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CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATION AND MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION OF SERVICE QUALITY: A STUDY OF HOTEL INDUSTRY IN SELECTED CITIES OF TIGRAY REGION, ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines customers' expectation and management's perception of service quality in the Ethiopian hotel industry particularly Tigray region. Data was collected from 282 customers and 68 managers and supervisors of hotels through self-administered questionnaire. A non-probability sampling methods of both convenient and purposive approaches were used to select respondents. A SERVQUAL scale consisting of 29 items was used to measure service quality. Using exploratory factor analysis four dimensions of service quality have been identified. The results of the study indicated that the level of management's perception was below the customers' expectation for all service quality dimensions. The study suggested that hotel managers should first identify customers' expectations in order to design their service offerings.

KEYWORDS

SERVQUAL, expectation, perception, service quality.

INTRODUCTION

The service industry is one of the main economic sectors of every country, yet its contribution to the country's overall GDP varies considerably. Services are increasing as an economic force in countries such as China, India and other fast growing and developing nations (**Bitner** and **Brown (2007).** Moreover, **Gupta (2011)** indicated that in US more than 75 percent of the work force and in Canada, Britain, France, Italy, Japan and Germany at least 50 percent of work force is employed in the service sector. Similarly, in Ethiopia, the contribution of service sector to the overall economy was dominant in 2011/2012 which accounted for 45.6 percent of GDP.

Due to the increased role of service to country's economy measuring service quality has become an area of growing interest to researchers and managers (Parasuraman et al., 1994). Given the complexity and importance of service, initially it was difficult to evaluate service quality with a completely objective measurement. Markovic and Raspor (2010) also added that the specific nature of service makes it difficult to provide measure and maintain its quality. To overcome this challenge, Parasuraman et al.(1985) laid a solid foundation for research work in this area. They were amongst the earliest researchers who recognized that the concept of quality prevalent in the goods sector is not applicable to the service sector. Hence, the authors proposed a SERVEQUAL scale which is used for measuring service quality. As management concern in customer service and loyalty increased, new research techniques and models such as Simalto and SERVQUAL were developed (Szwarc,2005). According to Parasuraman et al.(1988) SERVQUAL is a concise multiple-item scale with good reliability and validity that service organization can use to better understand the service expectations and perceptions of consumers and, as a result, improve service. The SERVEQUAL scale is an important development in service quality literature and has been widely applied by many researchers in various service settings including tourism and hospitality. However, it has also been the most debatable research methodologies used for measuring customer satisfaction(Szwarc, 2005).

Though there is debate about how best to incorporate expectations in to service quality measurement, researchers generally agree that expectations serve as reference points in customers' assessment of service quality(Parasuraman et al.,1994, and Oliver, 1980).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

DEFINITION OF SERVICE QUALITY

According to Rust (2004) in the late 1970s researchers in many countries with various disciplines produced a considerable theory and research devoted to understanding service quality. Many scholars have contributed to an understanding of service quality, however, despite three and half decades of study and continuous debate, conceptual work on service quality has remained divergent.

Service quality is a multi-dimensional construct(Parasuraman et al.1985; Gronroos, 1984, Mudie and Pirrie, 2006). The authors describe service quality as the degree of discrepancy between customers' normative expectations for the service and their perceptions of service performance. Iacobucci et al.(1995) stated that in the consumer literature, this model is referred to as the "Disconfirmation paradigm"; in the service literature, it is referred to as the "Gap model". This is a customer perspective definition of service quality and this definition suggests that quality is in the eye of the beholder.

For Sidin et al.(2001) service quality is the most important single factor affecting a business unit's performance the interest of which has a recent origin. Service quality is an important issue for both consumers and service providers(Dabholkar, 1996). Apte(2004) defines service quality as the ability of the service provider to satisfy customer needs. Service quality is defined as the difference between customers' expectations for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perceptions of the service received(Asubonteng et al.,1996). Cronin and Taylor(1992) provided empirical evidence which suggest that service quality should be measured as an attitude. While Cronin and Taylor (1994) considered service as an attitude indicating a long term overall evaluation, Parasuraman et al.(1985) described service quality as a function of the differences between expectations and performance along the quality dimensions. Gronroos(1984) defines service quality as a set of perceived judgments resulting from an evaluation process where customers compare their expectations with the service they perceive to have received. For the present study, service quality has been defined as customers' evaluation of their prior expectations against actual service performance of hotels.

MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY IN HOTEL INDUSTRY

As a result of the challenges of SERVQUAL model, alternative measures of service quality for specific service settings have been developed. In the tourism and hospitality industry some of the models developed were: LODGSERV(Knutson et al.,1991), LODGQUAL(Getty and Thompson, 1994), and HOLSERV(Mei et al.,1999). The LODGQUAL model, which is specifically developed for hotel settings, identified three dimensions, namely tangibles, reliability and contact. On the other hand, LODGSERV model is based on five original SERVQUAL dimensions and contains 26 items. The HOLSERV model includes 27 items, grouped in five original SERVQUAL dimensions.

According to Li Na (2010), three most popular models to measure customer satisfaction and service quality in the hotel industry are SERVQUAL, HOLSERV and LODGING QUALITY INDEX.

THE GAP MODEL

It is widely stated in many service literature that Parasuraman et al.(1985) identified ten components of service quality. However, Parasuraman et al., in their 1988 article, condensed and reduced these components into five dimensions using factor analysis: assurance, reliability, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. SERVEQUAL scale was revised in 1991 and the word “should” was replaced by “would” and also a further revision was made in 1994 by reducing the total number of items to 21, but five dimensional structure remained untouched(Seth and Deshmukh, 2004). While the original SERVEQUAL instrument has been revised and refined, its basic content, structure, and length has remained the same(Parasuraman et al., 1991).

However, despite the presence of several publications on service quality, the number and content of dimensions are quite diverse (Tan et al., 2014). Accordingly, the most frequently used service attributes are grouped in to five dimensions as stated below:

Tangibility: It includes appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. This dimension is crucial where the customer’s physical presence service facility is necessary for consumption to occur(Mudie and Pirrie, 2006).

Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. This can be considered as “No excuse” service delivery(Gupta, 2011). It involves consistency of performance and dependability(Berry et al., 1985).

Responsiveness: It is willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Responsiveness concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service (Berry et al., 1985). Baron and Haris (2003) describe responsiveness simply as “promptness and helpfulness.”

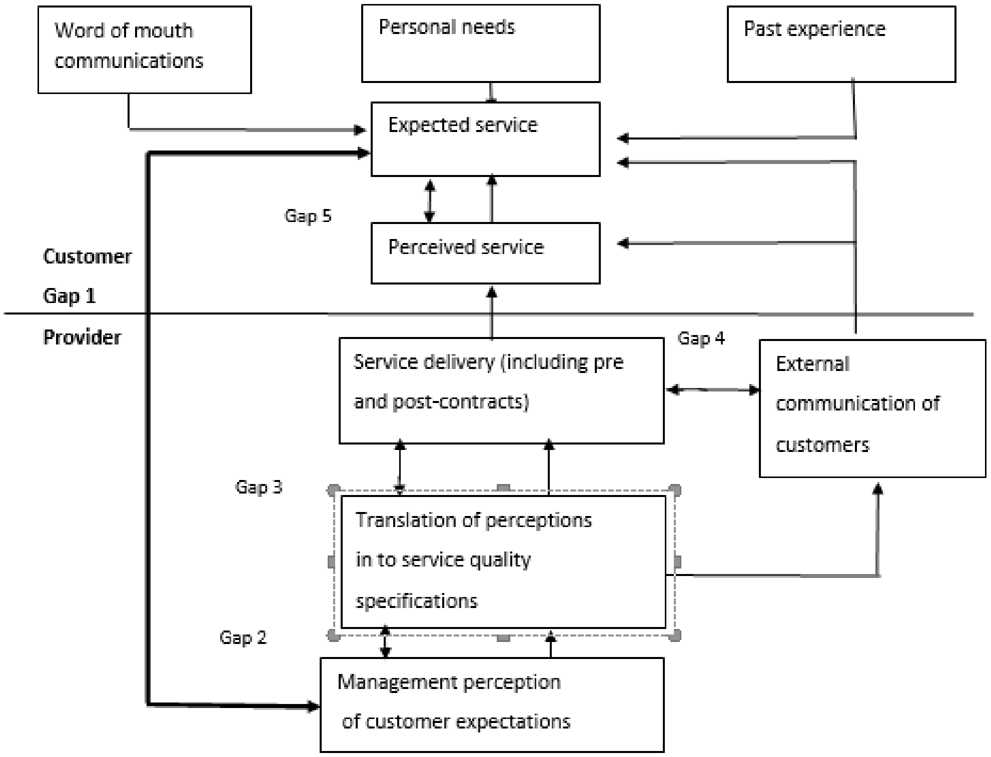
Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. This dimension may be of particular concern for customers of health, financial and legal services (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006).

Empathy: Caring individualized attention the firm provides to its customers (Baron and Haris, 2003).

Later attempts have been made to extend the five dimensions of service quality developed by Parasuraman et al.(1988). For example, Johnston(1995) extended the five dimensions of SERVQUAL up to eighteen quality dimensions namely: responsiveness, reliability, integrity, friendliness, courtesy, attentiveness, competence, communication, functionality, commitment, availability, flexibility, security, care, access, aesthetics, cleanliness and comfort.

Before SERVEQUAL model was devised, it was difficult to differentiate the concept of quality in the service sector and goods sector. Despite its limitation, SERVQUAL model can be considered as an important development in service marketing literature. Hence, it can be concluded that Parasuraman et al. (1985) laid a solid foundation and open the door for measuring service quality without which measuring service quality would be almost impossible.

FIG. 1: MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY GAP


Word of mouth communications
Personal needs
Past experience
Expected service
Gap 5
Perceived service
Customer
Gap 1
Provider
Gap 4
Service delivery (including pre and post-contracts)
External communication of customers
Gap 3
Translation of perceptions in to service quality specifications
Gap 2
Management perception of customer expectations

Source: Parasuraman A. Zeithaml A. and Berry L. (1985)

THE ROLE OF EXPECTATION AND PERCEPTION IN CONSUMER SATISFACTION FORMATION

Oliver (2010) defines expectation as an anticipation of future consequences based on prior experience, current circumstances, or other source of information. While some others use them interchangeably, the author claims that anticipation is different from expectation. Expectations are usually formed prior to the usage of a service but may also occur where a customer is actively involved in the delivery of service(Mudie and Pirrie, 2006). The authors also define perception as customers’ evaluation of the service, particularly in relation to expectations. Some researchers argue that expectations serve as a comparison standard to judge the performance of service delivery(e.g. Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988; Tse and Wilton, 1988, Oliver and Swan, 1989). Moreover, in case of service performance, expectation is an a priori standard that consumers bring to a consumption experience(Youl, 2006).

Davis and Heineke(2003) noticed that customers will be satisfied only if the service meets or exceeds their expectations, and when their perception of service performance exceed their expectations of the quality of service. This idea is supported by Mudie and Pirrie(2006) who argue that satisfaction arises when perception exceeds or matches expectations.

RATIONAL FOR THE STUDY

Some of the underlying reasons that initiated the researcher for carrying out this study are indicated as follows.

1. Ethiopia is one of the African countries that possess the highest number of UNESCO world heritage sites in the African continent, with 9 sites found in different corners of the country, and hence it has great potential to be a number one tourist destination area in Africa.
2. Ethiopia is a strategically important country in the horn of Africa for most countries and the country entertains many international meetings and conferences every year.

3. The growing role of service sector in the Ethiopia's economy coupled with the increased demand of customers for better service leads to the need for assessment of service quality of hotels in the Ethiopian hotel industry.
4. Most of the studies pertaining to service quality and customer satisfaction in service industry were conducted in developed and some developing countries. In Ethiopia, however, this issue is almost untouched and only few studies are available in this respect.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Bucak (2014) claimed that dimensions of service quality have an impact on perceived service quality and this in turn affects customer satisfaction. Parasuraman et al.(1988) also argued that qualities of service and customer satisfaction are determinant factors for the success of any business. Hence, hotel businesses need to identify and periodically assess the determinants of service quality and the factors contributing to service performance so as to stay longer in the industry. Despite the promising growth of the Ethiopian hospitality industry there are certain hurdles identified by Alelign (2013) such as poor regulation, outdated marketing strategy, poor management, high staff turnover, and dissatisfaction of customers. Moreover, Gobena and Gudeta (2013) suggested that there is still a big room for improvement when it comes to the quality of service.

MAIN OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to examine management's perception of customers' expectation and customers' actual expectation of service quality in the Ethiopian hotel industry particularly Tigray region.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To examine customers' expectation and managements' perception of service quality in the hotel industry.
2. To determine whether there is significant difference between customers' expected mean and management's perceived mean.
3. To suggest possible solutions for mitigating existing problems in the hotel industry based on the findings of the study.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: There is significant mean difference between customers' expectation and management's perception of service quality in the hotel industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a combination of descriptive and exploratory research. This study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire adapted from the modified version of SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman et al.(1988,1991). Hence, this model was used to analyze the gap between customers' expectations and management's perceptions of service quality in the hotel industry. However, the wording and items used in the questionnaire was based on what Presbury(2009) used to measure service quality in the Australian hotel industry. After a review of related literature, a questionnaire having 30 items was developed which was later reduced to 29 items through factor analysis. On the other hand, secondary data were collected from published and unpublished records of Aksum tourism and culture office, Tigray culture and tourism office and Ethiopian ministry of culture and tourism office. Moreover, sources like books, academic journals, doctoral theses and internet publications provided valuable information for carrying out this study.

The region where this study was conducted has seven zones of which three zones were purposively selected for conducting the study. The selected zones include Mekelle zone, Central zone and North Western zone. Next, using purposive sampling three cities were selected from each zone. As a result, cities such as Mekelle, Aksum and Shire were selected to be main study areas. These cities were selected because most of the three star, four star and five star hotels are found in these areas. Convenience sampling was used to select customer respondents from these areas. Questionnaire was distributed to 400 customers out of which only 325 were collected. Out of the total questionnaires collected from customers 45 were incomplete and excluded and 282 questionnaires were used for analysis. Primary data were also collected from hotel managers and supervisors. The data collected were carefully edited, coded, categorized and entered in to an SPSS program for analysis. For the purpose of this study reliability test, paired t-test, and exploratory factory analysis were applied. Descriptive statistics was used for presenting and summarizing data in tabular forms. The data collected were analyzed with the help of SPSS version 20.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings showed that there were more male customers (66.3%) than females (33.7%). As table 1 indicates 31.2 percent of the respondents were aged between 18-25 years while 54.6 percent were in the age range of 26-40 years, 11.3 percent were aged 41-55 years. Only 2.8 percent were aged above 55 years. Of the total respondents 56.7 percent were single, 41.5 percent were married, 1.1 percent widowed and 0.7 percent were divorced.

As far as educational status of respondents is concerned, 48.2 percent of the respondents were first degree holders. Of the total customers surveyed 38.7 percent indicated that they have jobs other than the stated alternatives. Moreover, of the total respondents, majority (33.7 percent) of the respondents have a monthly income above 5000 Ethiopian birr. Respondent's purpose of stay included vacation (35.5%) visit (30.9%), meeting (16.7%), business (6.7%), and some other purposes (10.3 %).

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CUSTOMER RESPONDENTS (n=282)

Demographic variables	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex	Male	187	66.3
	Female	95	33.7
Age	18-25	88	31.2
	26-40	154	54.6
	41-55	32	11.3
	>55	8	2.8
Marital status	Single	160	56.7
	Married	117	41.5
	Divorced	2	0.7
	Widowed	3	1.1
Educational status	< 12	1	0.4
	12 Completed	30	10.6
	Diploma	49	17.4
	First degree	136	48.2
	Second degree	64	22.7
	PhD	2	0.7
Occupation	Student	56	19.9
	Teacher	45	16.0
	Business person	71	25.2
	Other	109	38.7
Monthly Income(in Birr)	<1000	44	15.6
	1001-2500	50	17.7
	2501-5000	83	29.4
	>5000	95	33.7
Purpose of stay	Business	19	6.7
	Vacation	100	35.5
	Meeting	47	16.7
	Visit	87	30.9
	Other	29	10.3

Source: Own survey, 2017

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES: MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

In order to identify any gap between customers' expectation and service providers' perception of service quality, obtaining information from people of different managerial levels of hotels is necessary. Hence, data was also collected from managers and supervisors of hotels.

Table 2 shows that out of 68 managers asked 73.5 percent were males and 26.5 percent were females. Hotel managers were predominantly between 26-40 years which accounted for 33.8 percent and 41-55 years which accounted for 41.2 percent. Only 20.6 and 4.4 percent of them are in the age range of 18-25 and above 55 years respectively. Majority of the managers (47.05%) were first degree holders. As far as field of specialization of managers is concerned, 25 percent were graduated in tourism management, 20.6 percent were marketing management, and 22.0 percent were hotel management. The rest 20 percent had other fields of specializations. This indicates that majority of the hotel managers were graduates of other professions but related fields. Majority of the hotel managers (i.e. 79.5 %) were not much experienced. More than half(52.9%) of hotel managers work at the middle level of management whereas 16.2 percent work at upper level. The remaining 30.9 percent work at operating or supervisory level of management.

TABLE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF HOTEL MANAGERS (n=68)

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	50	73.5
	Female	18	26.5
Age	18-25	14	20.6
	26-40	23	33.8
	41-55	28	41.2
	>55	3	4.4
Educational status	<12	1	1.47
	12 Completed	4	5.88
	Diploma	15	22.05
	First degree	32	47.05
	Second degree	15	22.05
	PhD	1	1.47
Work experience	One year	11	16.2
	Two years	18	26.5
	Three years	25	36.8
	≥4 years	14	20.5
Level of management	Top level	11	16.2
	Middle level	36	52.9
	Lower level	21	30.9
Field of specialization	Hotel management	15	22.0
	Marketing management	14	20.6
	Tourism management	17	25.0
	Other	20	29.4

Source: Own survey, 2017

FACTOR AND RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Exploratory factor analysis with principal component extracting method was used to test the dimensionality of service quality and the suitability of the dimensions to factor analysis was examined using KMO value and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The Direct Oblimin rotation method used in this study resulted in four components or dimensions of service quality.

TABLE 3: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST OF SPHERICITY

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.937
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3925.068
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

Source: Author's computation using SPSS 20, 2017

The above table 3 indicates both KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity on the 30 items of the SERVQUAL scale. The result indicates that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy value (KMO) is 0.937 which is greater than 0.6; the minimum requirement for good factor analysis. The Bartlett's test of sphericity value is 0.000 which is significant at $p<0.05$ and this indicates that it fulfills the preconditions for factor analysis. Moreover, as can be seen from table 4 the Cronbach alpha of the four dimensions of SERVQUAL ranges from 0.74 to 0.89 which is greater than 0.7 and hence, suggesting a good internal consistency of the items.

TABLE 4: FACTOR LOADING, EIGENVALUE AND CRONBACH ALPHA

Item No	Service quality items and dimensions	Factor loadings	Eigen value	Cronbach Alpha
	Empathy			
P28	Employees of this hotel understand customers' specific needs	0.763	11.29	0.89
P29	This hotel has operating hours which are convenient to customers' requirements (e.g., pool, gym, and food and beverage outlets)	0.757		
P30	Employees of this hotel give customers individual attention	0.725		
P27	Employees of this hotel have the interests of their customers at heart	0.613		
P24	The behavior of employees in the hotel instills confidence in customers	0.540		
P23	Employees of this hotel anticipate their customers' needs	0.519		
P25	The employees of the hotel are always courteous to guests	0.468		
P26	Employees of this hotel show genuine care and concern when giving customers personal attention	0.463		
P22	This hotel has knowledgeable staff to answer questions about local attractions, shopping and major events	0.435		
	Tangibility			
P2	This hotel is a comfortable place to stay	0.667	1.86	0.79
P8	This hotel has public areas which are visually appealing, inviting and comfortable	0.625		
P6	This hotel has facilities such as a pool, spa and gymnasium	0.624		
P7	This hotel has a good choice of food and beverage outlets (e.g., a café/bistro, a dining room, room service)	0.582		
P4	The bedrooms and bathrooms of this hotel are bright, airy and spacious	0.559		
P3	The accommodation rooms in this hotel are quiet and provide the utmost privacy for guests	0.556		
P1	This hotel has immaculately clean bedrooms, bathrooms, and living areas	0.529		
P5	The employees of this hotel are always neat in appearance	0.497		
	Reliability &Responsiveness			
P15	When the hotel staff promise to do something by a certain time, they do so	-0.78	1.55	0.88
P16	When hotel customers have a problem, this hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it	-0.762		
P9	Employees of this hotel promptly solve any problems I might have	-0.707		
P14	This hotel delivers services promptly, once promised	-.690		
P12	Front desk employees of this hotel ensure that the check-in and check-out service is conducted quickly and without delay	-0.683		
P11	Employees of this hotel give prompt service to customers	-0.610		
P10	Employees of this hotel are always willing to help customers with their queries or requests	-0.602		
P17	This hotel performs the service right the first time	-0.569		
P18	The hotel presents bills that are error free	-0.440		
	Assurance			
P21	This hotel ensures the security and safety of their customers	0.629	1.03	0.74
P20	This hotel provides acceptable solutions to customers' problems	0.531		
P19	The employees of this hotel have in-depth knowledge of the hotel and its services	0.400		

Source: Author's computation using SPSS 20, 2017

As can be seen from table 4 the alpha value for all variables is more than the minimum acceptable value of 0.70 with values ranging from 0.74 to 0.89; suggesting a good internal consistency of the scales. The factor loading for each item was computed and items with loadings of 0.40 and above were retained. Out of the total items only one item was found to have a loading of less than 0.40 and it was discarded. Moreover, factors with eigenvalues greater than one were extracted.

GAP BETWEEN CUSTOMER EXPECTATION AND MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION (KNOWLEDGE GAP)

This gap usually measures managers' understanding of customers' expectations and their perception of the quality of service provided. Sometimes managers design their services without having clear idea about customers' expectation. This in turn leads to lower perceived service quality of customers. This type of gap occurs when the service provider does not correctly perceive the real needs and wants of customers (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Whenever knowledge gap occurs it may show that an organization is trying to meet non-existing needs of customers. Therefore, in profit oriented businesses, it is important first to have a clear understanding of the customers' need for service.

TABLE 5: GAP BETWEEN THE MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS AND THE ACTUAL EXPECTATIONS OF CUSTOMERS

Variable/Dimensions	Manager's perception Mean (P)	Customers' expectation Mean (E)	Gap score (P-E)
P1 Tangibility	4.36	4.44	-0.08
P2	4.38	4.46	-0.08
P3	4.29	4.40	-0.11
P4	4.44	4.36	+0.08
P5	4.20	4.43	-0.23
P6	3.92	4.42	-0.5
P7	4.42	4.42	0
P8	3.98	4.45	-0.47
P9 Reliab& Resp	4.11	4.41	-0.3
P10	4.16	4.42	-0.26
P11	4.27	4.46	-0.19
P12	4.17	4.29	-0.12
P13	4.17	4.28	-0.11
P14	4.17	4.42	-0.25
P15	4.13	4.33	-0.2
P16	4.10	4.43	-0.33
P17	4.25	4.48	-0.23
P18 Empathy	4.19	4.14	+0.05
P19	4.33	4.37	-0.04
P20	4.17	4.26	-0.09
P21	4.16	4.30	-0.14
P22	4.30	4.33	-0.03
P23	4.33	4.34	-0.01
P24	3.89	4.00	-0.11
P25	4.33	4.11	+0.22
P26	4.22	4.32	-0.1
P27 Assurance	4.00	4.15	-0.15
P28	4.23	4.25	-0.02
P29	4.33	4.19	+0.14

*(Significant), t-test 2-tailed, $p<0.05$, (Note that this table is not based on the order of items in table 4)

Source: Author's computation using SPSS 20, 2017

The above table 5 presents management's perception mean and customers' expectation mean. Given the above table 5, the hotel managers did not have good understanding of customers' expectation. The difference in gap score of managers' perception of customers' expectation and the actual customers' expectation was found negative for 24 items of service quality. This shows that the perception mean scores of managers were lower than customers' expectation on those items. Here, it looks that management had understated customers' expectations. This result, however, contradicts with the findings of Luk and Layton(2002) who found hotel managers overestimated customers' expectations on most of the items that the author used to measure service quality.The greatest gap was observed for the item "visually appealing, inviting and comfortable public areas" which is -0.47. Customers rated this item higher than management did. From customers' perspective, visually appealing, inviting and comfortable public area is an important factor in evaluating service quality. Therefore, customers primarily evaluate the condition of visually appealing, inviting and comfortable public areas in hotels. The result of this study is consistent with work of Ramchurran (2008) who showed a gap between managers' perception and customers' expectation. Therefore, it would be difficult for managers to design the type of service that can satisfy the needs and wants of customers if they are not fully aware of customers' expectations.

The gap score for four attributes was found positive indicating that the management had good understanding of customers' expectation for these items. More specifically, the gap score for one item of insurance i.e. for third item (p29=+0.14, see table 5) i.e. "knowledgeable staff" and for the eighth item of empathy (p25=+0.22, see table 5) i.e. "courteous employees" was found positive. This implies that customers were delighted or impressed with knowledge and courtesy of hotel employees because it was beyond their expectations. Moreover, a similar result was found for one item of tangibility where the gap score for the fourth item of tangibility (p4=+0.08, see table 5) i.e. "bright, airy and spacious bedrooms and bathrooms" was positive. A positive gap score was also found for the first item of empathy i.e. "Employees of this hotel anticipate their customers' needs" (p18=+0.05,see table 5). The gap score for the seventh (p7=0, see table 5) item of tangibility was zero. This implies that management perception matched customers' expectations and the management had good understanding of the desires of customers for food, beverage outlets of the hotels. In simple terms, the hotel's food, beverage outlets was as per the expectation of customers.

TABLE 6: GAP ANALYSIS OF MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATION AND THE ACTUAL CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS (DIMENSION WISE)

No	Dimensions	Management Perceived Mean score (P)	Customer Expected Mean score (E)	Gap score (P-E)
1	Tangibility	4.248	4.422	-0.174
2	Reliability &Responsiveness	4.17	4.391	-0.221
3	Empathy	4.213	4.241	-0.028
4	Assurance	4.186	4.196	-0.01
Overall		4.204	4.312	-0.108

Source: Author's computation using SPSS 20, 2017

The above table 6 depicts that the management's perceived mean score is smaller than customers' expected mean score for all service quality dimensions. Hence, the management had no good understanding about the customers' expectation in all service quality determinants. The management's highest perceived mean score was for tangibility (4.248) and the lowest was for reliability& responsiveness (4.17). On the other hand, the customers' highest expected mean score was for tangibility (4.422) and the lowest was for assurance dimension (4.196). Among all dimensions, the maximum gap was for reliability& responsiveness (-0.221) and the minimum gap was for assurance dimension(-0.01). Given this figure, reliability& responsiveness is one of the dimensions that require priority in terms of resource allocation in order to narrow the gap. The overall mean score for all service quality dimensions was negative (-0.108) which indicates a discrepancy between management's perception and customers' expectation. Hence, the management is required to use survey method to obtain information and clearly understand customers' expectations in all aspects. The information obtained through this method can be used to identify potential areas of improvements and to predict their influence on customer satisfaction (**Bolton** and **Drew, 1991**).

DETERMINATION OF SIGNIFICANCE FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION AND CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATION

As discussed earlier, there was gap between management's perceived mean score and customers' expected mean score. However, it is worth looking at the significance of such differences since it suggests area where priority requires in terms of resource allocation and performance improvement. Hence, the paired t-test was applied to examine whether a significant difference exists between management's perception and customers' expectation of service quality.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H1: There is significant mean difference between customers' expectation and management's perception of service quality in the hotel industry.

TABLE 7: MEAN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION AND CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATION USING PAIRED t-TEST

Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Q1E - Q1P	-.26471	.97150	.11781	-.49986	-.02955	-2.247	67	.028*
Pair 2	Q2E - Q2P	-.20588	1.12713	.13668	-.47870	.06694	-1.506	67	.137
Pair 3	Q3E –Q3P	-.25000	1.16382	.14113	-.53170	.03170	-1.771	67	.081
Pair 4	Q4E – Q4P	.00000	.97736	.11852	-.23657	.23657	.000	67	1.000
Pair 5	Q5E – Q5P	-.44118	.93653	.11357	-.66786	-.21449	-3.885	67	.000*
Pair 6	Q6E – Q6P	-.57353	1.38560	.16803	-.90892	-.23814	-3.413	67	.001*
Pair 7	Q7E – Q7P	.01471	1.22770	.14888	-.28246	.31187	.099	67	.922
Pair 8	Q8E – Q8P	-.55882	1.28577	.15592	-.87005	-.24760	-3.584	67	.001*
Pair 9	Q9E – Q10P	-.33824	1.19214	.14457	-.62680	-.04968	-2.340	67	.022*
Pair 10	Q10E –Q10P	-.38235	1.15938	.14060	-.66298	-.10172	-2.720	67	.008*
Pair 11	Q11E- Q11P	-.44118	1.12479	.13640	-.71343	-.16892	-3.234	67	.002*
Pair 12	Q12E –Q12P	-.20588	1.16618	.14142	-.48816	.07639	-1.456	67	.150
Pair 13	Q13E- Q13P	-.04412	1.07111	.12989	-.30338	.21515	-.340	67	.735
Pair 14	Q14E –Q14P	-.38235	1.10669	.13421	-.65023	-.11448	-2.849	67	.006*
Pair 15	Q15E - Q15P	-.23529	1.10788	.13435	-.50346	.03287	-1.751	67	.084
Pair 16	Q16E - Q16P	-.33824	1.08738	.13186	-.60144	-.07503	-2.565	67	.013*
Pair 17	Q17E - Q17P	-.26471	.97150	.11781	-.49986	-.02955	-2.247	67	.028*
Pair 18	Q18E – Q18P	.33824	1.15397	.13994	.05891	.61756	2.417	67	.018*
Pair 19	Q19E – Q19P	.08824	.92616	.11231	-.13594	.31241	.786	67	.435
Pair 20	Q20E – Q21P	.05882	1.23243	.14945	-.23949	.35713	.394	67	.695
Pair 21	Q21E – Q21P	-.04412	1.23909	.15026	-.34404	.25581	-.294	67	.770
Pair 22	Q22E – Q22P	.04412	1.22698	.14879	-.25288	.34111	.297	67	.768
Pair 23	Q23E – Q23P	.08824	1.16843	.14169	-.19459	.37106	.623	67	.536
Pair 24	Q24E – Q24P	.04412	1.60627	.19479	-.34468	.43292	.226	67	.822
Pair 25	Q25E – Q25P	.26471	1.15407	.13995	-.01464	.54405	1.891	67	.063
Pair 26	Q26E – Q26P	-.19118	1.13634	.13780	-.46623	.08388	-1.387	67	.170
Pair 27	Q27E- Q27P	-.07353	1.47937	.17940	-.43161	.28455	-.410	67	.683
Pair 28	Q28E –Q28P	-.11765	1.05843	.12835	-.37384	.13855	-.917	67	.363
Pair 29	Q29 – Q29P	.30882	1.36324	.16532	-.02115	.63880	1.868	67	.066

Paired *t-test (2-tailed Sig.) $p<0.05$, Source: Author's computation using SPSS, 2017

In the above table 7 the values in the column designated "Sig." indicate whether the mean difference between management's perception and customers' expectation is significant or not. While a value less than 0.05 indicates that the presence of significant mean difference, a value greater than 0.05 represents insignificant mean difference. Given this, the "Sig." value for 11 items was less than 0.05 and the rest (18) items had values greater than 0.05. Therefore, there was significant mean difference between managements' perception and customers' expectation for the eleven items of service quality. On the other hand, non-significant values for 18 items indicate that there was no significant difference between managements' perception and customers' expectation. Hence, the hypothesis is partially supported and can't be rejected. A significant mean difference indicates that mangers did not correctly perceived customers' needs or wants. Therefore, managers should conduct market research to identify whether demand is available for their offer. They should also measure satisfaction immediately after every purchase made and solve complaints to ensure customers' desires.

FINDINGS

The result of this study indicated that majority of the hotel managers were graduates of other professions but related fields. Moreover, majority of the hotel managers (i.e. 79.5%) were not much experienced. The result of factor analysis also showed that only four service quality dimensions were found important determinants of service quality in hotels. It was also found that management's perceived mean score is smaller than customers' expected mean score for all service quality dimensions. Among all dimensions, the maximum gap was for reliability& responsiveness (-0.221) and the minimum gap was for assurance dimension(-0.01). Finally, there was no significant mean difference between management's perception of customers' expectations and actual customers' expectations for most of the items of service quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the maximum gap was for reliability& responsiveness, it is one of the dimensions that require priority in terms of resource allocation in order to narrow the gap. The overall mean score for all service quality dimensions was negative (-0.108) which indicates a discrepancy between management' perception and customers' expectation. Hence, the management is required to use survey method to obtain information and clearly understand customers' expectations in all aspects. In order to manage customers' expectations, service providers should underestimate the benefits that would be provided while promoting their offers. The result of this study showed that there is lack of service skilled and experienced employees graduated in hotel management. Therefore, hoteliers should hire well trained and experienced service professionals that could transform the existing quality of service to the next level.

CONCLUSIONS

The result of factor analysis indicated that service quality is a four dimensional construct involving empathy, reliability& responsiveness, tangibility, and assurance. Regardless of its components Arora et al.(2011) also found a four dimensional structure of service quality consisting of reliability, tangibility, efficiency, and service interaction.

The idea of measuring the difference between expectation and perception with the help of SERVQUAL gap model is essential for assessing the level of service quality. This is because the information obtained through gap analysis would help managers diagnose areas where improvement is needed. This study attempted to identify the gap between management's perception of customers' expectation and customers' actual expectations of service quality. The result of the study indicated that the level of management's perception was below the customers' expectation for all service quality dimensions. The result of this study is consistent with work of Ramchurran (2008) who showed a gap between managers' perception and customers' expectation. In this case, the overall gap score for all service quality dimensions was negative; suggesting a discrepancy between management's perception and customers' expectation. Moreover, there was lack of service skilled and experienced employees in the hotel industry.

LIMITATIONS

This study has certain limitations despite the presence of theoretical and empirical support for the methodology used. Since this study covered only hotels found in selected cities of Tigray region, the results cannot be generalized and may not reflect the situations of service quality in the Ethiopian hotel industry. Moreover, service quality of hotels was measured using SERVQUAL model but this model has several theoretical and operational criticisms. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence on the applicability of SERVQUAL model in the Ethiopian hotel industry.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In order to get a meaningful picture about the service quality of hotel industry in Ethiopia the sample size should be large enough. It is better if research is conducted at national level in order to make generalization about hotel service quality in Ethiopia. Service quality of hotels was measured using SERVQUAL model. However, it has many limitations and research has to be conducted on the appropriateness of this model for measuring service quality in developing countries like Ethiopia. Hence, in the future researchers should either develop a new model that can be more suitable for measuring hotel service quality in Ethiopia or confirm the applicability of SERVQUAL model in the Ethiopian hotel industry.

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