

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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ASSESSMENT OF SATISFACTION LEVEL AMONG GUESTS OF WOLAITA SODO CITY**TEMESGEN TESHOME****LECTURER****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT****WACHEMO UNIVERSITY****ETHIOPIA****YITBAREK SEYOUM****LECTURER****DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT****WOLAITA SODO UNIVERSITY****ETHIOPIA****ABSTRACT**

Effective management of the diverse business establishments in tourism and hospitality sector require clear understanding of the environment in which they operate. In particular, customer satisfaction is a critical goal that should be pursued by all businesses in this sector. This study has the main objective of investigating satisfaction level among guests who use the goods and services of hotels, restaurants, and pensions in Wolaita Sodo City. By using a combination of purposive, stratified, and then convenience sampling techniques, the survey involved 250 foreign and local guests who stayed at and used the selected hotels, restaurants, and pensions from March 1- July 6, 2013. A questionnaire derived from SERVQUAL model that involving tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy dimensions was used as a data collection instrument. The survey data was analyzed using an SPSS (version 20). The overall mean score for guest expectations and perceptions on five dimensions of SERVQUAL model are ranked at a high level with 3.82 and 3.71, respectively. The overall negative value of SERVQUAL gap analysis (-0.11) indicated that the guests were not fully satisfied with the overall service of the organizations under study. With respect to gender of guests, the t-test finding points out no significant differences of perceptions towards all dimensions of SERVQUAL with an exception to Responsiveness dimension.

KEYWORDS

Guest satisfaction, Service quality, SERVQUAL, SERVQUAL dimensions.

INTRODUCTION

Wolaita Sodo City, the capital of Wolayta Zone, is found in the Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR). It is also a residence for tourists that travel from different directions (Addis Ababa, Hossana, Shashemene, Hawassa) to/from the tribes of Omo Valley, Arba Minch, Dorze and Konso. The city is located 385kms from Addis Ababa via Shashemene whereas 330kms from Addis Ababa via Hossana as well as 155km from Hawassa to the south-west. A guests' visit to Wolaita Sodo city is perfectly fit with both the modality of traveling on 'long/short' type of tours to southern Ethiopia and tribes of Omo Valley as well as attending seminars or trainings organized by government or NGOs.

Nowadays, the management of the hotel industry which comprises a major field of the growing hospitality and tourism sector has got better attention. According to Kandampully et al. (2001), the major contributors for the growth of hospitality and tourism sector are: the tourists, the businesses providing the goods and services that the tourist market demands, the government of the host community, and the host community. The tourism and hospitality sector consists of different industries such as travel, hotels and restaurants and employs millions of people. Effective management of the diverse business establishments in this sector require clear understanding of the environment in which they operate. In particular, customer satisfaction is a critical goal that should be pursued by all businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector.

Like all service businesses do, hotel and restaurant operators continuously strive to improve the quality of their services in order to fulfill or exceed customer expectations. Workforces of hospitality establishments are ready to anticipate and achieve their customers' needs and wants as soon as customer requirements are clearly identified and understood (Juwaheer, 2004). Also Choi and Chu (2001) stated that if customers are more satisfied at the first hand service delivered to them, they are more likely to return or prolong their hotel stay.

In hospitality business, most scholars are interested in maximizing customer satisfaction as satisfied customers incline to generate return for the hotel which helps provide increased profits to it (Liu, 2000; Hernon & Whitwan, 2001). Accordingly, understanding how customer expectation formed is significant in to order to identify the aspects of service satisfaction. Therefore, this paper sought to explore and assess level of satisfaction among guests of selected hotels, restaurants, and pensions in the city of Wolaita Sodo.

The general objective of this study was to assess the satisfaction level of guests who used the goods and services of hotels, restaurants, and pensions in Wolaita Sodo City. To achieve this aim, the specific objectives of the study are: to assess guests' satisfaction towards services of Hotels, Restaurants, and Pensions; to analyze the perceptions-expectations gap regarding the quality of services, and to examine significant differences in quality perceptions between male and female guests.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years of business environment, various topics have been raised but many have to serve for satisfying customers in the business organizations. Many scholar reached in consensus that a satisfied customer will give more value continuously for the specified goods and services. Contrary, an unsatisfied customer will go to another business organization in order to get satisfaction, thus causing a decrease to sales revenue the business organization that does not satisfy the customer (Zeithaml et al., 2006). Meanwhile, related literature reviews on relevant concepts are discussed in the following manner in order to develop the research theoretical framework.

QUALITY AND SATISFACTION IN SERVICES

As defined by Zeithaml et al. (2006), service quality in the management and marketing literature is the extent to which customers' perceptions of service meet or exceed their expectations. They argued that measuring service quality as the difference between perceived and expected service was a valid way and could make management to identify gaps to what they offer as services. Thus, service quality can intend to be the way in which customers are served in an organization which could be good or poor.

Getz et al. (2001) discuss the role of service quality and its applicability on events, wherein they scrutinize if the main core of service quality is similar to that of standard services. The question concerns whether the service quality perceived by customers at an event is the most important determinant of customer satisfaction. Indeed the authors classify events as a complex, time-limited experiential service package, but with some tangible elements (i.e. toilets, food etc.) making the evaluation process of this heterogeneous product, very complicated.

But the discussion of service quality, or more precisely on antecedents to customer satisfaction, has been extensive so far and can be seen as a forerunner to the development of service quality research followed through by Parasuraman et al. (1988). Oliver (1980) considers the relation between expectations and customer satisfaction, which in turn leads to studies on how the purchase intentions of customers are influenced through customer satisfaction. In the model proposed by Oliver (1980) discrepancies between expectations and perceptions of experience, so called disconfirmation, have indirect and direct influence on the customer's satisfaction and his/her intentions to further purchases.

Revising research concerning the constructs of quality and satisfaction in the tourism and recreational field, Baker and Crompton (2000) discuss the distinction between the *quality of the performance*, including features that the organizer of an event or supplier of a service within the tourism sector can control (the output of the tourism supplier) and *satisfaction or quality of experience*, containing social-psychological and extraneous events influencing the satisfactory level of the attendant to tourist attractions, festivals, and events. The latter is moreover influenced by the programming, setting, and staffing which is the part that organizers or responsible body at tourism attractions can control as opposed to social psychological and extraneous events. The controllable factors mentioned have been picked up by Getz (2004) and used to illustrate aspects influencing the festival and special events experience altogether.

Closely related to service quality is also the concept of customer satisfaction (Getz et. al. 2001). It is necessary to look back on research conducted earlier to understand the impacts of service quality and customer satisfaction. Churchill and Suprenaut (1982) stated that customer satisfaction is reached through a confirmation of the customer's expectations. The concept they used is called disconfirmation paradigm and was elaborated in later research by Parasuraman et al. (1985) to become the GAP model. Oliver (1980) was an even earlier adapter of the disconfirmation paradigm. The paradigm defines the perception of the performance quality/level of satisfaction in terms of the magnitude of the individual's disconfirmation. In that way both performance quality and degree of satisfaction can be assessed by relating an experience to initial expectations.

According to Lewis and Booms (1983), the main function a hospitality organization's members must perform is the delivery of quality service to its customers. Service quality has been defined as how well a customer's needs are met, and how well the service delivered meets the customer's expectations. Gronoos (1990) indicated that the perceived quality of service is dependent on a comparison between expected and perceived service, and is thus the outcome of a comparative evaluation process.

The aim of managing satisfaction is to obtain a higher rate of customer retention and to improve a company's market share and profits (Hessamaldin, 2008). In a nutshell, customer satisfaction could be the pleasure obtained from consuming an offer. Measuring customer satisfaction could be very difficult at times because it is an attempt to measure human feelings. It was for this reason that some existing researcher presented that "the simplest way to know how customers feel, and what they want is to ask them" this applied to the informal measures (*Ibid*).

FACTORS INFLUENCING SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS

Managers of customer base service providing public and private organizations must understand that their organization's viability and sustainability depends upon the quality of service that they provide. In his book, "Leadership in Public Organizations", Montgomery Van Wart (2008) writes that "exceptional performance is necessary for organizational success, whether that entails higher productivity levels, greater contribution in adaptation and innovation, or effective organizational transformation". The SERVQUAL developers argue that it is also important for leaders to put into place a process to continually monitor customer's perceptions of service quality, identify the causes of service quality shortfalls and take appropriate action to improve the quality of the service provided (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Whereas the previous chapter illustrated a process for monitoring customer perceptions as well as an application of SERVQUAL, this section entails a discussion about the factors that influence customer perceptions of service quality.

Much like the exploratory study conducted with customers of service industries described in the previous chapter, the SERVQUAL developers conducted a similar study with the executives from "marketing, operations, customer relations, and senior management – areas in which executives should have a keen interest in service quality" (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Again, similar study conducted with the service industry customers, the discussions with the executives revealed consistent patterns; many of which cut across all areas of the service industry. The SERVQUAL developers found that the one who offers critical clues for achieving effective service quality control can be cast in the form of four key discrepancies or gaps pertaining to executive perceptions of service quality and the tasks associated with service delivery to customers (*Ibid*). The four themes that were identified by the SERVQUAL developers were labeled as: Gap 1: Customer Expectation – Management Perception; Gap 2: Management's Perception – Service Quality Specification; Gap 3: Service Quality Specification – Service Delivery and; Gap 4: Service Delivery – External Communication.

As a result of additional research, these four gaps were found to be the major contributors to the gap(s) between customer expectation and customer perception, which the SERVQUAL customer perception tool was designed to measure. In this analysis, the gap between customer expectation and customer perception was labeled Gap 5 (*Ibid*).

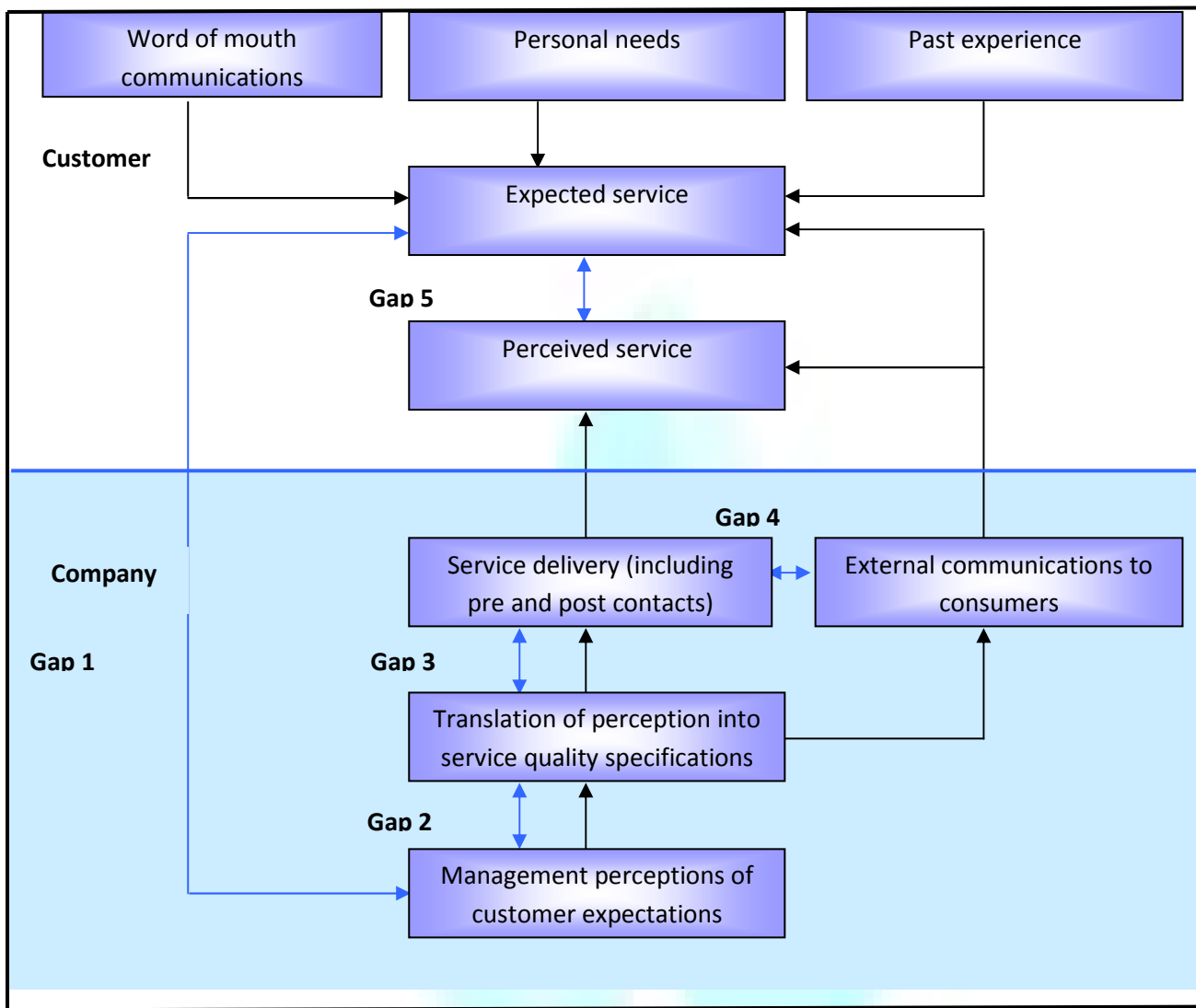
DEVELOPMENT OF MODELS FOR MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY

When the researchers like Parasuraman et al., 1985 and Grönroos, 1978 started to harmonize that service quality to the customer is the comparison of the customers' expectations and the perceived performance, the GAP model idea was developed. Parasuraman et al. (1985) emanated with new explanations about the relationship between expectations and perception through applying an exploratory research to find more fundamental insights about service quality. All the identified and put together gaps to a model are with the potential of unequal expectations compared to perceived performance. But Gap 5 is determined to be special in being a function of the four antecedent gaps.

A gap is existed between expected and perceived service quality. In an attempt to explain such gap, Parasuraman et al (1985) tried to explain such gap with a gap model which is intended to be used for investigating quality problems sources and aid managers understand how service quality can be improved. When there is smaller gap, the service quality will be better and customer satisfaction increases. The model is illustrated in figure 2.1 below.



FIGURE 2.1: THE GAPS MODEL



(Source: Parasuraman et al, 1988)

The service arise is revealed at the beginning of the model. Phenomena related to customers is included at the upper portion of the model, whereas phenomena related to the service provider is at the lower portion. The model depicted that customer's *past experience*, *personal needs* and of *word of mouth communication* are main influencers of *expected service*. Furthermore, *market communication* activities of the firm affects it. Subsequent internal decisions and activities of the firm results in to *perceived service*. The service delivery process could be experienced by customers as a process-based quality component whereas the technical solution received by the process as an outcome-based quality component. As shown in the model, both the expected and perceived service can be influenced by *marketing communication*.

The gap model exhibits the steps that the service providers have to consider service quality identification and planning. Discrepancies in the quality management process caused the five discrepancies (so-called *quality gaps*) between the various elements of the structure. The *Gap 5* (ultimate gap) is a function of other gaps that possibly occurred in the service operation process.

SERVQUAL MODEL AND ITS DIMENSIONS

In addition to afore mentioned components, the basis for the SERVQUAL theory is constituted in the GAP theory. Hence the difference between customer expectations and perceived service performance, i.e., service quality is represented by the 'GAP' model. When the customer's perception of service performance equals or exceeds the expected service level, the GAP model indicates that the service quality is adequate and the customer is satisfied (Brady et al, 2002).

Parasuraman, et al. (1988) has proven the SERVQUAL scale, which is similar to the gap model, to be one of the best ways to measure the quality of services provided to customers. The consistency and reliability of this method has also been confirmed by Brown et al. (1993). Many researchers reached in to consensus that as perceived service is less than the expected service, it is less than satisfactory and vice versa (Jain et al., 2004).

For many related researches, the dimensions from the SERVQUAL model has been considered as one of the most useful measurements of service quality. In first SERVQUAL model that came had 22 pairs of Likert-type items, where one part measured perceived level of service provided by a particular organization and the other part measured expected level of service quality by respondent (Kuo.YF, 2003). Zeithaml et al (2006) mentioned the ten service dimensions that were initially identified and labeled as: "tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, and understanding the customer".

After refinement of some correlated ones, the above ten dimensions were later reduced to five generic dimensions of service quality as follows: **Tangibility** - the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. **Reliability** - the ability to perform the promised services dependably and accurately. **Responsiveness** - the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. **Assurance** - the knowledge and courtesy of employees as well as their ability to convey trust and confidence, and **Empathy** - the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers. In other words, staff have to make customers feel like they belong (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

As some of the researches on the service quality indicates, most researchers modify the SERVQUAL model and adapt it to the characteristics of services in the tourism and hospitality industry. The study by Saleh and Ryan (1991) in the hotel industry used five determinants such as transparency, tangible elements, trust, avoiding sarcasm and empathy. In their study, they included a total of 33 questions compared to the original 22 questions used in the SERVQUAL survey. Ramsaran-Fowdar (2007) used seven determinants of service quality to investigate satisfaction of tourists for two month in Mauritius. According to the studies revealed herein indicate that the SERVQUAL model does not cover all the determinants of service quality that are important for hospitality guests.

HOSPITALITY GUEST SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY

Gunderson *et al.* (1996) defines customer satisfaction as, “a guest’s post consumption judgment of a product or service that can, in turn, be measured by assessing guest’s evaluation of a performance on specific attributes.” The authors’ research revealed that the business travelers were most concerned with the tangible aspects of housekeeping (e.g. room amenities) and the intangible aspects of the front desk (e.g. receptionists’ willingness to provide service). Providing services which customers prefer is obviously a starting point for providing customer satisfaction. A relatively easy way to determine what services customers prefer is simply to ask them.

Politis *et al.* (2009) demonstrate enablers that drive hotel guest satisfaction including ability of hotel to determine requirements; expectations; preferences of its current and potential customers, to build relationships with customers and to identify customers’ preferences for the quality of the provided services and products so as to satisfy the particular requirements of the different categories of customers. Meanwhile the study identified certain elements that are building block of development and maintaining hotel guest satisfaction including: Customer and market knowledge, customer relationship management, product and service design, and customer satisfaction determination.

Pizam & Ellis (1999) also indicated the gap that may exist between customers’ expectation and perceived service as an influence on measurement of the quality of the service. Meanwhile, this study indicated connection between satisfaction with individual attributes of guest’s service experience and overall satisfaction of service encounter. Service customers may make trade-offs of one attribute for another in order to make decision in which weakness in one attribute of service encounter is compensated by strength in another. For example, if the hotel is old but the service is good, the guest overall satisfaction with hotel service is high.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Firstly, this study addressed the overall satisfaction level of guests of hotels, bar & restaurants, and pensions at Wolaita Sodo City because this particular type of study had not been previously conducted in these organizations. The outcome of this study contributes to improving the service quality of the aforementioned organizations since it identified service quality gaps as perceived by the customers. For the result that shows guests satisfaction, the owners would be happy with their service and try to maintain it whereas for the opposite results, they should take recommended improvements.

Secondly, the findings of this study add to the wealth of knowledge in customers’ satisfaction research. It would also be helpful for individuals who want to conduct further studies in related topics and other similar organizations those face related problems.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The hotel industry today has been recognized as a global industry, with producers and consumers spread around the world. The use of hotel facilities such as: room, restaurant, bar, nightclub or health club; are no longer considered a luxury. For many people these services have become an integral component of lifestyle. Moreover, in the last two decades, demand for and supply of hospitality services beyond that of the traditional services intended for travelers have escalated the growth of the hospitality industry globally, leading to intense competition in the market-place. One of the greatest challenges facing hotel organizations today is the ever-growing volume and pace of competition. Competition has had major implications for the customer, providing increased choice, greater value for money and augmented levels of service.

In the hospitality and tourism business, most researchers are interested in maximizing customer satisfaction; satisfied customers tend to generate return business for the hotel which helps provide increased profits to hotel. Hernon & Whitwan (2001) defined customer satisfaction as a measure of how the customer perceives service delivery. Liu (2000) stated that customer satisfaction is a function of service performance relative to customer expectations. For this reason, it is important to understand how customer expectation is formed in order to identify the factors of service satisfaction. Therefore, this paper sought to investigate and evaluate level of satisfaction among guests of selected hotels, restaurants, and pensions in the city of Wolaita Sodo.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study was to assess the satisfaction level of guests who use the goods and services of hotels, restaurants, and pensions in Wolaita Sodo City. More specifically, this study sought to achieve the following specific objectives:

- ✓ To assess guests’ satisfaction towards services/facilities/products of Hotels, Restaurants, and Pensions selected for the study.
- ✓ To analyze the perceptions-expectations gap regarding the quality of services and its facilities.
- ✓ To examine significant differences in quality perceptions between male and female guests of that Hotels, Restaurants, and Pensions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In view of the above objectives, the following questions are expected to be answered in this study:

- What is the overall satisfaction level of guests with the services offered by Hotels, Restaurants, and Pension in Wolaita Sodo city?
- What does the perceptions-expectations gap value refers regarding the quality of services and its facilities?
- With respect to gender of guests, is there any significant difference of perceptions towards service and prices that Hotels, Restaurants, and Pension of W/Sodo city offer?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as the *cross-sectional* survey for the quantitative study which was used to gather the relevant and pertinent information with regard to satisfaction level of guests. Thus, this study is classified as survey research. A three step sampling technique such as purposive, stratified, and then convenience sampling was used to select samples. The survey involved 250 foreign and local guests who stayed at and used the selected hotels, restaurants, and pensions from March 1- July 6, 2013.

Selection of relevant days on which guests are available was based on both week days and weekends in consideration of service demand peaks and downs in those days. Basically these respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the current status of services and goods offered by hotels, restaurants, and pensions as well as their personal views about goods and service satisfaction. A questionnaire derived from SERVQUAL model that consisting of five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy was used as a data collection instrument.

The survey data was analyzed using an SPSS (version 20). The frequencies and percentages are used for calculating and analyzing the demographic data. Besides using descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations, gap analysis was used in comparing means between expectation score and perception score of the respondents. T-test is also used to examine significant differences in quality perceptions with respect to gender of guests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1 presented the summary of the guests’ demographic data results. As it is presented in the above table, seventy five percent of the customers were male. Majority of the customers were from 25-35 years of age (50%). However, there were only 6 % of customers above the age of 57 years. Among the customers, the highest proportion of customers (88.8%) was from Ethiopia whereas the least (0.8%) is from Scandinavian countries.

The main purpose of guests’ visits included vacation (11.6%), honeymoon (0.8%), seminar/conference (12.8%), training (30.8%), business (26.4%), and others (17.6%). When we see the number of previous visits, 37.6% of the guests had visited/stayed at the same hotel/pension more than 4 times followed by 28.8% who had visited/stayed for the first time, whereas only 10.4% had visited/stayed there 4 times.

TABLE 4.1: GUESTS' PROFILE SUMMARY

	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Female	62	24.8
	Male	188	75.2
Age	Below 25 years old	23	9.2
	25-35 years old	125	50
	36-46 years old	58	23.2
	47-57 years old	29	11.6
	Over 57 years old	15	6
Nationality/Region	Ethiopian	222	88.8
	Asian	8	3.2
	European	9	3.6
	American	5	2.0
	Scandinavian	2	0.8
	Others	4	1.6
Occupation	Government official	52	20.8
	Employee	97	38.8
	Owner / Private business	57	22.8
	Student	15	6
	Others	29	11.6
Purpose of trip/coming to this city	Vacation	29	11.6
	Honeymoon	2	0.8
	Seminar	32	12.8
	Training	77	30.8
	Business	66	26.4
	Others	44	17.6
Number of previous visits	1 time	72	28.8
	2 times	30	12.0
	3 times	28	11.2
	4 times	26	10.4
	more than 4 times	94	37.6

Source: Primary data through Questionnaire, 2012

Table 4.2 below contains descriptive data (mean and standard deviations) for the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model as indicated by the respondents. In all cases, the distribution of scores for the sample contained reasonable variance and normality for use in subsequent analyses. The overall mean scores as well as levels of expectations and perceptions of services based on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model are summarized in the table.

TABLE 4.2: OVERALL MEAN SCORE AND LEVEL OF GUEST SATISFACTION TOWARDS SERVICE QUALITY

Dimensions	Customers' expectation			Customers' perception		
	Mean	S.D.	Level	Mean	S.D.	Level
Tangibility	3.80	.81	High	3.77	.73	High
Reliability	3.73	.73	High	3.59	.68	High
Responsiveness	3.94	.88	High	3.96	.76	High
Assurance	3.94	.76	High	3.78	.70	High
Empathy	3.68	.91	High	3.46	.78	High
Overall mean score (OMS)	3.82	.69	High	3.71	.60	High

Source: Primary data through Questionnaire, 2012

Note: N=250

Each dimension of SERVQUAL has 5, 8, 2, 7, and 4 items respectively.

As presented in the table 4.2 above, all dimensions of SERVQUAL model for the expectations of guests' satisfaction are at a rank of high level. As the result shows us, responsiveness and assurance dimensions are getting most important rank for guests' expectation at 3.94 followed by tangibility, reliability and empathy respectively. When looking at guests' perceptions for each dimensions, all are at a rank of high level. But most guests perceived Responsiveness as most important by providing ranking level at 3.96 followed by Assurance, Tangibility, Reliability, and Empathy respectively.

OVERALL SATISFACTION BASED ON SERVQUAL GAP ANALYSIS RESULTS

The summary of the SERVQUAL gap analysis results of hotels, restaurants and pensions at Wolaita Sodo for five dimensions are presented in the table that appear below. The gap is calculated between the mean score of expectation and perception to determine overall guests' satisfaction based on the results of their difference.

TABLE 4.3: SUMMARY OF THE SERVQUAL GAP ANALYSIS FOR GUESTS' EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS BASED ON THE FIVE DIMENSIONS

Five Dimensions	OMS of Guests' Expectations (E)	OMS of Guests' Perceptions (P)	Guests' Satisfaction/ SERVQUAL Gap (P-E)
Tangibility	3.80	3.77	-0.03
Reliability	3.73	3.59	-0.14
Responsiveness	3.94	3.96	0.02
Assurance	3.94	3.78	-0.16
Empathy	3.68	3.46	-0.22
Overall mean score (OMS)	3.82	3.71	-0.11

Source: Primary data through Questionnaire, 2012

As shown in Table 4.3, the negative sign of SERVQUAL gap for mean scores between the perceptions and expectations of the guests indicated a negative difference in all dimensions except Responsiveness. Accordingly, many of the organizations under study had not been capable of fulfilling the guests' satisfaction in these four dimensions. Only Responsiveness dimension of SERVQUAL model recorded the high level of satisfaction with a positive mean score of +0.02 between the perceptions and expectations of the guests.

COMPARISONS BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE RESPONSES TO SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS

T-test is used to compare the means with respect to gender (two independent samples). In this case, the significant differences on the SERVQUAL dimensions are determined. In this test two critical assumptions regarding data distribution are considered such as the values in the data set are independent (measured on randomly selected units from the study area) and the data to be normally distributed. However normal distribution of the data could not be sensitive to violations of the normality assumption unless the data is extremely non-normal.

TABLE 4.4: T-TEST RESULTS FOR EQUALITY OF MEAN SCORES BY THE TWO SAMPLES ON SERVQUAL PERCEPTION

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Tangibility dimension	Equal variances assumed	-1.495	248	.136
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.507	105.596	.135
Reliability dimension	Equal variances assumed	-1.413	248	.159
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.507	117.077	.135
Responsiveness dimension	Equal variances assumed	-2.665	248	.008
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.804	114.031	.006
Assurance dimension	Equal variances assumed	-.283	248	.778
	Equal variances not assumed	-.322	134.608	.748
Empathy dimension	Equal variances assumed	-.895	248	.372
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.025	136.119	.307

Source: Primary data through Questionnaire, 2012

FINDINGS

Overall mean score for guest expectations and perceptions on five dimensions of SERVQUAL model are ranked at a high level with 3.82 and 3.71, respectively. This indicates us that guests' expectations based on all dimensions had not been met.

The result of some dimensions is consistent with the study of Lam and Zhang (1999), who explored service quality factors on overall customer satisfaction in Thailand hotels. Their findings revealed that "reliability", "responsiveness" and "assurance" factors had the largest scores for customers' expectations and perceptions.

As per the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model, the overall negative value of gap analysis (-0.11) indicated that the guests were not fully satisfied with the overall service of the organizations under study. This result coincides to the explanation of Oliver (1980) and Jain et al., (2004) who proved that if the outcome matches the expectations, confirmation (satisfaction) occurs and vice versa.

When we see overall satisfaction of guests based on SERVQUAL gap analysis results, it is inconsistent to findings of Tse & Wilton (1988) who claimed that customer satisfaction can be said to be in existence when the expectations of the customers are met or surpassed by the services or products of a business organization.

The t-test finding points out no significant differences of perceptions towards all dimensions of SERVQUAL with an exception to Responsiveness dimension. These absence of significant differences implies as there are no major differences between male and female perception about the service quality of the organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the SERVQUAL gap (the difference between guests' perceptions and expectations) has a negative value (-0.11) for overall mean score of the five dimensions, these organizations should define their services according to the wants or needs of the guests to overcome such problem. The respondents claimed that the organizations should improve their receptionists/waiters language skill and should have more knowledge about the types of room and hotel facilities available.

As the guests' complaint mainly stressed, the owners of most hotels/restaurants should take care of food and water hygienic issues, improve poor room, bed, and equipment facilities as well as try to have regular water supply for shower and related services. Moreover, they should set up TV, ICT support and internet access (either broadband or wireless) in almost all hotels and pensions.

CONCLUSIONS

From the main purpose of guests' visits to Wolaita Sodo, training (30.8%) has major share followed by business (26.4%). When we see the number of previous visits, 37.6% of the guests had visited/stayed at the same hotel/pension more than 4 times.

All dimensions of SERVQUAL model for the expectations of guests' satisfaction are at a rank of high level with responsiveness and assurance dimensions getting most important rank for guests' expectation at 3.94 followed by tangibility, reliability and empathy respectively. When looking at guests' perceptions for each dimension, all are at a rank of high level with Responsiveness considered most important by providing ranking level at 3.96.

As per the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model, the overall negative value of gap analysis (-0.11) indicated that the guests were not fully satisfied with the overall service of the organizations under study. This indicates that most guests felt dissatisfied with the service quality of the hotels/restaurants and pensions at Wolaita Sodo City.

With respect to gender of guests, the t-test finding points out no significant differences of perceptions towards all dimensions of SERVQUAL with an exception to Responsiveness dimension.

LIMITATIONS

The shortage of up to date reference materials and research works, specifically to the Ethiopian context, narrowed the content of the study. Lack of sufficient fund hindered the need to include a large sample size that could nearly represent the total population of the study.

Another barrier we came across in the process of data collection was refusal by owners of some hotels and pensions to formally permit the distribution of the questionnaire for unconvincing reasons such as lack of time for guests to fill the questionnaire, fear of sensitivity of the questionnaire contents if its results present to public, etc. Although we have a great group of participants who were willing to fill the questionnaire, there were some guests who would not volunteer to be part of the study for unknown reasons.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since this study did not consider employees who provide the services to customers, it would be interesting to study relationship among service quality, customer satisfaction and job satisfaction to see if satisfaction level of employees is related to their services and customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, future researchers could test among the dimensions with the use of another statistical method to see which of them will be more important to service quality and customer satisfaction. As well these same variables could be tested in a manufacturing sector.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION COMPUTED- EXPECTATION

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility dimension	250	1.00	5.00	3.8024	.81285
Reliability dimension	250	1.00	5.00	3.7260	.72994
Responsiveness dimension	250	1.00	5.00	3.9420	.88019
Assurance dimension	250	1.00	5.00	3.9406	.76105
Empathy dimension	250	1.00	5.00	3.6770	.91035
Overall dimensions	250	1.00	5.00	3.8182	.68534
Valid N (listwise)	250				

APPENDIX B: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION COMPUTED- PERCEPTION

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility dimension	250	2.20	5.00	3.7656	.73333
Reliability dimension	250	2.13	5.00	3.5850	.67721
Responsiveness dimension	250	2.50	5.00	3.9620	.75885
Assurance dimension	250	1.86	5.00	3.7823	.70280
Empathy dimension	250	1.75	5.00	3.4600	.78060
Overall dimensions	250	2.09	5.00	3.7115	.60391
Valid N (listwise)	250				

APPENDIX C: INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST (GENDER PERCEPTION)

		t-test for Equality of Means						
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Tangibility dimension	Equal variances assumed	-1.495	248	.136	-.16016	.10713	-.37116	.05085
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.507	105.596	.135	-.16016	.10628	-.37088	.05057
Reliability dimension	Equal variances assumed	-1.413	248	.159	-.13984	.09898	-.33479	.05511
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.507	117.077	.135	-.13984	.09281	-.32365	.04397
Responsiveness dimension	Equal variances assumed	-2.665	248	.008	-.29264	.10980	-.50889	-.07638
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.804	114.031	.006	-.29264	.10438	-.49942	-.08586
Assurance dimension	Equal variances assumed	-.283	248	.778	-.02915	.10312	-.23224	.17395
	Equal variances not assumed	-.322	134.608	.748	-.02915	.09042	-.20797	.14968
Empathy dimension	Equal variances assumed	-.895	248	.372	-.10231	.11437	-.32756	.12295
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.025	136.119	.307	-.10231	.09978	-.29963	.09502

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