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- Sharma T., Kwatra, G. (2008) Effectiveness of Social Advertising: A Study of Selected Campaigns, Corporate Social Responsibility, Edited by David Crowther & Nicholas Capaldi, Ashgate Research Companion to Corporate Social Responsibility, Chapter 15, pp 287-303.

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ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMERS' SERVICE EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN GEM HOSPITAL: GAPS MODEL

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ABSTRACT

The hospital services market symbolizes one of the most important segments of the Indian healthcare industry and is projected to be worth US\$ 81.2 billion by 2015. In India's healthcare industry, the private sector has emerged as a vibrant force, gaining both national and international repute. The Health Care Industry in Coimbatore has witnessed a tremendous growth in the last decade. GEM hospital, Asia's first exclusive gastroenterology and advanced laparoscopic surgery center situated in Coimbatore is providing world class laparoscopic treatment to the patients from various parts of India such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Bangalore, etc and abroad. Nowadays, Customers have become more and more aware of their requirements and are demanding higher standards of services. The perceptions and expectations of customers are continually evolving, making it difficult for the service providers to measure and manage service effectively. However, it is important to understand how sensitive the customers are to various service attributes or dimensions. Allocating resources in the fashion that is consistent with customer priorities can enhance the effectiveness in the service operations. This study aims to assess the exceptions and perceptions of customers regarding the quality of service offered by GEM Hospital, Coimbatore.

KEYWORDS

Expectations, Perceptions, Service Quality.

INTRODUCTION

The healthcare industry forms the backbone of any nation's well being and can be broadly divided into five segments namely hospitals, pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, medical equipment & supplies and medical insurance. World health care industry includes any medical institution which includes either a single medical assistant to the medical practitioner or medical practitioners attached to different hospitals and other medical establishments. The world health care industry comprises of the following segments: Hospitals, Nursing, Physicians, Dentists, Health care services at home, Medical practitioners, Outpatient departments, Ambulant health care facilities and Diagnostic laboratories and medical services. With latest technological developments happening across the globe, the world health care industry is catching up with the other leading industries of the world.

The Indian healthcare sector is expected to reach US\$ 100 billion by 2015 from the current US\$ 65 billion, growing 20 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y), as per rating agency Fitch. The industry aims to touch US\$ 79 billion in 2012 and US\$ 280 billion by 2020, on back of increasing demand for specialized and quality healthcare facilities. India's cost advantage and explosive growth of private hospitals, equipped with latest technology and skilled healthcare professionals have made it a preferred destination for medical tourism. Medical tourism market is expected to expand from US\$ 1.9 billion in 2011 to reach US\$ 3.9 billion in 2014, at a CAGR of 27 per cent. India is the most competitive destination with advantages of lower cost and sophisticated treatments, highlighted the RNCOS report titled 'Indian Healthcare - New Avenues for Growth'. Exchange Rate used: INR 1 = US\$ 0.01816 as on 22nd Dec 2012.

Coimbatore has the sophisticated large hospitals offering the world class quality treatments equivalent to the best hospitals around the world. The number of Coimbatore hospitals delivering health care to the masses is increasing every day. Coimbatore's charity trusts have ensured that the district has a unique place in health care industry. They have championed the cause of health and medical care in Coimbatore. Coimbatore is also well-known for its exclusive super-speciality hospitals. The Lakshmi group started the Kuppusamy Naidu Hospital. It is one of the five centres in the country for the detection of cancer and education on cancer. The PSG Hospitals with highly scientific clinical services; The KG Hospital with the state-of-the-art facilities; The Kovai Medical Centre and Hospital (KMCH) with specialised procedures such as stenting, fallopian tube recanalisation, chemoembolisation and laparoscopic and thoracoscopic; Ganga Hospital for trauma, orthopaedic and micro-vascular surgery; **GEM Hospital for laparoscopy**; Rao Hospital for assisted reproduction and endoscopy; The Eye Foundation and Sankara Eye Clinic for ophthalmology - which offer world-class treatment at affordable rates; Vikram Hospital for ENT and so on. Other than this, Ayurvedic hospitals, Homeopathy Clinics, Naturopathy hospitals, Siddha Hospitals, and Acupuncture treatments are also emerging with innovative ideas to treat the people with their ancestral knowledge.

GEM hospital, Asia's first exclusive gastroenterology and advanced laparoscopic surgery center situated in Coimbatore is providing world class laparoscopic treatment to the patients from various parts of India such as Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Bangalore, etc and abroad.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Using SERVQUAL to measure the Service Quality of Travel Agents in Guangzhou, South China" was conducted by Zhou Ruiqi and Pritchard Adrain (2005). The objective was to investigate the expectations and perceptions of Chinese consumers in the context of travel agents in South China. With Sample size of 221 respondents and the data was collected using interview schedule and questionnaire that was designed based on SERVQUAL dimensions. The study revealed that there is a negative gap scores between the expectations and perceptions of consumers and the overall service quality of the top four travel agents in Guangzhou was not satisfactory.

"A study to find the Gaps in Services offered by ICICI bank with regard to Customer Expectations and Deliverables" was conducted by Megha Trivedi and Nirmit Agrawal. To identify the degree of customer satisfaction on various dimensions of ICICI bank and to determine the gap in services offered by ICICI bank with special reference to the expectations of the customers and services offered was the objective. Descriptive research design with sample size of 100 respondents was used and structured questionnaire, SERVQUAL was used to collect the primary data. The study revealed that customers are highly satisfied with the tangibility dimension followed by assurance and other dimensions.

"An Assessment of Service Quality in National Parks: A case study of Gunung Gading National Park (GGNP), Sarawak" was conducted by Abas Said, Nor Emel Farnida Jaddil and Norazirah Ayob (2004 – 2005). The objectives were to evaluate the service quality expectations and perceptions in GGNP, to determine the gaps between service quality and expectations and to evaluate the visitors' satisfaction with trips to GGNP. With sample size of 182 respondents the data was collected using questionnaire developed based on ECOSERV model. The findings of the study revealed that there was a negative service quality gaps in all dimensions of service quality and the overall service quality in GGNP was unsatisfactory.

"Service Quality and behavioural intentions: An Empirical Study in Computer centres in Madurai" was conducted by T.Vanniarajan and A.Stephen. The study investigates the quality of services offered to students in an institutional computer centre and measures tangible and intangible aspects of service quality, customer satisfaction and revisit intentions. Purposive sampling with sample size of 500 respondents was done. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The study revealed that the service performance of computer centres generally lags behind the users expectations and Tangible aspects of service performance have a stronger direct effect on revisit intention and recommendation than the intangible aspects. Further, the study revealed that the intangible aspects have a stronger indirect effect on revisit intention and recommendation especially through user satisfaction. It was concluded that the satisfied users intend to revisit the computer centres and also recommend others to visit it.

"Customer Expectations and Perceptions across the Indian Banking Industry and the resultant Financial Implications" was conducted by Kirti Dutta and Anil Dutta. The objective of the study was to compare the expectations and perceptions of service quality and bank performance between public, private and foreign banks and the overall service quality of banks in India. Quota sampling was done and the sample size was 263 respondents. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The study revealed that in the banking sector it is the foreign banks which are perceived to be offering better quality services followed by the private and then public banks. It was also found that these perceptions are reflected in the financial performance of the banks.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Services have assumed greater importance in the Indian economy due to its remarkable contribution to GDP. The competition in service organizations is becoming intense and severe. It is apparent that the growth in the services sector has been substantive. Today one can find a large variety of services being offered in the market by service providers. These services are extremely heterogeneous and varied. Customers have become more and more aware of their requirements and demand higher standards of services. The perceptions and expectations of customers are continually evolving, making it difficult for the service providers to measure and manage service effectively. It is important to understand how sensitive the customers are to various service attributes or dimensions. Allocating resources in the fashion that is consistent with customer priorities can enhance the effectiveness in the service operations. This study aims to assess the service quality of GEM hospital which is Asia's first most advanced Laparoscopic Surgery and Research Centre which in turn will enable to clearly identify the expectations and perceptions of patients with regard to services of GEM hospital

OBJECTIVES

- To assess GEM hospital's service quality along each of the five SERVQUAL dimensions
- To assess gaps between customer expectations and perceptions of services in GEM hospital
- To ascertain customer requirements or expectations for services
- To prioritize the service requirements of customers in GEM hospital

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A Descriptive study was undertaken with sample size of 80. Purposive sampling technique which is a non-probability sampling method was used since the data has been collected from a specific target group. Primary data was collected using an undisguised structured questionnaire, SERVQUAL developed by A.Parasuraman. The last part of the questionnaire sought the general information about the respondents and the remaining questions were directed towards finding out the views of the respondents on their expectations and perceptions of the 5 dimensions of service quality as per SERVQUAL instrument. The data collected were analyzed using SPSS package. The tools used in the study for analysis of data are simple percentage analysis, mean score. Weighted SERVQUAL score and Un-weighted SERVQUAL score are calculated.

LIMITATIONS

- The findings are applicable only to GEM hospital, Coimbatore
- Very young and old patients are not included in the study.
- The study was conducted only with those who are admitted as inpatients during the period of research.
- Patients admitted in ICU are not included.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE 1 : DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

S.No	Demographic Profile	%	
1	Gender	Male	35
		Female	65
2	Family Income (Per Month)	Less than 10,000	15
		10,001 – 20,000	31.2
		20,001 – 30,000	38.8
		30,001 – 40,000	8.8
		Above 40,000	6.2

Source : Primary Data

Table 1 indicates that Majority (65%) of the respondents are male. Most (38.8%) of the respondents belong to the family income group (per month) of Rs.20,001 to 30,000 followed by 31.2% belonging to income group of Rs.10,001 to 20,000.

TABLE 2: GAPS IN SERVICE QUALITY

Dimensions	Factors	Perceptions	Expectations	Gap Score
Tangibles	Modern looking equipments	6.1375	5.5375	0.6
	Visually appealing physical facilities	5.625	5.225	0.4
	Neat appearance of personnel	6.0875	5.9375	0.15
	Visually appealing materials associated with service	5.2	5.625	-0.425
	Average Tangibles SERVQUAL Score			0.18125
Reliability	Keep up Promise of Performing at Certain Time	5.45	5.4	0.05
	Sincere Interest in Solving Patients Problem	5.6375	5.9625	-0.325
	Get Things Right at first time	5.2625	5.475	-0.2125
	Provide Service at the Promised Time	5.075	5.425	-0.35
	Error Free Records	5.6	5.625	-0.025
Average Reliability SERVQUAL Score			-0.1725	
Responsiveness	Inform exactly about the Performance of Service	5.25	5.7375	-0.4875
	Prompt Service	5.8	5.725	0.075
	Willingness to Help	5.95	5.8125	0.1375
	Not Busy to Respond	5	5.075	-0.075
	Average Responsiveness SERVQUAL Score			-0.0875
Assurance	Trustworthy	5.6	5.6375	-0.0375
	Safe in Dealings	5.6625	5.8875	-0.225
	Courteousness of Personnel	5.8625	5.5625	0.3
	Knowledge of Personnel	5.4625	5.6625	-0.2
	Average Assurance SERVQUAL Score			-0.0406
Empathy	Individual Attention	5.6625	5.65	0.0125
	Convenient Operating Hours	5.3375	5.4875	-0.15
	Personal Attention	5.5125	5.9875	-0.475
	Best Interests at Heart	5.525	5.4375	0.0875
	Understanding the Needs	5.45	5.7	-0.25
	Average Empathy SERVQUAL Score			-0.155
Gaps in Service Quality Unweighted SERVQUAL Score				-0.05487

Source: Primary Data

From Table 2 and Figure 1 the following inferences can be made :

Positive gap (0.18125) prevails in tangibility dimension, expectations regarding materials associated with the service (-0.425) are not met well, whereas expectations regarding modern looking equipments (0.6), visually appealing physical facilities (0.4) and neatness of personnel (0.15) are well met.

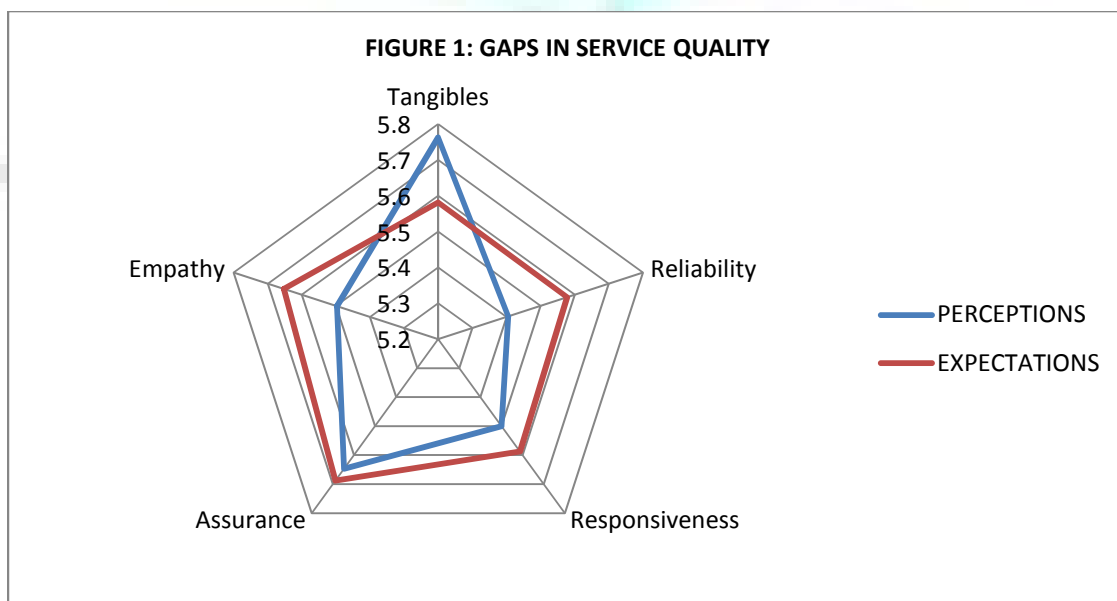
Negative gap (-0.1725) exists in the reliability dimension, the expectations regarding sincere interest in solving patients problem (-0.325), getting things right at first time (-0.2125), providing service at the promised time (-0.35) and error free records (-0.025) are not well met whereas expectation regarding keeping up promise of performing at certain time (0.05) is well met.

Negative gap (-0.0875) exists in the responsiveness dimension, expectations regarding providing prompt service (0.075) and willingness to help (0.1375) are well met whereas expectations regarding informing exactly about the performance of service (-0.4875) and not being busy to respond (-0.075) are not well met.

Negative gap (-0.0406) exists in the assurance dimension, expectations regarding courteousness of personnel (0.3) is well met by the Gem hospital whereas the perceptions regarding trustworthiness (-0.0375), safe in dealings (-0.225) and knowledge of personnel (-0.2) are slightly lower than the expectations.

Negative gap (-0.155) exists in the empathy dimension, expectations regarding individual attention (0.0125) and best interest of patients at heart (0.0875) are well met whereas the perceptions regarding convenient working hours (-0.15), personal attention (-0.475) and understanding the needs (-0.25) are slightly lower than the expectations. The perception of empathy dimension of service quality is slightly lower than the expectations.

Service Quality of GEM Hospital has a negative gap (-0.05487). The perceptions regarding reliability (-0.1725), responsiveness (-0.0875), assurance (-0.0406) and empathy (-0.155) are slightly lower than the expectations where as the perception regarding tangibles (0.18125) of Gem hospital are more than the expectations. The perception of service quality of Gem hospital is slightly lower than the expectations.



Source : Primary Data

TABLE 3 : WEIGHTED SERVICE QUALITY SCORE

Servqual Dimension	Scores (A)	Importance Weights (B)	Weighted Score (A*B)
Tangibles	0.18125	20.5625	3.72695
Reliability	-0.1725	22.1875	-3.8273
Responsiveness	-0.0875	20.125	-1.7609
Assurance	-0.0406	17.75	-0.7207
Empathy	-0.155	19.375	-3.003
TOTAL			-5.58495
WEIGHTED SERVQUAL SCORE			-1.11699

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 indicates that respondents have given maximum importance to Reliability dimension (22.1875) followed by tangibles (20.5625), responsiveness (20.125), empathy (19.375) and assurance (17.75). Since the weighted SERVQUAL score is in negatives (-1.11699), perceptions of service quality of Gem hospital is slightly lower than the expectations.

TABLE 4 : FEATURES PREFERRED

Dimensions	Mean Score
Tangibles	1.19
Reliability	1.39
Responsiveness	1.3
Assurance	0.8
Empathy	1.29

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 indicates that Respondents have preferred reliability (1.39) as the most important feature followed by responsiveness (1.30). The important service requirement of patients is reliability followed by responsiveness, empathy, tangibles and assurance.

CONCLUSION

Gem hospital is considered to be one of Coimbatore's best hospitals for Laparoscopic treatment. Customer's expectations and perceptions have changed a lot, thanks to technological advancement. Assessment of Service Quality of GEM Hospital revealed a negative gap of (-0.05487). Tangibility dimension of Service quality shows a positive gap which brings to light Gem Hospital's modern looking equipments, visually appealing physical facilities and neatness of personnel are at par with customers' expectations. Even though Gem hospital provides reliable services, it has to concentrate even more on reliability dimension as it is the most preferred among other dimensions by the patients. Reliability can be enhanced by providing service at the promised time with error free records and by showing sincere interest in solving patient's problem and by getting things right at the first time. Responsiveness can be further improved by providing exact information about the performance of service and by not being busy to respond to patients. Enhancement of assurance can be done by creating trustworthiness and safety in dealings and by improving the knowledge of personnel by providing them training. Understanding the needs of the patients, showing personal attention and by having operating hours convenient to the patient's requirements can enable to better satisfy customers expectations towards empathy.

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