

Service Quality Management in Hotel Industry: A Conceptual Framework for Food and Beverage Departments

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Abstract

Service quality has been an important subject of research involving food and beverage (F&B) departments of hotels. Despite a substantial number of studies on service quality, the reasons why guests revisit a hotel and why a high-quality service from the F&B department is needed have remained unanswered. This paper aims to review existing literature on service quality management in the F&B departments of hotels, its process, and the effective service quality management framework. This paper discusses famous models, and explains Parasuraman's dimensional framework of service quality management in the area of F&B and its application to the hotel industry. The conceptual paper suggests application of the dimensional model in the F&B department and encourages hotels to improve its management to better satisfy their guests.

Keywords: service quality, hotel industry, parasuraman dimensional model, food and beverage department

1. Introduction

Hotel management scholars consider service quality a precedent to guest satisfaction. Some experiential studies show that getting a good quality of service from the food and beverage (F&B) department of a hotel is important for many guests (Armstrong et al., 1997; Crick & Spencer, 2011; Cronin & Taylor, 1992a; Getty & Thompson, 1994; Lam & Zhang, 1998; Parasuraman. et al., 1988a; Sulek & Hensley, 2010; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). Researchers have defined service quality in relation to the concept of consumer-perceived quality, which is based solely on the perspective of customers. Such a perception is built in a place where an organization supplies goods and services to customers in a manner that satisfies them and where they examine service quality (Babajide, 2011, p. 48; Carman, 1990; Choi & Chu 1998; Christie 2002; Cronin et al., 2000; Gounaris et al., 2003; Mei et al., 1999; Mill, 2002; O'Neill, 2001; Oberoi & Hales, 1990; Presbury et al., 2005; Qu & Tsang, 1998; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Saleh & Ryan, 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1996). In the hotel industry, service quality that satisfies customers is important to encourage them to revisit and to earn their *loyalty* (Carev, 2008; Carman, 1990; Jabulani, 2001; Parasuraman. et al., 1988a; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003) and *satisfaction* (Babajide, 2011, p. 48; Christie 2002; Hersh, 2010, p. 209; Ladhari, 2009, p. 311; Oliver, 1999).

Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988b), Qu and Tsang (1998), and Zeithaml et al. (1996) define "perceived service quality" as the global evaluation by customers of the overall excellence or superiority of a service. The definition is similar to the concept of attitude. Based on the exploratory definition of service quality as perceived by customers, it is the gap (discrepancy) between a customer's expectation of a service and his perceptions of the actual service received (p. 254 – 255). Much of the recent research on service quality has been carried out within the framework of the SQ (service quality) model developed from the extensive research of Parasuraman et al. (1990, 1985, and 1988b), Qu & Tsang (1998), and Zeithaml et al. (1996). Service quality has been discussed in various literatures, and one of the most largely used models measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL.

Taking on views from the study by Parasuraman et al. (1995, 1998), this study suggests that service quality and its dimensions are among the important factors influencing guest satisfaction. Considering the dimensions of service quality is, therefore, necessary as well. This dimension was focused on several studies on which hotel administrators received the support to implement the plan for improving service quality (AlRousan, 2011; Mohsin, 2011; Parasuraman et al., 1985). The benefits of a good service quality as far as the hotel industry is concerned include greater guest satisfaction and enhancement of employee performance (Cronin et al., 2000; Duncan & Elliott, 2002; Johnson et al., 1995; Kang & James, 2004; Lidén, 2003; Peter & Nicole, 2006; Rust et al., 1995;

Soutar et al., 2001; Su, 2004). Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) mentioned that perception of service quality becomes global depending on the prevalence of the service. The idea that service quality is a multidimensional concept is commonly accepted.

According to Antony and Ghosh (2004) and Harvey (1998), service quality covers meeting and exceeding customer expectations. This description has become popular since its inception in the late 1970s. The concept of service quality stemmed from the area of marketing, which puts importance to the relationship between a business and its customers. Service quality is intangible, making its measurement impossible. Evaluation of service quality largely depends on management of appearances and perceptions (p. 380).

This paper reviews existing literature and suggests a theoretical framework for F&B department that illustrates the evaluation of service quality in the hotel industry in Jordan. It uses the five dimensions developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Zeithaml et al. (1996). These five dimensions are the followings: (1) tangibles – refer to physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personal, etc.; (2) reliability – ability to dependably and accurately perform the promised service; (3) responsiveness – willingness to help customers and provide prompt service; (4) assurance – knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to convey trust and confidence; and (5) empathy – care for and individualized attention to guests.

2. Theories and Models in Service Quality

There are five dimensions of service quality, namely, tangibility (Cronin & Taylor, 1992b; Kang & James, 2004; Saleh & Ryan, 1991; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003), reliability (AlRousan, 2011; Kotler & Bloom, 1984; Ladhari, 2009, p. 311; Parasuraman. et al., 1988a), responsiveness (Antony & Ghosh, 2004; Cheung & Law, 1998; Knuston et al., 1991; Upal, 2008), assurance (Al Khattab, 2011; Cronin & Taylor, 1992a; Pitt & Jeantrout, 1994; Powapaka, 1996), and empathy (Harvey, 1998; Mohsin, 2011; Parasuraman. et al., 1988a; Qu & Nelson, 1998; Zeithaml et al., 1993). Several studies have identified SERVQUAL, but Parasuraman et al. (1985) were the first to point out that the direction of marketing services is one of the considerations in guest administration. Service quality, such as in the hotel industry, is difficult to understand compared with product quality because the former is intangible. Several studies reported that the SERVQUAL scale is not universal because the dimensionality of service quality apparently depends on the type of service examined (Ladhari, 2009, p. 311).

There has been variable help for the validity of the SERVQUAL model in the hotel service industry (Ladhari, 2009, p. 311; Wilkins et al., 2007). Akan (1995) explores the applicability of the SERVQUAL model in the Turkish hospitality industry and identifies seven dimensions in the model: (1) courtesy and competence of the person, (2) communication and transactions, (3) tangibles, (4) knowledge and understanding of the customer, (5) accuracy and speed of service, study of the hotel industry, (6) solutions to problems; and (7) accuracy of hotel reservations. Mei et al. (1999) determine the dimensions of service quality in the Australian hotel industry and develop a new scale of service quality in the hospitality industry, called “HOLSERV,” with three dimensions: (1) employees, (2) tangibles, and (3) reliability. Saleh and Ryan (1991) report five dimensions of service quality that differ from those in the SERVQUAL model: (1) conviviality; (2) tangibles; (3) reassurance; (4) avoidance of sarcasm; and (5) empathy. Oberoi and Hales (1990) suggest that service quality plays an important role in conference hotels in the United Kingdom and report that service-quality perception has two dimensions: (1) tangibles; and (2) intangibles.

Getty and Thompson (1994) describe the validity of the SERVQUAL dimensions in the hotel sector and report that only two of the dimensions (tangibles and reliability) are generic. Getty and Getty (2003) test the dimensions of service quality in the hotel industry in the United States and develop a new scale (called “lodging quality index”) with five service-quality dimensions: (1) tangibility, (2) reliability, (3) responsiveness, (4) confidence, and (5) communication. Al Roussan (2011) examines Parasuraman model for hotel service quality and customer loyalty in Jordanian hotels using the Marriott hotel chain as a case study. The study discusses the five gaps in service quality in the context of Jordan and applies this model to the Marriott hotel chain to test its quality of service. The benefit of this framework is applying the elements of “various models” into a clarified hotel and tourism industry management as Parasuraman (1995, p. 1) says:

“Attainment of quality in products and services has become a pivotal concern in 1980 while the quality in tangible goods has been described and measured by marketers, quality of service is largely undefined and unresearched. The authors attempt to rectify this situation by reporting the insight obtained in an extensive exploration of quality in four service businesses and developing a model of service quality”.

3. Service Quality Dimensions

The first definition, reliability is defined as the ability of a service supplier to promptly deliver a good quality of

service. Observing service delivery contracts, pricing, and complaints handling are all important for a business. (AlRousan, 2011; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Tat & Raymound, 1999). The second concept, responsiveness is the agreeableness to help guest by providing immediate service as soon as a request is received. The service guests will provide soon and prompt attention to all their guest requests, question and suggestion (Al Rousan, 2011; Knutson et al., 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1985). The third concept, assurance is with consideration to the service quality detention which considers on the capability to activate trust and confidence of the product or service provided. The fourth dimension empathy is the service quality manner that stresses on the contacting of guest's as personalized. The end of this step, tangibility is the service dimension that makes a product or service practical and usable for customers (AlRousan, 2011; Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Figure 1 shows the Parasuraman dimensional SERVQUAL management framework.

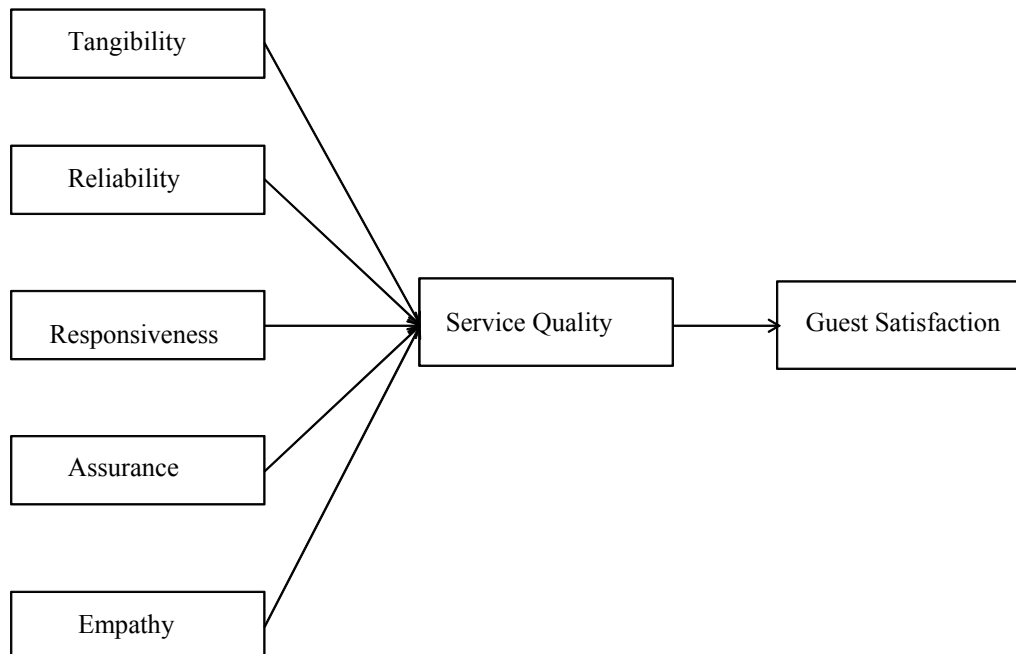


Figure 1. Parasuraman SERVQUAL management framework: adopted by Parasuraman et al. (1985)

3.1 Guest Satisfaction

Guest satisfaction is the evaluation of a guest whether or not the quality of a service meets his expectations. Performance that falls below expectations makes guests dissatisfied (Kottler & Killer, 2006). In the hotel industry, satisfaction of guests is in terms of their satisfaction with the service of the F&B department and the customer relations developed by hotel staff (Al Rousan, 2011; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Customer satisfaction is considered one of the most important outcomes of all marketing activities in a market-oriented firm. The obvious objective of satisfying a customer is to expand a business, to gain higher market share, and to acquire repeat and referral business, all of which lead to improved profitability (Barsky, 1992; Carev, 2008). However, the guest satisfaction concept in this model refers to judgement that depends on both good service quality and fitness of service to the needs of guests (Tse and Wilton, 1988). According to Parasuraman, guest satisfaction is the level in which expectation of a guest is met or exceeded. Carev (2008) defines service quality satisfaction based on overall consideration by a guest of the advantages of a service taking into account perceptions of what is reserved and what is given (Parasuraman. et al. 1988b). Service providers should be able to understand the behavior and needs of guests to be able to know how to satisfy them. Cheung and Law (1998) develop a new model for the measurement of hospitality SQ that incorporates performance of hotel employees in the SQ level. This new SQ for the customer satisfaction model, in turn, can be directly integrated into the hospitality TQ operation because SQ is a basic component of TQ. This new model prevails over the traditional SQ models in several areas. The new model is more comprehensive. Moreover, the new model better reflects the actual SQ situation that fits the TQ concept as both TQ and staff performance aim at sustained improvement. The former steers towards continual improvement of each process, whereas the latter is directed towards continual

improvement in performance. (p. 402).

This study is one of the studies on the quality of the F&B department in Jordanian hotels and its relationship with guest satisfaction and service quality. This study suggests a model that may be successfully applied to service quality. Furthermore, this study suggests the application of a guest satisfaction model that hotel managers may find useful. Finally there was an absence of competent data to design and develop hotel service quality and guest satisfaction. To benefit from this study, F&B department and hotel management will develop and improve their service and guest satisfaction. Nevertheless, this study is expected to help F&B departments and management of hotels to develop and improve their service and thus better satisfy their guests.

4. Service Quality in Food and Beverage Departments

F&B department in the hotel industry has received considerable attention from researchers and academics given that this department may help guide the development of service quality in the entire F&B industry (Arizon, 2010, p. 122). Understanding the antecedent of service quality” allows the hotel industry to concentrate on SERVQUAL models. Reviewing more than 32 empirical studies, Arizon (2010, p. 122) focuses on service quality delivery in the F&B industry in the western Cape, evaluates factors that affect service quality, and explains SERVQUAL application and gaps in the hotel industry. Cho and Wong (1998 p. 285) show the relationship between service quality and guest satisfaction, and discuss the measurement of service quality using a computerized food and beverage cost control system. According to their study, “The gaps between management requirements and the functionality of computer systems could thereby be reduced. The average scores in terms of the expectations of all attributes are high, suggesting that there are few redundant functions/features in the existing FBCCSs in Hong Kong hotels.” In another study, the Gui Hilton Helsinki Airport hotel is used as the main antecedent of breakfast service quality, which covers quality of food and reliability of service in restaurants. The gap between consumer expectation and management perception, as well as the gap between service quality specification and service delivery leads to a gap in perceived service quality (Babajide, 2011, p. 48). Ruetzler (2008) has three studies on food and beverage, namely, “*Service Quality and Culture*,” “*Service Quality and School Food Service*,” and “*Service Quality Model*.”

Nield et al. (2000) affirm “the role and importance of food service in tourist satisfaction and the differences in satisfaction levels among regional groups. Analysis of the findings reveals that significant differences existed between satisfaction perception of three tourist groups on value for money, quality of food, a number of dishes, food service standards, variety of dishes, and presentation of food and speed of service in general, bread, coffee, meat, and soup in particular. Overall results further indicate that quality of food, value for money, variety of dishes, attractiveness of the surroundings, and presentation of food were the attributes that most affected the overall food service experience in Romania (p. 375). Result of their study show that food service is an important contributor to tourist satisfaction, and that there are significant differences in satisfaction levels with food service between eastern and western European, and Romanian tourists. They confirm that guest satisfaction plays a very important role in the hotel and tourism industry.

In the study by Sriyam (2010, pp. 7-17), the use of the SERVQUAL approach to measure service quality in hotel and other service industries is accepted. The study explores expectation and perception levels of customers towards service quality that focuses on the front office staff and service quality dimensions in other hotel departments, such as that of F&B. Moreover, the SERVQUAL model scale enables actual measurement of service quality. The model on which SERVQUAL is based allows customers to evaluate quality of a service based on five distinct dimensions: *tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy*. The provision of individualized attention to customers and the use of this model are suggested by previous studies (e.g., Lin, 2006; and Nield et al., 2000). In existing literatures, theories and models for measuring service quality in food and beverage departments are recommended and recognized as indicators of SERVQUAL (Al Khattab, 2011a; Al Rousan, 2011; Christie 2002; Gazzoli et al., 2009; Getty & Getty, 2003; Gronroos, 1990; Knutson et al., 1990; Mill, 2002; Oliver, 1980; Qu & Nelson, 1998; Richards & Allaway 1993).

5. Conclusions

It can generally be contested that there are two perspectives to explain Parasuraman’s model. Firstly, the guests directly gain loyalty from the service quality dimensions: ‘*tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy*’. When they perceive a higher service quality, they will ultimately turn into a loyal guest of a specific service quality provided such as the F&B department, and secondly, guests may have higher satisfaction level. The application of this model by hotels can bring success for food and beverage departments to achieve high service quality which has a direct effect on satisfaction level of guests. As this paper is only conceptual, future studies may incorporate empirical data that will be collected from F&B departments in selected hotels in Jordan.

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