

LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER: MAKING THE ORGANISATION TO WORK BETTER

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Abstract : World-class market performance in delivering high quality and cost competitive service is essential for survival in today's business environment. The important part of any service is to understand what the customer wants. The customer expects fair and equal treatment, immediate response to their queries, organisations' commitment towards keeping up the promise, prompt in processing and empathetic personnel. The main purpose of this research will be, therefore, to identify guests' expectations of hotels in Chennai. The research findings of the study will be helpful to the managers to understand the expectation of the guests' and can make necessary improvement in the service.

Keywords: customer expectation, customer satisfaction, Quality

INTRODUCTION

The 'Customer is the king! This is a time-tested and accepted philosophy. It is very difficult to make the 'King' happy. The new age customer is highly demanding. The typical customer is highly qualified, globally exposed, highly social conscious and expects high quality of service. This fact reveals that service quality plays a key role in stimulating one to withstand of business competitiveness. The important part of any service is to understand what the customer wants. The customer expects fair and equal treatment, immediate response to their queries, organisations' commitment towards keeping up the promise, prompt in processing and empathetic personnel. There is evidence that meeting customer expectations leads to customer loyalty, (Alexandris et al 2002, Anderson et al 1994), and enhanced business performance (Aaker and Jacobson 1994). The strategic planning and the application of service quality provide customer satisfaction and retention (Cronin et al. 1992). Customer satisfaction, loyalty, retention, improved economic growth and profit are some of the positive effects of service quality.

To achieve better performance results, the service organisation must first and foremost anticipate and satisfy the customer needs.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Customer satisfaction is one of the important outcomes of marketing activity (Spreng et al, 1996). In the competitive market, customer satisfaction is considered as the essence of success. More recently, researchers started addressing the links between customer satisfaction and performance, emphasizing the way satisfaction affects customers' repeat

purchases (examples of recent contributions include Sulek and Hensley 2004 and Cheng 2005). The research on expectations will help hotel managers to diagnose where performance improvements can best be targeted.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

World-class market performance in delivering high quality and cost competitive service is essential for survival in today's business environment. Managers in the service sector are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that their services are customer-focused and that continuous performance improvement is being delivered. (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), emphasises its strong impact on business performance, lower costs, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty (Gurau, 2003; Newman, 2001; Silvestro and Cross, 2000; Sureshchander *et al.*, 2002, Seth et al 2005). In this context, an attempt has been made to examine the service expectation of hotel guests in Chennai.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this research will be, therefore,

- To identify guests' expectations of service quality regarding five dimensions; reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility of hotels in Chennai.

METHODOLOGY

The study uses both primary and secondary data. Since the objective was focused on primary data, the study relied more on the primary data. Primary data were collected using a pre-tested interview schedule. It consisted of two parts. Part one refers to general information about profile variables of hotel guests'. Part two relates to expectation of guests'.

TOOLS USED FOR ANALYSIS

The chi-square test was used to find the degree of association between the demographic variables. In order to analyse the consistency in expectation among the sample respondents for each service quality dimension ANOVA, independent 't' test, Dunnett C – Post-Hoc

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Hotel industry in India is set to grow at 15 per cent a year. After globalization, hotel industries operating in India are facing a tough time to provide world class standard quality. If they failed to provide such a quality, they will be sidelined from the race. To gain a competitive advantage, hotel managers have to provide their guests with the quality service and meet their expectations. This study focuses on guests' expectation of hotels in Chennai on the basis of SERVQUAL model. The research findings of the study will be helpful to the managers to understand the expectation of the guests and can make necessary improvement in the service.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Hence, the findings and conclusions of the study are valid only for hotels in Chennai. Time and resource constraints

have made the researcher restrict the area of the study to Chennai and the findings and conclusions of this study may not be generalised for other service sectors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Parasuraman, Valarie A Zeithaml, Leonard L Berry (1988) Developed a multiple-item instrument called SERVQUAL for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. J. Joseph Cronin, Jr. & Steven A. Taylor (1992) investigated the conceptualization and measurement of service quality and the relationships between service quality, consumer satisfaction and purchase intentions. Service quality has now become one of the main factors used to gain competitive advantage. The industry must focus more specifically on the expectations of its customers.

FINDINGS

The hypotheses were aimed to identify whether there were difference in guests' expectation of service quality in 4* hotels when classified by demographic characteristics. The demographic factors involved in the study were age, education, occupation and monthly income.

Table 1
Difference in Guests' Expectations of Service Quality When Classified By Demographic Characteristics

Factors	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Tangible
Gender	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Age	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
Monthly	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓

There is difference in guests' expectation of service quality when classified by demographic characteristics

Table 2

Dunnet C–Post-Hoc Analysis of the Source of Significant Differences in guests' expectations of service quality when classified by frequency of the stay by the guests' in the same hotel

<i>Dependent</i>	<i>(I) Number of times</i>	<i>(J) Number of times</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>
Ex_Reliability	1-2 times	3-4 times	-0.09(*)
		5-6 times	-0.10(*)
	3-4 times	1-2 times	0.09(*)
		5-6 times	-0.00
	5-6 times	1-2 times	0.10(*)
		3-4 times	0.00
Ex_Responsibility	1-2 times	3-4 times	0.11(*)
		5-6 times	-0.10
	3-4 times	1-2 times	-0.11(*)
		5-6 times	-0.22(*)
	5-6 times	1-2 times	0.10
		3-4 times	0.22(*)
Ex_Assurance	1-2 times	3-4 times	-0.05
		5-6 times	-0.13
	3-4 times	1-2 times	0.05
		5-6 times	-0.07
	5-6 times	1-2 times	0.13
		3-4 times	0.07
Ex_Empathy	1-2 times	3-4 times	0.01
		5-6 times	0.13(*)
	3-4 times	1-2 times	-0.01
		5-6 times	0.11(*)
	5-6 times	1-2 times	-0.13(*)
		3-4 times	-0.11(*)
Ex_Tangibility	1-2 times	3-4 times	-0.07(*)
		5-6 times	0.04
	3-4 times	1-2 times	0.07(*)
		5-6 times	0.12(*)
	5-6 times	1-2 times	-0.04
		3-4 times	-0.12(*)

* The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Dunnet-C test explores the source of significance of difference in case of dimensions reliability, responsiveness, empathy and tangibility—the significance of difference among

categories was contributed by difference among the three categories. In the rest of the case the difference did not contributed any of the categories.

Hotel Guests' Expectation of service

The primary aim of the present research was to study the hotel guests' expectation of service quality of hotels.

- Among the various attributes of reliability dimension "Perform the service right at the first time", "Maintain error free records" scored high with the mean score at 6.59. The attribute "Service as promised" scored the lowest mean score.
- The attribute "Willing to help customers" scored" received highest mean score of 6.56 and the attribute "Prompt service" received the lowest mean score by the guests' in responsiveness dimension.
- The average mean score of the assurance dimension was 6.53. The attribute in assurance "the staffs' knowledge to answer customer request" scored high with mean score 6.54 which was more than the average score.
- "Hotel should give personal attention to customers" who received the mean score of 6.45. Staff should understand the specific needs of the customers who scored 6.31 as mean score which was less than the mean score in the empathy dimension.
- Five tangibility attributes, "materials associated with the service", "swimming pool" (6.50), "visually appealing physical facilities" (6.46), "modern looking equipments" (6.46) and "Internet facility" (6.37) scored less than the average mean score.
- Hotel guests' expectations of performance of service quality dimensions were really very high. Their expectation in term of reliability was 6.53, the average mean in term of responsiveness was 6.50. The average mean score for assurance was 6.53. The average mean score for empathy was 6.43, and for tangibility 6.52.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- One of the reasons that hotels cannot fulfil the expectations of the Guests' is due to the fact that they do not classify their Guests'. All the guests do not enjoy the same importance for the organization. By considering the age, gender, nationality, primary purpose of stay and other specifications through doing periodical evaluations, the hoteliers should try to meet the expectation of the guests'. Thus if the fulfilments of the expectations of all the guests are impossible, the managers could concentrate on the expectations of the most important segment.
- One of the factors that create the gap between satisfaction and expectation is the lack of standards

of the defined customers. It is recommended that the hotel managers should understand the guest's expectations and standardize relevant services. The hotel managers shall set the proper standards and to support them with enough resources and facilities (worthy and trained staff, proper system and advanced technology).

- Most quality service problems are caused by poor communications. Facilitating communication between different departments is considered another aspect for minimizing the service gaps. Managers should focus more on minimizing the communication obstacles by cooperation with the staff, and by establishing an organizational culture so that all would comply with the service quality rules and standards.

CONCLUSION

Success in any business depends on understanding the key issues that affect customer needs, and also on understanding how well the business meet or exceed customers' needs. On a competitive market, a competitive advantage cannot be obtained without fulfilling the requests of the clients in what concerns the quality of the services. Therefore, the aim of the company is to delighting the customers by exceeding their expectation, not simply satisfy them.

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