Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality Measurement in Star Rated Hotels in Gondar

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Abstract

One of the biggest contemporary challenges of management in service industries is maintaining customer satisfaction. Service quality and customer satisfaction have increasingly been identified as key factors in the battle for competitive differentiation and customer retention. Lam and Zhang (1999) claim that overwhelming customer demand for quality products and service has in recent years become increasingly evident to professionals in the hotel industry. Among all customer demands, service quality has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the success of any business (Grönroos, 1990; Parasuraman etal., 1988).

The purpose of this study is to examine hotel guest comment books (GCBs) and customer satisfaction management schemes in Gondar star rated hotels. This study adopts the applied suitable analysis approach; utilizing comparison and recording of findings based on a set of best practice criteria. The results of this study provide hotel with an assessment of current methods of measuring and managing customer satisfaction and service quality in Gondar star rated hotels in the course of GCBs.

Key words: Hotel, Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality, Guest Comment Books

1. Introduction

During the past few decades, customer satisfaction and service quality have become a major area of attention to practitioners and academic researchers. Both concepts have strong impact on business performance and customer behavior. Service quality leads to higher profitability (Gundersen et al., 1996) and customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1997). Furthermore, a number of empirical studies indicate a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Dimitriades, 2006; Chi and Qu, 2008; Faullant et al., 2008), as well as between customer satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth (Söderlund,1998). Therefore, one of the key strategies for customer-focused firms is to measure and monitor service quality and customer satisfaction.

Several tools are available for measuring customer satisfaction. In hotels, one of the most popular is aguest comment card (GCB). GCBs have the advantages of small size, easy distribution and simplicity. When analyzing data gathered in such a way, managers can get information about the attributes that have an impact on guests' satisfaction. This paper is divided into several sections. First, a brief review of main concepts of interest is provided. Next, the research methodology used for this study is presented, followed by presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, the article concludes with main research findings. Further, authors of studies conducted on quality in the service industries have also expressed concern regarding the quality dimensions in hotels and, in particular, with methods used to measure customer perceptions of hotel service quality (Johnston, 1990).

2. Statement of the Problem

Quality in the service industries have also expressed concern regarding the quality dimensions in hotels and, in particular, with methods used to measure customer perceptions on hotel service quality (Johnston *et al.*, 1990).Satisfaction can be determined by subjective (e. g. customer needs, emotions) and objective factors (e. g. product and service features). Applying to the hospitality industry, there have been numerous studies that examine attributes that travelers may find important regarding customer satisfaction. Atkinson (1988) found out that cleanliness, security, value for money and courtesy of staff determine customer satisfaction. Knutson (1988) revealed that room cleanliness and comfort, convenience of location, prompt service, safety and security, and friendliness of employees are important. Barsky and Labagh (1992) stated that employee attitude, location and rooms are likely to influence travellers' satisfaction. A study conducted by Akan (1995) showed that the main determinants of hotel guest satisfaction are the behavior of employees, cleanliness and timeliness. Choi and Chu (2001) concluded that staff quality, room qualities and value are the top three hotel factors that determine travelers' satisfaction. Providing services those customers prefer is a starting point for providing customer satisfaction. A relatively easy way to determine what services customer prefers is simply to ask them. According to Gilbert and Horsnell (1998), and Su (2004), guest comment books (GCBs) are most commonly used for determining hotel guest satisfaction. GCBs are usually distributed

in hotel rooms, at the reception desk or in some other visible place. However, studies reveal that numerous hotel chains use guest satisfaction evaluating methods based on inadequate practices to make important and complex managerial decisions (Barsky, 1992; Barsky and Huxley, 1992; Jones and Ioannou, 1993, Gilbert and Horsnell, 1998; Su, 2004). The most commonly made faults can be divided into three main areas, namely, quality of the sample, design of the GCBs, and data collection and analysis (Gilbert and Horsnell, 1998).Hence this study is evaluated the function and contribution of Guest Comment Books for the improvement of service quality and customer satisfaction in star rated hotels of Gondar town.

3. Research Question

➢ What are customer satisfaction assessment methods?
➢ What are service quality assessment methods?
➢ How assessment methods function to evaluate customer satisfaction?
➢ How assessment methods function to evaluate service quality?
➢ What are the roles of assessment methods on customer satisfaction?
➢ What are the roles of assessment methods on service quality?

4. Objectives of the study

✓ To identify customer satisfaction assessment methods
✓ To identify service quality assessment methods
✓ To evaluate the function of customer satisfaction assessment methods
✓ To evaluate the function of service quality assessment methods
✓ To determine the role of customer satisfaction assessment methods
✓ To determine the role of service quality assessment methods

5. Literature Review and Conceptual Analysis

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been a popular topic in marketing practice and academic research since Cardozo's (1965) initial study of customer effort, expectations and satisfaction. Despite many attempts to measure and explain customer satisfaction, there still does not appear to be a consensus regarding its definition (Giese and Cote, 2000). Customer satisfaction is typically defined as a post consumption evaluative judgment concerning a specific product or service (Gundersen, Heide and Olsson, 1996). It is the result of an evaluative process that contrasts pre-purchase expectations with perceptions of performance during and after the consumption experience (Oliver, 1980).

The most widely accepted conceptualization of the customer satisfaction concept is the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Barsky, 1992; Oh and Parks, 1997; McQuitty, Finn and Wiley, 2000). The theory was developed by Oliver (1980), who proposed that satisfaction level is a result of the difference between expected and perceived performance. Satisfaction (positive disconfirmation) occurs when product or service is better than expected, On the other hand, a performance worse than expected results with dissatisfaction (negative disconfirmation).Studies show that customer satisfaction may have direct and indirect impact on business results. Anderson et al. (1994), Yeung et al. (2002), and Luo and Homburg (2007) concluded that customer satisfaction positively affects business profitability. The majority of studies have investigated the relationship with customer behavior patterns (Söderlund, 1998; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Dimitriades, 2006; Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Chi and Qu, 2008; Faullant et al., 2008). According to these findings, customer satisfaction increases customer loyalty, influences repurchase intentions and leads to positive word-of-mouth. Given the vital role of customer satisfaction, it is not surprising that a variety of research has been devoted to investigating the determinants of satisfaction (Churchill and Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980; Barsky, 1995; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). In order to improve the validity of hotel guest satisfaction measurement practice, Barsky and Huxley (1992) proposed a new sampling procedure that is a „quality sample". It reduces non response bias by offering incentives for completing the questionnaires. The components of their questionnaire are based on disconfirmation paradigm and expectancy-value theory. In this manner, guests can indicate whether service was above or below their expectations and whether they considered a particular service important or not. Furthermore, Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) developed a list of criteria for GCB content analysis, which is adopted in this study as well. Discusses the issues of question clarity, scaling, validity, survey timing, and question order and sample size (Schall, 2003)

Service quality

The concept of service quality has been the subject of many research studies in variety of service industries; even the research attention towards hospitality industry has been growing. This concept has been the subject of many conceptual and empirical studies, and it is generally accepted that quality has positive implications for an organization's performance and competitive position. However, despite the vast amount of research done in the area of service quality, quality related issues have received little research attention within the hospitality context (Harrington and Akehurst, 1996). Customer satisfaction has also been a subject of great interest to organizations and researchers alike. The principal objective of organizations is to maximize profits and to minimize cost. Profit maximization can be achieved through increase in sales with lesser costs. One of the factors that can help to increase sales is customer satisfaction, because satisfaction leads to customer loyalty recommendation and repeat purchase. (Wilson et al, 2008)

Service quality is a complex, elusive, subjective and abstract concept. It means different things to different people. The most common definition of service quality is the comparison customers make between their expectations and perceptions of the received service (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Grönroos, 1982). Quality is a multi-dimensional concept. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) defined three dimensions of service quality, namely, physical quality, interactive quality and corporate quality. Similarly, Grönroos (1984) argued that service quality comprises of technical quality, functional quality and corporate image.

On the other hand, Parasuraman et al. (1985; 1988) developed the SERVQUAL scale, which became the most popular instrument for measuring service quality. They identified five key dimensions of service quality – reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The results are used to identify positive and negative gaps. The gap is measured by the difference between perceptions and expectations scores and indicates the level of service quality. If the result is positive, perceived service exceeds expected service. A negative result means low quality of service. According to this instrument, service quality occurs when perceived service meets or exceeds customer's expectations.

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The SERVQUAL instrument has been widely applied in a variety of service industries, including tourism and hospitality. Research related to this sector can be divided into measuring service quality in historic houses (Frochot and Hughes, 2000), hotels (Douglas and Connor, 2003; Antony et al., 2004; Juwaheer, 2004;Marković, 2004; Nadiri and Hussain, 2005; Olorunniwo et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2007), restaurants (Heung etal., 2000; Fu and Parks, 2001; Namkung and Jang, 2008), travel agencies (Atilgan et al., 2003; Martinez Caroand Martinez Garcia, 2008), diving (O'Neill et al., 2000), health spas (Snoj and Mumel, 2002; Marković et al.,2004; González et al., 2007), ecotourism (Khan, 2003), theme parks (O'Neill and Palmer, 2003), tourism and hospitality higher education (Marković, 2005; Marković, 2006). The instrument was used to measure hotel employee quality as well (Yoo and Park, 2007).

It should be noted that service quality and customer satisfaction are distinct concepts, although they are closely related. According to some authors, satisfaction represents an antecedent of service quality (Carman,1990; Bolton and Drew, 1991). In this sense, satisfactory experience may affect customer attitude and his or her assessment of perceived service quality. Thus, satisfaction with a specific transaction may result with positive global assessment of service quality. Other authors argue that service quality is antecedent of customer satisfaction (Churchill and Suprenant, 1982; Anderson et al., 1994; Oliver, 1997; Oh, 1999; Zeithaml andBitner, 2003; Jamali, 2007). This group of authors suggests that service quality is a cognitive evaluation, which may lead to satisfaction. Hence, customer satisfaction is the result of service quality. To sum up, the relationship between quality and satisfaction is complex. Some authors have described it as Siamese twins (Danaher and Mattsson, 1994; Jamali, 2007). Although there still remain a lot of unresolved questions, it can be concluded that service quality and customer satisfaction can be perceived as separate concepts that have causal ordering.

6. Methodology

1.1. Research Design

The purpose of this study is to examine hotel guest comment books (GCBs) and customer satisfaction management schemes in star rated hotels of Gondar. According to the nature of study explanatory most suitable research design is allowed descriptive by its nature, because of its high degree of representativeness and the ease in which a researcher is to obtain the participants' opinion (Polit& Beck 2004).

This study created and adopts a Guest Comment Books (GCB) checklist with 3 categories. These categories, used to analyze the content of hotel GCBs, fall under five general areas of analysis: (1) Function of GCBs as service quality improvement (2) As a technique to measure the overall customer satisfaction (3) As a method for Marketing measures.

1.2.   Population, and Sampling

The researcher has selected the samples through non-probability sampling method, specifically through convenience sampling technique. Sample has been determined from the total population, based on last 5 year average arrivals to Gondar town is 12,289international tourists and approximate of 28,590 local tourists, with the total of which is, as per Amhara National Regional State Culture Tourism &Park Development office, 2015.

$$n=\frac{N.}{1+N (e^2)}$$

n = is sample size,

N = population size &

e = acceptable sampling error (5%)*(Israel, Glenn D. 1992)*

According to the applied technique, from total of 40,875 of total population 396 sample size is determined Thus, Out of 7 star rated hotels in Gondar, 5 (71.4%) properly they use GCB for measuring hotel guests' satisfaction, while 3 of them (28.5%) they do not use GCB. However from those applying GCBs only 3 hotels in Gondar can the distribute GCBs in the guest room or near for each floors, 2 of them are allow the GCBs in front desk or lobby area only. Since the hotels are using GCBs in different ways, for assuring the efficient output of the research and through considering data saturation technique all star rated hotels with GCBs are involved in the research.

7. Analysis and Results

First, results of personal interviews with hotel managers are presented. Frequency of gathering information: All hotels in a sample that gathering information through GCBs to measure guests satisfaction and service quality. GCBs are placed in every taken room lobby area. Ways of gathering information: In all 5analyzed hotels, information is gathered using GCBs. 71.4% of

Interviewees answered that they gather information via complaints and praise as well. Personal contact with guests is used in hotels. Almost 38% of hotel managers revealed that they receive information on hotel services from guests' through letters, comments on the hotel's web sites, or internal comments made by the hotel's employees.

Response rate: According to the occupancy rate of the hotels the number of comment writing on GCB is low. Thus the majority of the hotels the number of completed GCBs is estimated to be up to 30%, while only one hotel response rate or number of comment is higher than 50%.

Sampling methods: In 5 of hotels, GCBs are distributed to the guests. 3 hotels are allowed for the direct assessment, and from 2 hotels respondents are selected randomly.

Summary of GCBs dispersal and analysis in the Hotels

GCBs Distribution Through	GCBs Distribution Rate		GCBs analyzed for further Management Decision		Analyzed By	Frequency	Percentage
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage			
Housekeeping Department	79	20%	28	35%	General Managers	226	57%
Front Office Department	317	80%	73	23%	Marketing Department	170	43%

Process of GCBs dispersal: according to the check-in data 20% of hotels from the sample, GCBs are distributed by the housekeeping department staff and, in 80% of hotels from the sample; GCBs are distributed via the front office department. Only 35% of collected GCBs are properly analyzed which are collected through housekeeping department, and 23% of collected GCBs are analyzed which are collected through front office department, thus generally the Completed 43% of GCBs are analyzed in the marketing department. 57% of GCBs are analyzed by the general managers.

Staff: In all hotels in the sample (5), hotel staff with direct contact of the guests and the process of measuring hotel guests satisfaction. Regarding the way GCBs are distributed, it is believed, that hotel employees do not need additional training in order to motivate their guests to complete GCBs. In accordance, employees are not rewarded for motivating guests. However, staff motivation was recommended by Gilbert and Horsnell (1998).

Results presentation to management: 42% of the interviewed hotel managers claim that they receive an analysis report once a month. In the case of a complaint received, management takes appropriate measures to fix the problem (apology, repair, etc.).

Methodology of GCB design: In all hotels in the sample, GCBs are designed according to the managers 'personal experience. Two hotel managers indicated that they adopted some questions from the practice of other hotels. Timing the survey: In all 5analyzed hotels, GCBs are distributed to hotel guests during their stay.

GCBs accessibility: In 60% of hotels, GCBs can be found in a folder on a room table. In two hotels analyzed are GCBs accessible at the reception desk. One of the possible reasons for low response rates could be that the GCBs are not placed invisible places, considering that in the majority of hotels they are hidden in a folder.

Reasons for not conducting GCB surveys: As it was indicated earlier, out of 7 hotels in the sample, in 28.5% of them GCBs are not used for measuring guests' satisfaction. Reasons for this are the following: guests ignore the questionnaire, hotels do not want to disturb guests with the GCB, hotels are considering the GCB practice, or are just not interested in it. Following the best practice criteria for assessing GCB, the content analysis was conducted. The results are presented next.

Standardized GCBs in the hotels: Out of 5 hotels in the sample, 80% of hotels they use simple agenda documentation books, only one hotel uses its own brand published GCB with few guide information of the hotels.

Customer motivation to fill GCB:40 % of the hotels they could motivate there VIP guests to write their stay and satisfaction in the hotel, 60% they didn't do any further action to motivate their customers to write their comments on GCBs, this shows the contribution of GCB for service quality in Gondar is not functional

A space for open comments: All of the GCBs in the sample met these criteria. In GCBs, the provided enough space for the comments; the availability and visibility of the comments for all customers in some extent the customers has been biased by the previous comments and it affects the quality of information.

Summary of Data Analysis on customer response categories on GCBs

Resolution	Frequency	Percentage	Areas of Resolution	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfaction	*115*	*29%*	*Staffs performance*	*32*	*28%*
			Quality of foods	*23*	*20%*
			General comment	*60*	*52%*
Dissatisfaction	*281*	*71%*	*Service quality*	*107*	*38%*
			Performance staffs	*79*	*28%*
			Test and quality of foods	*56*	*20%*
			Accessibility and function of the Facilities inside the hotel	*39*	*14%*

A direct or indirect measure of overall satisfaction: out of the total sample, only29% of GCBs are filled with good satisfaction indicator comments, among this segment 28% of customers are explained their satisfaction is directly linked with front line staffs performance; 20% of them are related with the quality of foods provided in the hotel, 52% of the comments are just general and some of them are touch different aspects of the hotels with the town so it's difficult to distinguish in different categories but the comments are just good for the hotels.

A direct or indirect measure of overall satisfaction: from the entire sample 71% of the statements are related with complain; while under this segment 38% of the data shows service *quality related complains are provided by the customers;*28% of customers are explained their complain linked with the performance staffs, specially service timing, lack of enthusiasm and attention toward the customers can affect their satisfaction;20 % of them are related with lack of test and quality of foods provided in the hotel, 14% of the customers' comments are focus on the problems related with the accessibility and function of the facilities inside the hotels.

Marketing measures: In addition to measure guest satisfaction, GCBs provide an opportunity to obtain information about the guest for marketing purposes. GCBs relating to guest demographics are included in all GCBs in the sample. The most frequently provided comment by the customers (23% of GCBs) are identified with purpose of visit, marketing channels, room number and contact (address, e-mail). In 77% of GCBs, comments are accommodated only with the name and signature of the comments.

Function of GCBs as service quality improvement

Based on the collected data from the hotels in Gondar, (20%) or only one hotel is review and made few step of processes for improving the service quality of the hotel through GCBs per six or three months regularly, the remaining 80%(4) hotels are not able to review the GCBs regularly; based on the analysis the function of the GCBs in Gondar hotels is not significantly used to improve the quality of service and different aspects of the hotels

Assessment some of the main attributes of hotel services through GCBs: Analysis has indicated that all GCBs include the assessment of hotel room (cleanliness, comfort, amenities in the room) and restaurant (quality and variety of food). In 86% of GCBs, guests can assess sports and leisure facilities (e. g. wellness, swimming pool, animation, entertainment). The reception department can be assessed in 71% of GCBs. Questions on staff friendliness and efficiency are included in 43% of GCBs, as well as assessment of room service.

8. Conclusion

This study can be of great use to hotel managers in providing a direction on how to conduct and modify the existing practice of measuring customer satisfaction in hotels. The primary objective of GCBs is to understand guests' needs, gather their opinions and comments, most its significant, to assess guests' satisfaction with services provided. Although in 71.4% of analyzed hotels, GCBs are recognized as an

important tool for measuring guest satisfaction, results indicate that in most hotels measurement practice should be improved.

Findings indicate that in most hotels GCBs can be found in a folder on lobby areas and few of them are placed near to the guest room. Guests can fill GCBs during their stay at the hotel. Filling GCBs rates are very low and no incentives are provided. In conclusion, this study combines an analysis of customer satisfaction management schemes on star rated hotels of Gondar town. Thus 71% of the statements are related with complain; only 29% of GCBs are filled with good satisfaction indicator comments, GCBs are designed according to managers' personal experience, and managers usually processes the analysis reports once per six or three months in one hotel only and the remaining 80%(4) hotels are not able to review the GCBs regularly. According to the study the function of GCBs in Gondar hotels is not significantly used to improve the customer satisfaction and the quality of service in the hotels.

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