Assessment of International Tourists Perceived Service Quality in Tourist Standard Hotels' Service; In Case of Gondar Town

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Abstract

The objective of this paper was assessing service quality and tourists' perception in tourists' standard hotel in Gondar town, one of the best tourist destinations in Amhara National Regional State & in Ethiopia, where Gondar castle is available. SERVQUAL model with five dimensions were used in developing the hypothesis which was tested based on the data collected. Explanatory research design has been utilized to explain the relationship between tourists' standard, hotels' service quality &international tourists' perception. Primary & secondary data were collected from international tourists, hotel managers &different articles. From the unknown number of tourists who arrived in Gondar, based on Cochran sampling determination technique, eighty five international tourists two hotel managers were taken as a sample. The data collected from the samples were analyzed through descriptive statistical measure& the relationship between service qualities dimensions were analyzed through correlation analysis& regression. The results of the study revealed that tourist perceive the quality of hotels service primarily based on the tangibles. In this dimension, almost all hotels in Gondar lack facilities for children's, aged tourists & tourists with disabilities. Limited availability of room amenities, lack of unique features and overall aesthetic qualities, no sufficient conference hall& modern facilities, lack of technological facilities and augmented services, unavailability of sufficient parking space, unavailability of recreational centers, lack of cultural personal's grooming, unsatisfactory proficiency in communication skills& inadequacy of training are found to be the basic factors that determine the level of tourists perception & service quality.

Key words: -Tourist hotels, service quality & perception

I. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Now a day, in the global market, service marketing concepts and strategies are developing rapidly, in response to the tremendous growth the service industries resulting in their increased importance to the world economy (Abbey, 2003).One of the service sectors which play a great role in economic development of nations is a hotel business. The hotel industry has a long colorful history beginning with inns, and lodges, and growing into the hospitality industry. An incredible change in the industry of tourism in the world brought many changes in the field of hotel business. This means, the expansion and development of travel has contributed a lot for the development of hotel industry (Michael & Richard, 2001).

Since 1990, international arrivals have increased by 4.3 % annually and the UNWTO expects them to rise by 4 per cent per annum over the next 20 years. Today's tourism represents 5% of the world GDP, contributes 6%-7% of employment and it ranks 4th after fuels, chemicals and automotive products in global exports with industry value of US$1trillion a year that accounts for 30% of the world's exports of commercial services and even it added the rate of hospitality investment (UNWTO, 2014).

In Ethiopia the hotel industry has comparatively long history. In which Ethiopia is also sharing the pie with the growing demands for the service sector. The growing sector of tourism which is highly attracting foreigners from different countries across the world & the fact that Gondar is the home for historical heritages in Ethiopia, hotel service is one of the industries practiced by hoteliers. In today's business world hospitality industry is becoming amazing and highly competitive career field. Hotel and restaurant careers are offering potential for personal and professional growth and success, but it highly depends on learning and applying certain marketing principles in nature to the field (Kotler& Armstrong, 2004).With the fact that marketing is one of the most significant functions in any service providing industry, meeting the global standards & customer expectation is very essential part of the business (Joel R.Evans& Barry Berman, 1987).Among the service providing firms in Gondar, which is the best tourist's destinations, hotels plays a great role in accommodating tourists who comes to visit the destinations. Hotel is an establishment whose primary business is providing lodging facilities for the

general public and which furnishes one or more of the following services; food and beverage service, room attendants service, laundry or dry cleaning and use of furniture's and fixtures (Kasavana and Brooks, 2001).

Hotels basically have room service, recreational centers &conference centers. Some of the characteristics of employees that play a significant role in providing a quality service: well-groomed appearances, congenial nature, works well with guests and hotel staff; a team player (Abbey, 2003).

As a result, to have a successful food and beverage operation, the five E's should be encompassed: excellent environment: excellent service, excellent food & beverage products, excellent value, &excellent management control.

Currently, there are more than 17 tourist standard hotels providing tourist standard hotels in Gondar which ranges from Kino, The Ruth, Jantekel, Florida hotel; south of Gondar; almost 7 kilometers from airport to Quara, L Shape, Goha, Landmark, Taye Belay& AG Hotel; in northern & western part of Gondar. There are also morethan three lodges; Four sisters, Fasil &Dechatu lodges are some of them located in the eastern part of Gondar.

These hotels service are evaluated based on different service quality dimensions. For this paper, Servqual model, developed by Parasuraman Berry &Zeithaml and Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985; 1988) which are tangibles; reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy is used. Brysland and Curry (2001) found out in a study at a catering company, that organizations canat least assess five dimensions of service quality to ascertain the level of services provided, and determine which dimensions need improvement.

Thus this paper identified the quality of the service provided in those hotels compared to tourists' perception based on the SERVQUAL model.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Service quality and perception is an important concept in hotel industry. Also, the ability to market a given service will help the business to sustain with in the highly competitive environment and also customers of service have more problems in observing and evaluating services than goods. Even when providers of services in the hotel are willing and able to provide more market transparency where the details of services marketing are clear, comparable and available to all interested parties.

Currently hotels are the most recognizable elements among all other in the accommodation sector. The hotel industry has bright visions for the growth of travel and tourism industry. It has important aspects of a country's infrastructure as well as it provides the largest total employment in global terms (Cooper, 2005).Even though, the inbound tourist arrivals in Ethiopia continued to grow from 76,844 in 1989, to 184,078 in 2004, and reaching 523,438 in 2011, The GTP's target on the number of inbound tourist arrivals by the end of 2014/15 was set at 1 million (Ethiopia Minister of Culture and Tourism, 2012). Further the Ethiopian Investment Commission provides fiscal incentives such as exemption of customs duty, and exemption of income tax for Star designated hotel and resort, motel, lodges and restaurant investments (EIC, 2015).

Though that is the case, there are different factors that affect the quality of hotel services& customers perception. Image, encounter, price & evidence of the service are the basic once, which is developed by Zeithaml and Bitner in 1996. On the other hand, customers evaluate hotel services quality based on service quality dimensions. In each of the dimensions, lot of items are identified & based on those items customers perceive certain level of quality. Hoteliers need to analyze these dimensions; items in each dimensions since four gaps have been identified by Zeithaml and Bitner which are Gap 1- not knowing what customers expect; Gap 2- not selecting the right service design and standard, Gap 3- not delivering to service standard, Gap 4- not matching performance to promise (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).At the same time, Clow and Kurtz have identified customers' expectations as *Ideal service level, desired service level, adequate service level&Predicted Service level*. At each level, the customers' evaluate the quality of the service. Since service quality plays a significant role in purchasing decisions for most consumers; it is crucial for marketing success. It is more difficult for the consumers to evaluate service than the quality of a good. Service quality is based on consumer's perception of the outcome of the service and their evaluation of the process by the service was performed. Improving customer service quality involves making a commitment to learning what customers' needs and wants are, and developing action plans that implement customer friendly processes. Thus conducting this

study is rational to describe the current level of tourist standard hotels quality in Gondar based on service quality dimensions.

1.3 Objectives of the study

✓ To analyze the relationship between tangibility &tourists' perceived hotel service quality.
✓ To analyze the relationship between reliability &tourists' perceived hotel service quality.
✓ To describe the relationship between responsiveness &tourists' perceived hotel service quality.
✓ To analyze the relationship between assurance &tourists' perceived hotel service quality.
✓ To identify the relationship between empathy &tourists' perceived hotel service quality.
✓ To identify the relationship among hotel service quality dimensions.

II. Literature Review

A service is an activity which has some element of intangibility associated with it. It involves some interaction with customers or property in their possession, and does not result in a transfer of ownership. A change of condition may occur and provision of the service may or may not be closely associated with a physical product (McDonald & Payne, 2003).According to Lovelock and Wirtz, a service is an economic activity that creates value and provides benefits for customers at specific times and places by bringing about a desired change in, or on behalf of the recipient of the service.

The service quality from the customer's perspective means how well the service meets or exceeds expectations. Because of the customer-oriented market, service quality is generally defined from the customer's perspective, which is usually termed as perceived service quality (Fisk, Grove & John 2004).Fisk et al (2004) define service quality from the service provider's perspective as the degree to which the service's features comply with the organization's specifications and requirements; from the customer's perspective this implies whether the service meets or exceeds his or her expectations. Service quality has been defined as the degree and direction between customer service expectations and perceptions (Newman, 2001). Perceived service quality is defined as the evaluation of the service across the episodes when compared to some explicit or implicit standard (Storbacka K, Strandvik T, & Grönroos 1994). Further, it can be seen as how well a service satisfies the expectations of customers (Bouman&Van der Wiele, 1992).

The goal of quality is to consistently meet or exceed customer expectations by providing products and services at a price that creates value for customers and profits for the company. A company: Must have a good marketing research program; must hire service oriented employees, must have leaders at the top who are totally committed to quality service; to maintain service quality (Woods & King, 2002).

Perceptions are defined in various ways. Strydom, Jooste& Cant (2000) define customer perception as the process of receiving, organizing and assigning meaning to information or stimuli detected by the customer's five senses and opine that it gives meaning to the world that surrounds the customer. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) describe customer perceptions as the subjective assessments of actual service received or experienced and whether they are satisfied with the quality of the service. Perception is always considered relative to expectation. Customers' perception equals to how customers perceive the service. Zeithaml*etal.,* (2006) stated that customers perceive services in terms of quality of the service and how they satisfied the overall with their experiences.

2.1 Hotel service

The idea of accommodation emerged long time ago when people travel around on animals in search of water, food, or trade. Therefore, the origin of lodging emerged when travelers were looking for shelters to keep their animals and to rest their bodies. The first accommodation provided for travelers was just a mere roof to stay under. Consequently, this industry has been developing because of the extensive human needs for travelling. Therefore, this necessitates providing them with comfortable rooms and food. The statistics of UNWTO (2014) pointed out that the global hotel industry comprises about 14.6 million rooms. One of the most important characteristics of the hotel industry is the leading role of human factor in service process. It cannot be accomplished without the participation of customer and without the participation of the staff (Gronoos, 1990, Parasuraman et al., 1988).

2.2 Factors influencing customer's service perceptions

Perceived service quality: refers to the customer's evaluation of an organization's service based on his or her overall experience of the continuous service encounter (Woodruffe 1995, Fisk et al 2008).According

to Zeithaml and Bitner (1996), four factors that influence customers' service perceptions are image, price, and service encounters(moments of truth) and the evidence of service. Customer perceptions can be affected by the image or reputation of the organization. Keller (1993) defines organizational image as "perceptions of an organization reflected in the associations held in customer memory." This positive image serves as a buffer against incidents of poor service (Zeithaml&Bitner 1996).The price of service can also influence customer perceptions. If the price is higher than average price, customers are likely to expect higher quality than others; if price is too low, customers may doubt the ability of organization to deliver the service appropriately. For both situations, the higher or lower expectations will greatly influence customer perceptions of service.

Service encounter refers to the interaction between the customer and the service provider during a period of time. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (1996), when customers have service transactions with a service organization, they can judge the quality of service provided by this organization, through evaluating the concrete service encounters. Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) mention three types of service encounters that can be managed by a service organization to have interactions with customers, namely remote encounters, phone encounters and face-to-face encounters. The last factor of influencing customer perceptions of service is regarded as the evidence of service. Because services are intangible, customers not only rely on price to evaluate service quality, but also seek for evidence of service in every interaction they have with an organization to build an impression of service perceptions. Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996 discover three elements of evidence experienced by the customer: people, process and physical evidence.

2.3 Expectations of Service

Customer expectations are beliefs that a consumer has about the performance of a service delivery that function as standards or reference against which service performance is judged (Clow and Kurtz, 2003). Knowing what the customer expects is the first and possible most critical step in delivering quality service. Being wrong about what customers want can mean losing a customer's business to a competitor.

According to Clow and Kurtz the customers' expectations has *Ideal service level, Desired service level, Adequate service level, Predicted Service level.*

Customer's expectation of a given service depends on the following factors: Explicit service promises: Implicit service promises Word of mouth: Past Experience (Zeitham and Bitner, 2003).

The gaps model of service quality brings customer focus and service excellence together in a structured practical way. The model focuses on strategies and process that the firm can employ to drive service excellence while maintaining a focus on customer.

According to Zeithaml and Bitner, customer gap is the difference between customer expectation and perception. Expectations are the reference point's customers have coming into a service experience; perception reflect the service as actually received.

Gap between consumer expectation and management perception, Gap between management perception and service, Gap between service quality specification and service delivery, Gap between service delivery and external communication consumer expectation, Gap between perceived service and expected service. This factor occurs when the consumers misperceive the service quality (Kottler, 2000)&(Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).Service quality must first close the customer gap that is between customer perception and expectation.

III. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researcher has used an explanatory research design. International tourists who use the service of tourist standard hotels are the population of the study. 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 international tourist arrivals to the town of Gondar, which is 12,289, as per Amhara National Regional State Culture Tourism &Park Development office, 2015.

Cochran (1963) sample size determination technique, the sample size is 99

n= __N__   were n is sample size, N is total population & e is error term (10%)

   $1+N(e)^2$

3.2 Source of data & data collection instrument

Primary data were collected using questionnaires, interview and observation; on the other hand, secondary data was collected from publications, books, internet, and the region's raw data.

3.3. Method of data analysis

A descriptive data analysis method was employed& correlation & regression analysis has been used to analyze the relationship between service quality & service quality dimensions, as well as the relations ships among service quality dimension.

3.4 Data Analysis & Presentation

The analysis is done through SPSS Version 20, only 55 questionnaires have found usable for this part.

Table 1: Means of information about the hotel

Means	Frequency	Percentage
Trip advisor	17	20%
Tour & travel agencies	40	47%
Friends recommendation (Word of Mouth)	20	23.6%
Social media	7	8.2%
Others	1	1.2%
Total	85	100%

Source: Survey 2017

As per the above table, majority (47%) of international tourists obtained information mainly from their tour & travel agents. Tour operators & travel agents have contacted them from airport & lead them to a hotel that they use the service. Trip advisors have been used by 20% of the tourists as a source of information about their hotels. On the other hand, 23.5% of tourists got information from friends' recommendations, those who have hotels service experience in Gondar. Social media has been found to be insignificant source of information about the hotel & its service. As per the interview held with hotel managers, the have said that they are using their web pages to promote their service & but not engaged with social medias.

IV.   Hotel Service Quality Dimensions Analysis

The Mean scores have been computed for all the service quality dimensions. Respondents were asked to rate their perception on a five-point likert scale ranging from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree for service quality dimensions.

Table 3: Mean of Service Quality Dimensions

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Dev
Tangibles	2.7300	.675
Reliability	2.7954	.541
Responsiveness	3.7395	.938
Empathy	2.6321	.838
Assurance	2.9504	.713
Overall Service Quality	2.9695	.741
Valid N = 55		

  Source: Survey 2017

In the above table, the mean scores of tourist's perceived service quality of tourist standard hotels for all dimensions is from 2.6321 to 3.7395 indicating that tourists feel that quality of service being offered by tourist standard hotels is quite average. The total mean, 2.9695 describes the hotel service quality as in the moderate/average level, as per PoonlarBtawee, Mean scores 4.51-5.00 excellent or very good, 3.51-4.50 good, 2.51-3.50 average or moderate, 1.51-2.50 fair and 1.00-1.50 is poor (Poonlar Btawee:1987).

Correlation Analysis between service quality dimensions and tourists perceived service quality

The relationship between service quality dimensions and service quality and the correlation among service quality dimensions are presented below.

Table 4: Correlation analysis among service quality dimensions (Pearson Correlation)

	Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Empathy	Assurance	Perceived Service Quality
Tangibles	1	.587**	.489**	.500**	.456**	.556**
Reliability	.587**	1	.602**	.619**	.517**	.485**
Responsiveness	.489**	.602**	1	.672**	.614**	.496**
Empathy	.500**	.619**	.672**	1	.656**	.459**
Assurance	.456**	.517**	.614**	.656**	1	.435**
Perceived Service Quality	.556**	.485**	.496**	.459**	.435**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The abovetable presents you the magnitude of the relationship between service quality dimensions with perceived service quality, ranges from.435; between assurance and tourists perceived service quality&.556, tangibility.

Regression Analysis

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.776a	.602	.599	.74145

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy &Assurance
Source: Survey 2017

The result indicated that correlation of the independent variables with the dependent variable, 0.776 in which 60.2% of the variance in tourists' perception of hotel's service quality was explained & influenced by these variables.

Table 6: Results of Regression Coefficient.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.204	.152		.947	.005
	Tangibles	.197	.039	.214	4.991	.000
	Reliability	.185	.051	.180	3.636	.000
	Responsiveness	.187	.043	.182	4.341	.000
	Empathy	.159	.047	.162	3.421	.001
	Assurance	.097	.043	.092	2.253	.025

a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Service Quality **Source**: Survey 2017

The results indicate the positive and statistically significant relationship of these variables with perceived service quality.

The regression analysis highlighted the priority areas of service improvement and revealed that not all the dimensions contribute equally to the tourists' perceptions of service quality in tourists' standard hotels. The study indicated that among the various service quality dimensions, tangibility has the largest β value of 0.214 followed by responsiveness with 0.182 beta value.

Tangible elements of tourist's standard hotels are the most significant attributes of tourists' standard hotels in Gondar. Tourists' perception of tourist's standard hotels tangibles strongly influences their perception of quality service and this in turn influences their satisfaction level.

Therefore, superior performance on the most important dimension, tangibility may be helpful in providing enhanced quality of tourist standard hotels' service while the performance on less important dimension; assurance may not significantly affect tourists' perceptions of service quality in Gondar.

➢ **Analysis of Hotel manager's feedback**

The analysis presented here under is taken from the responses of the selected two hotel managers.

As per the managers 'response, room service& food & beverage, are the basic services offered by their hotels. They have been trying read customers' expectations and needs to deliver high service quality according to their request& expectation.

In relation hotels staff, their sociability, politeness, sense of responsibility cooperation were among the characters taken as a positive side, on the other has, lack of communication skill was the main challenges that hotel are facing, as per the hotel's managers response. They have been equipping them with clean & ironed uniform, polished and proper shoe. They have also added that, even if it's not adequate, they have been working with University of Gondar, specifically with department of Hotel Management in delivering training for front office managers, what they should do while serving international tourists with higher expectation of hotel service quality.

In addition to that, they were confident enough about the employees in handling tourist's situations.

➢ **Result of the study**

1.   The biggest gap between expectations and perceptions of tourists were related to 'physical facilities', 'staff skills and performance' and 'price and value'. Reception, housekeeping, food and beverages, are also important in determining tourists perceived service quality. Not all aspects of a hotel operation were equally important to the tourists. Tourists' satisfaction with tangibles was found to be the most significant factor that determined tourists' evaluation of quality of service. There is high level of customer satisfaction in terms of the food delivery; local variety and the overall performance of the employees in handling customers. Almost all hotels have a limitation of access for disable tourists.
2.   Hotel amenities which are delivered for tourist were having some problems. Assortment, delivery time, neatness, sleep quality, are the basic challenges mentioned by tourists. Each of them contributed their own part for overall quality of hotel service.
3.   Sociability, politeness, cooperativeness and facial expression of the hotel staff found to be essential in tourists' satisfaction& it's available in almost all tourist standard hotels in Gondar.
4.   The language usage and most of the communication capability of the employees are not satisfactory.

V.   Recommendation

➢ In the hotels service, what is mostly delivered is pure service and this makes it difficult to say that there is no problem in delivering it.
➢ Based on each service quality dimension, the following points have been forwarded to hotel managers.
➢ Satisfying tourists who come from industrial nation different cultural backgrounds and having different psychological expectation is a great challenge in hotel business, especially in regional cities of Ethiopia, but it can be minimized through the use of domestic physical facilities, traditional ways of service delivery, & local foods & beverage& other amnesties, since international tourist have seen lots of modern facilities in premium hotels. Thus hotel managers should equip their hotels with those items.

➢ In relation to the basic hotel service, almost all tourist standard hotel deliver traditional dishes, beverage, rooms, which are some of the tangibles elements but as per the collected data, they lack the recreational centers, neatness of the tangibles; the parking space of the hotels is limited for the tour operators & travel agents who provide a city tour for tourists thus hotel managers should work on it.

➢ As per the hotel managers' response, most of the employees are not always satisfied with their jobs, poor monthly salary is taken as a fundamental reason. How could dissatisfied employees satisfy its customers? Hoteliers should ask this question themselves & should increase the salary of hotel staff so that they can reduce layoffs, &increase job satisfaction that intern help their hotel through warm welcome to tourists, readiness to serve the tourists. They have also mentioned that there is lack of skilled man power in hotel industry, specifically front office manager & general hotel managers which is considered as a hub or the nerve center of the hotel. To communicate with the guest, to handle the guest's complains; and providing all the information that the guests needs about the hotel, the city, other hotels in the city, or any other information that the guest needs, hotel staff should have the technical skills &knowledge. Obviously a skilled and professional receptionist makes the guest feels welcomed and gives him/her a charming first impression, provides a sense of comfort to guests by making them feel at home. Thus hoteliers should search for skilled & experienced staffs that have a strong relationship with hotel service quality. Training, collaborating with hotel stake holders &increasing the Gondar Hotel Association's position is recommended for the hoteliers. Communication barriers between hotel staff and tourists were other challenges that affect hotel service quality.

➢ Finally hoteliers should assume all tourists' expectations of safe & secure accommodation, neat room, comfortable& well maintained facilities and equipment's.

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