Exploring guests' perception of service quality in selected budget hotels in Tacloban city, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Customers' thoughts, views, and sentiments in their contacts with the company shape their perception of the brand, which is why it is also essential to fostering customer loyalty and retention. The goal of this study was to determine how consumers in Tacloban City's budget hotel rated the SERVQUAL characteristics of service quality. A 5-point Likert scale survey questionnaire was given to respondents from budget hotels as part of the convenience sample strategy utilized in this study. Spearman Rho correlation was used to assess the significance of the relationships between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and perceived service quality as well as between perceived service quality and visitors' behavioral intentions in Tacloban City. According to the survey, reliability and empathy were crucial components of service excellence. Age is strongly and adversely correlated with reliability (r = -0.187), indicating that older guests are less likely to be satisfied with the hotels they stay at. Additionally, empathy is strongly and favorably related to hotel stays (r = 0.186), suggesting that clients consider empathy while selecting a hotel to stay at. However, despite the fact that the sex, age, length of stay, and purpose of the customers' stays were not substantially correlated with the service quality dimension, these factors still need to be taken into consideration.

Keywords: Guest perception, budget hotel, service quality, perceived service quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

To be successful in any tourism or hospitality business an organization must have good service and prioritizing it will be the first step to improving its service quality as it is necessary to deliver par excellence service quality when most hotels have identical physical amenities (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006). The hospitality industry's existence relies on providing superior service that meets the needs & wants of customers, which is why it is important for the establishment to adapt to the ever-diverse hospitality customers. Leisure sector operators must look beyond traditional marketing techniques to grow their share of consumer spending, establish customer loyalty, and assure client retention and acquisition (AlBattat, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction of Budget Hotel: A Case Study of De Palma Hotel Shah Alam, Malaysia, 2016). As the world gets modernized, the business also evolves as newcomers to the business are already setting new service standards.

Service quality is regarded as an important fundamental idea and a key success component in the hospitality business as it provides a great opportunity to have a greater advantage in the competitive marketplace and lastly, it is considered the hotel's lifeblood (Nobar, 2018). The hospitality industry is the place where customers pay more attention to the service they receive as they count it a memorable experience that would equate to the money they spend (Briggs, 2007). Managers have to understand how customers perceive the establishment's service quality (Hult, 2017) and have customer feedback surveys to have information and insights in improving customer experience.

Satisfaction of customers and quality of service are seen as critical business factors since they have a significant impact on how effectively an establishment retains its customers. Customer satisfaction is considered to be a result of strong service quality, which will promote customer loyalty and retention (Zygiaris, Hameed, Ayidh, & Rehman, Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in the Post Pandemic World: A Study of Saudi Auto Care Industry, 2022) and according to Rabo & Ang (2018) programs focused on the achievement of cost, and efficiency will ultimately achieve better performance that is why companies must understand customer satisfaction to streamline their operations.

Likewise, Niepewna, (2023) pointed out that customer feedback is information that customers provide about their interactions with a company generally and their level of satisfaction with particular products or services. Wellington (2022) said that it is possible to find nuggets that make it easier to change and enhance the customer experience through time, in both the good and the bad. In other words, getting feedback can help you keep your community at the forefront of all commercial deals you make. The problem in the lodging industry is that sometimes the quality of service cannot be fully appreciated until something goes wrong and it negatively impacts the customer base for years to come which means a bad perception and loss of business (Loizos & Lycourgos, 2005).

The perception of customers serves as a brand reputation and awareness because it is the customers beliefs, opinions, and feelings in their interactions with the company which is why it is also the key to building customer loyalty and retention. According to Rao (2018) different consumers' perceptions of the same item or service might differ and by determining precisely what drives or impacts a buyer's decision to buy or not buy a certain product will help the establishment achieve its aims. The customer perception of service quality in a hotel can be influenced by various factors, such as the hotel's location, price, amenities, cleanliness, staff behavior, and overall ambiance. By continually understanding and satisfying the specific needs and

expectations of the customer, service quality can be perceived to be of high quality.

A budget hotel is a style of hotel that provides reasonably priced lodging for those seeking a cost-effective choice. Budget hotels often offer fewer amenities and services than luxury hotels and are simpler and more basic. These hotels offer tidy, comfortable lodging at a reduced cost because they frequently feature smaller rooms and fewer amenities. Author Dalton, (2011) confirm that breakfast may not be included in the price, but there may be a canteen or coffee shop on the property where you can buy food. If a guest has a private bathroom, it will only have cold water, and the "shower" occasionally consists of a faucet sticking out from the wall that produces a small amount of water.

Data from the Department of Tourism's Regional Office 8 show that Tacloban City welcomed 559,803 tourists in 2018, which was an increase of 8.51% from the same period in 2017. Overall, 1.78 million overnight visitors stayed in the Eastern Visayas Region, up from 1.51 million the year before (Chua, 2019). There are 1,760 DoT-accredited accommodation establishments representing 289,649 rooms in the Philippines according to the Department of Tourism based on its 2017 available statistics (Jian, 2019 PHILIPPINES Hotel Industry Survey of Operations, 2019) and more or less 53 of these lodging companies are in Tacloban City. The number of accredited budget hotels in Tacloban City outnumbers the 3-star hotels as there are more or less 32 budget hotels while the latter only counts up to 21 establishments. The 32 budget hotels fall under 1-2-star hotel and in Tacloban City there are twenty-five (25) 2-star hotels while there are only seven (7) 1-star hotels. The selected budget hotels where the research is conducted is belong on the 2-star category.
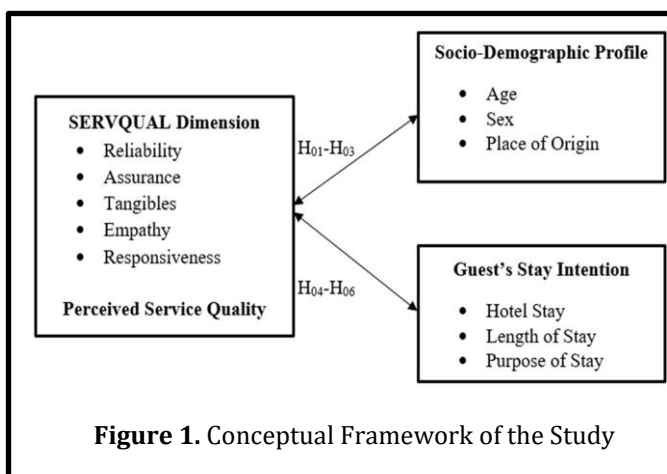

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The budget hotels of Tacloban City is popular among price-sensitive guests and once they decide to explore and set foot in the city because according to a 2021 poll conducted by Global Data, Gardner (2021) revealed that budget hotel owners will be in a good position to profit once tourism picks up again from an increase of travelers who are looking to save money on their accommodations, especially those who are on a tight budget or traveling for an extended period of time. Hence, it's important to note that the quality of budget hotels can vary widely, before booking it's necessary for customers to do research and read reviews about the establishment.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between the variables of the study is presented in Figure 1. The hotel attributes such as reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness were the variables used in assessing the service quality of a hotel. The socio-demographic profile of the respondents and guests' behavioral intention were chosen for this study to determine if the selected factors had significance to the perception of customers in the selected budget hotels.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1. Research Design

To gather enough information from the respondents, a descriptive research design method was used in this study to focus on describing the nature of the demographic segment. This study also used a correlational design to determine the correlations between the variables.

2.2. Research Locale

This study was conducted in Tacloban City, the provincial capital of Leyte and located in Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines.

2.3. Sampling Design and Technique

The two-hundred (200) respondents of this study were chosen by the researchers using convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling method, wherein participants were selected because they meet specific criteria for the study (1) ages 18 years old and above and (2) were first time or loyal customers of the establishment with a (3) purpose of business or vacation. They were either (4) from urban or rural areas of Leyte and Samar. Moreover, this study was conducted on August – September 2022.

2.4. Research Respondents

The respondents of the survey were two-hundred (200) guests who stayed from August until the second week of September 2022 at selected Budget Hotel in Tacloban City.

2.5. Research Instrument

A survey questionnaire was adapted from Fripp (2013) which is the most often used standardized test to evaluate service quality.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

All respondents were voluntary, anonymous, and had the right to withdraw anytime without any consequences. Moreover, the purpose, details of the study, and their roles were discussed prior to the distribution of the questionnaire and the anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed..

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

There was a total of 200 respondents who participated in this study. Their socio-demographic profile in terms of sex, age, and place of origin classified as urban or rural are shown in Table 1.

The majority of the respondents were male at 53%, while the female only made up 47% of the total population. Budget hotels' frequent guests were aged 21-30 years old at 55% followed by 20 years old and younger at 22%. Participants with ages 31-40 years old got second lowest percentage at 13% and ages 40 years old or older at 9.5% got the lowest number of respondents who participated in the study. Meanwhile, in terms of place of origin or location of residence, an overwhelming proportion of respondents came from rural areas at 79% while only 21% come from urban areas.

3.2. Perceived Service Quality of Budget Hotels in Tacloban City

The result for each dimension, namely reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness both overall and across dimension indicators are shown in Table 2.

3.3. Reliability

The reliability of services provided by budget hotels received a very favorable perception from the respondents, as indicated by the overall mean of 4.22.

Table 1. Frequency & Percentage Distribution of Respondents across Profile Variables (n =200)		
Profile Variable	**Frequency**	**%**
Sex		
Male	106	53.0
Female	94	47.0
Age		
20 years old or younger	44	22.0
21 to 30 years old	110	55.0
31 to 40 years old	26	13.0
40 years old or older	19	9.5
Did not report age	1	0.5
Place of Origin		
Urban	42	21.0
Rural	158	79.0

This suggests that hotels' services are dependable and accurate as advertised to customers. Looking at the individual indicators of reliability, with mean scores ranging from a minimum of 4.16 to a maximum of 4.28, the ability to show sympathy and reassurance to customers when they encounter problems during their stay appears to be the most notable strength of the hotels' services. Similarly, the hotels' performance when it comes to meeting allotted time for providing a response to customers and the hotels' trustworthiness were also perceived very favorably by the respondents. Moreover, although respondents' perception of promptness of services and accuracy of record keeping of the hotels is generally positive, these components of service reliability are the lowest points of the hotels' services.

Reliability of services contributes to positive customer satisfaction. This is because customers expect a reliable service from companies they are interacting with, and reliable services satisfy customer expectations. The study of Bhuian (2021) showed that among the five dimensions of service quality, reliability has the most impact on customer satisfaction. Moreover, when a company achieves positive customer satisfaction, it is highly likely to attain further success, as satisfaction improves customer retention and could attract new customers. In relation to this, hotels that sustain highly reliable services have opportunities for growth.

3.4. Assurance

The perception of the respondents of the hotels' service quality in terms of the assurance aspect is favorable, with an overall mean of 4.18. This implies that the respondents have confidence and trust in the hotels' ability to deliver their promised services. Mean scores across individual indicators of assurance further show that respondents trust and most confident about the hotels' ability to provide sufficient assistance to their employees in the delivery of services, with a mean score of 4.20 which is slightly higher than those of the other indicators. Likewise, the staff's ability to instill trust to customers was recognized favorably by the respondents, as evidenced by a mean score of 4.19. It can also be noted that respondents are confident about the safety of hotel transactions.

The assurance dimension is cultivated when hotel management and employees demonstrate expertise of the services they promise to deliver. Assurance is particularly important when customers have limited knowledge of specific hotel services and thus need the assistance of hotel staff. Hotel staff thus need to carefully earn the trust of the customers. Although it is

Table 2. Respondents' Perception of Service Quality in terms of Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy & Responsiveness

Statements	Mean ± STDev
Reliability	
1. The hotel meets its allotted time for a response.	4.26 ± .58
2. If a customer has problems, sympathy and reassurance are what the hotel shows.	4.28 ± .59
3. The hotel can be trusted.	4.26 ± .59
4. The hotel provides service to its customers promptly.	4.17 ± .61
5. The hotel keeps accurate records.	4.16 ± .64
Overall Mean	**4.22 ± .40**
Assurance	
6. The behavior of the staff instills trust in customers.	4.19 ± .56
7. Customers feel safe with their transactions with the hotel.	4.17 ± .59
8. The staff is consistently courteous with the customers.	4.17 ± .56
9. Employees must receive sufficient assistance from the company.	4.20 ± .66
Overall Mean	**4.18 ± .42**
Tangibles	
10. The hotel's equipment is up-to-date.	4.12 ± .62
11. The physical facilities at the hotel are visually appealing.	4.22 ± .60
12. The staff at the hotel are presentable and well-dressed.	4.27 ± .61
13. The appearance of the physical facilities is compatible with the hotel.	4.23 ± .62
Overall Mean	**4.20 ± .46**
Empathy	
14. The hotel gives customers individual attention.	4.07 ± .58
15. The hotel has employees who give customers personalized attention.	4.05 ± .65
16. Employees of the hotel fully understand the specific needs of the guests.	4.09 ± .67
17. The hotel employees have the customer's best interest at heart.	4.11 ± .64
18. The hotel operates at hours suitable to all customers.	4.25 ± .62
Overall Mean	**4.11 ± .45**
Responsiveness	
19. Staff at the hotel tell guests when exactly will the service be performed.	4.07 ± .54
20. Employees in the hotel give prompt services to the customers.	4.20 ± .61
21. Hotel employees are always willing to help customers.	4.22 ± .63
22. The employees in the hotel are never too busy to respond to customers.	4.14 ± .64
Overall Mean	**4.16 ± .47**

Note: 5 – strongly agree; 4 – agree; 3 – neither agree nor disagree; 2 – disagree; 1 – strongly disagree

not the most important factor, assurance contributes to customer retention (Nsiah & Mensah, 2014).

3.5. Tangibles

The service quality of the hotels in terms of tangibility received a highly favorable perception from the respondents. On the whole, this indicates that the tangibility of hotel's services is very desirable, garnering an overall mean of 4.20, which reflects the hotels' capacity to portray service quality. The most notable tangible attribute of the hotels' services very favorably perceived by the respondents is the presence of neat

Table 3. Correlation between Socio-Demographic Profile and Perceived Service Quality

Service Quality Dimensions	Socio-Demographic Profile		
	Sex	Age	Place of Origin (Urban/Rural)
	Correlation Coefficient (Point-biserial)	Correlation Coefficient (Spearman Rho)	Correlation Coefficient (Point-biserial)
Reliability	0.109 ns	-0.187*	-0.010 ns
Assurance	0.046 ns	0.044 ns	0.110 ns
Tangibles	0.088 ns	-0.115 ns	-0.043 ns
Empathy	0.067 ns	0.110 ns	-0.018 ns
Responsiveness	0.109 ns	0.077 ns	-0.056 ns

Note. *Significant at $\alpha=0.05$ ns- not significant

Table 4. Correlation between Perceived Service Quality and Guest's Behavioral Intention

Service Quality Dimensions	Variable		
	Hotel Stay	Length of Stay	Purpose of Stay
	Correlation Coefficient	Correlation Coefficient	Correlation Coefficient
Reliability	0.029 ns	-0.139 ns	0.031 ns
Assurance	0.002 ns	0.014 ns	-0.004 ns
Tangibles	-0.029 ns	0.016 ns	-0.046 ns
Empathy	0.186*	0.022 ns	0.138 ns
Responsiveness	0.024 ns	0.000 ns	-0.030 ns

Note. *Significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ ns- not significant

and well-dressed staff. Appearance of the physical facilities was also deemed appropriately matched with the hotel. In fact, physical facilities were perceived to be very visually appealing. Moreover, hotel equipment was perceived to be up-to-date, showing that the hotels' services follow modern trends.

In other words, tangibility shapes customers' impression about the brand or services the hotel promises to offer. For instance, clean physical facilities, up-to-date equipment, and neat and well-groomed staff, among others, can indicate that the hotel takes customer comfort seriously (Klokkenga, 2020).

3.6. Empathy

The perception of the respondents of the empathy the hotels provide to customers is generally favorable. This service quality dimension obtained an overall mean of 4.11, indicating a desirable level of empathy. This means

that the hotels ensure that their services showcase individualized attention and care towards customers. This quality is mostly reflected in the hotels' intention of making sure that hotel operation hours cater all customers as much as possible. As perceived by the respondents, the hotels have placed customers' best interest at the core of their operation and hotel staffs are fully aware of the specific needs of the customers.

Empathy helps hotels build relationships with customers because it showcases care towards the customers and shows that what the hotels want is customer safety. It follows then that even if the hotels are performing very well in terms of the other service quality dimensions, with the absence of empathetic service, there is a chance the hotels will fail to meet customer expectations (Tessera, Hussain, & Ahmad, 2016).

3.7. Responsiveness

In terms of responsiveness, the hotels were perceived by the respondents to be fully prepared to provide immediate help and service to customers, obtaining an overall mean of 4.16. Willingness of hotel employees to help customers is shown to be the most notable responsiveness indicator, receiving a mean of 4.22. Along with willingness to help, readiness of hotel employees to deliver prompt services is likewise evident, with a mean of 4.20. There was also a favorable perception about communication between hotel staff and guests – for instance, hotel staff make sure that guests know the schedule of hotel services.

Responsiveness reflects a hotel's dedication to offer and provide services promptly. It shows eagerness to eagerness to assist customers. A hotel with high service quality provides a swift response to customer communication, which is indicative of the value that the hotel places upon customer satisfaction, whether in relation to requests, feedback, questions and issues or problems, among others (Ali & Doski, 2022).

3.8. Relationship between socio-demographic profile and perceived service quality

This study also determined whether significant relationships exist between socio-demographic profile variables and perceived service quality. The results are shown in Table 3.

Only "age" and 'reliability" had a significant relationship at 95% level of confidence. The negative correlation coefficient suggests that as the age increases, they tend to give lower ratings or agreement score than lower aged respondents when it comes to reliability of hotel services. This could also mean that older customers look at or places value more on reliability when looking hotels to stay in. This group of customers are critical about fulfilling promised or advertised services. The result of this study was supported by the research

conducted by Moklis (2012) that reliability/honesty dimension was significantly associated with age as it revealed that customers with ages 36-65 years old are concerned with honesty and dependability. It is thus important for hotel management and staff to maintain a certain level of reliability of services that either meets or exceeds customer expectation.

3.9. Relationship between guest's behavioral intention and perceived service quality

The results shown in Table 4 are the relationship between perceived service quality dimensions and hotel stay and length and purpose of stay which was also determined.

The results showed that only "empathy" and "hotel stay" showed a significant relationship shown in Table 4. This means that hotels with management and staff who show empathy to customers in the delivery of their services tend to be chosen more or sought after by customers. In other words, customers frequently look for this kind of hotels. Management and staff of such hotels communicate well with the customers and understand that customers may have varying needs and concerns that need to be addressed. The study of Ali, A.M., et al. (2022) have the same result, where it showed that empathy among the five dimensions had the highest impact on customer satisfaction thus it became one of the qualities that a customer seeks.

4. CONCLUSION

After a thorough analysis of the findings obtained from the results of the study, it can be concluded that the selected budget hotels in Tacloban City serve customers belonging to different age groups, most of whom are young and middle-aged adults. These hotels are likewise popular to male and female customers. Also, it was shown that most hotel customers originate from rural

areas. It can also be concluded that the hotels deliver high to very high quality of services, as affirmed by the; agree and strongly agree responses of the hotel customers. Although the level of service provided by the hotels is already favorable, the quality of service can still be raised, particularly in all five dimensions, namely, reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness.

Moreover, the study demonstrated that reliability and empathy are very important aspects of service quality. Reliability is significantly and negatively associated with customers' age, suggesting that older customers are more critical about service reliability of the hotels they are staying in. Also, empathy is significantly and positively associated with hotel stay, implying that empathy is an important factor that customers look at when choosing a hotel to stay in. On the other hand, although the other service quality dimensions were not significantly associated with the socio-demographic profile, hotel stay, length of stay, or purpose of stay, they are still significant aspects of service quality in hotels and thus should not be neglected.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, it is highly recommended to the four (4) budget hotels to continuously improve the performance of their service considering the significant association between reliability and age, between empathy and hotel stay. Budget hotels should continue to place utmost priority upon the reliability of their service to maintain loyal younger aged guests while attracting older-aged aged people at the same time. Additionally, the budget hotels should also prioritize the empathy of the employees to the guests to be continuously chosen by customers when they need an accommodation establishment. Moreover, to the future researchers wish to study

customer perception in budget hotels of Tacloban City should include more budget hotels in Tacloban City and should duplicate and improve the result of this study.

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7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have declared that there is no conflict of interest.

8. SOURCE/S OF FUNDING

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