



ABSTRACT

Service quality is a key in maintaining visitors in a destination or influencing repeat visit as a result of certain level of satisfaction during their stay. This study investigates the role service quality play by exploring the kinds of services offered in relation to interaction, destination environment and outcome qualities. Name of the destination was purposely hidden and represented by "X". Mixed method was adopted using 60 respondents derived from 2 categories - the personnel and the visitors of the safari tourism destination "X" to obtain their views. Descriptive statistics was used to obtain

INVESTIGTING SERVICE QUALITY IN A SAFARI TOURISM DESTINATION "X" TOWARDS ATTRACTING REPEAT VISITS

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Introduction

Research has shown that enhanced service quality has positively influenced customer decision-making (Gummesson, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, 1990). More precisely, the provision of high-quality services to consumers promotes customer loyalty and satisfaction, which, in turn, enhances the profitability of the service provider (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Dagger, Sweeney, & Johnson, 2007; Fornell, 1992). In the hotel industry, service quality received much attention from both researchers and practitioners because of its positive impact on financial performance, customer satisfaction, and retention (Akbaba, 2006; Ghobadian, Speller, & Jones, 1994; Gržinić, 2007; Martinez Caro & Roemer, 2006; Tam, 2000). Ultimately, quality enhancement is a key determinant for the success of an organization in today's competitive market environment (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994). Therefore, marketers in the service industry should pay close attention to the issue of service quality (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996).

The tourism industry and hotel business are not exempted from service quality concerns (Brown, Bowen, & Swartz, 1992; Tsaur & Lin, 2004). In the highly competitive hotel industry, it is very important to differentiate one hotel's services from those of its competitors. To achieve this, managers should understand and satisfy customers' needs and wants by offering high-quality services (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005). These efforts would improve market share and overall profitability (Anderson et al., 1994; Oh & Parks, 1997). As service quality is becoming an important part of business practice in the



the average mean of the variables on the subject. A 5-point Likert scale was constructed and then applied to the entire dataset of the variables. Chi-square test was engaged to compare observed results with expected results. Destination “X” laid less emphasis on understanding of visitors’ travel behaviour and their specific travel motivations; inadequate qualified rangers, untrained staff, poor/ lack of motivation and insufficient equipment are among the challenges facing the destination. Surprisingly, variables that are highly associated with service quality such as catering services, conference, events appeared to be insignificant on kinds of services offered. It is important for tourism destination “X” to understand the travel behavior and visitors’ motivation, as it could assist in product development, improved marketing strategies, enhanced service delivery approaches and creates a competitive advantage.

Keywords: Service quality, Satisfaction, Motivation, Visitors, Travel behavior.

tourism and hotel industries, it is imperative to define clearly the quality of hotel services and develop a psychometrically sound measurement tool (Mei, Dean, & White, 1999; Nadiri & Hussain, 2005).

In response to the call for more systematic service quality research, Sergeant and Mohamad (1999) and Tsang and Qu (2000) proposed a number of conceptual models in the context of the hotel and tourism industry. However, the psychometrically sound measures of service quality mentioned in the literature remain scarce (Min & Min, 1997). Currently, hotel organizations have difficulties in adequately assessing and improving their service performance from a customers’ perspective due to the lack of a psychometrically sound conceptual model and related measurement scale. Against this background, the purposes of this study are twofold: (a) to propose a conceptual model of service quality in the hotel industry, and (b) to test the psychometric properties of the proposed model by developing a scale for measuring service quality in the hotel service industry. The present study may fill the conceptual void existing in the hotel and tourism industry by offering a comprehensive and industry-specific model of service quality. The accompanying measurement instrument represents a valid and reliable tool for assessing service quality in the hotel industry. The study thus, aids future research by providing a foundation for further investigation regarding perceived service quality and a practical assessment tool for evaluating hotel service quality Northern Nigeria.

Literature Review

The service quality in this study focuses on three folds Rieger, quoted in Krippendorf (1986) reflects that there are tourists constantly looking for novel experiences, out of anxiety of internal “emptiness”; how that emptiness is filled and how the experience affects the visitors would be shown through the study. There has been an enormous amount of research looking at the nature of satisfaction and its relationship to other constructs such as service quality. It is generally recognized that service quality impacts on satisfaction directly hence if service quality is improved, satisfaction will be improved (Soutar, 2001). However, recent research has suggested that service



quality may be only one of the factors influencing satisfaction. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994) claim that a customer's overall satisfaction may be related to their assessment of not only products and service quality e.g. courtesy, responsiveness, sociability, etc. but also product features e.g. hotel design and location, size of hotel room, capacity of conference hall, restaurant layout, landscapes, serenity of the environment, etc. and price. In a similar vein, Soutar (2001) suggests that satisfaction may be affected by product, service, quality and value.

Theoretical framework

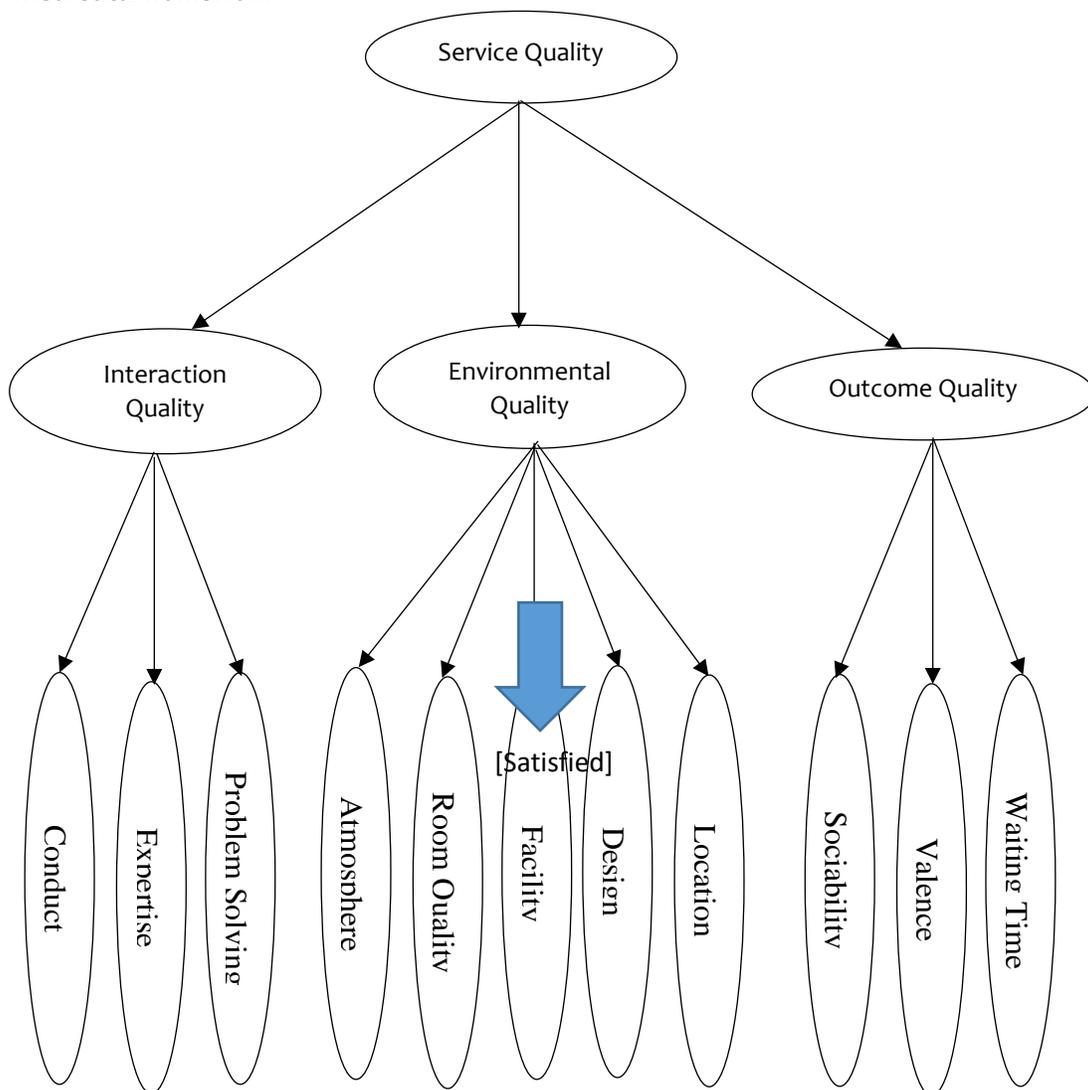


Chart adapted from Wu and Ko's 2013 proposed Multidimensional and Hierarchical Model of service quality.

Combination of the above variables under interaction, environmental and outcome qualities gives satisfaction. Satisfaction based on previous visit facilitates decision for further visits. Consequently, there would be increased revenue as a result of subsequent increased visit. Here, different factors



come into play: first, word of mouth promotion because of previous visit; research indicates that the best way to promote a product/service is through “word of mouth” (for example), Previous experience matters a lot to a tourist because what stays longer in mind is the experience gained at a destination but not the destination itself, for that can be easily forgotten. Second, Third...

Methodology

The study adopts quantitative method using random sampling approach. To achieve the objectives, data was obtained through semi-structured questionnaire as a research instrument. Sixty (60) respondents were selected as a sample from..., and the response rate was 100%, as all the participants completed the questionnaires and returned, and were valid. Questionnaire was validated by professionals in tourism and hospitality sectors.

Descriptive statistics was used to obtain the average mean of the variables on the subject.

The construct has 5 – point likert scale, hence the mean is $\frac{5+4+3+2+1}{5} = 3.00$. The average mean of 3.00 is considered as the cut-off point, such that any computed value that is greater than or equal to 3.00 is considered as significant and therefore accepted otherwise if the computed value is less than the cut-off point, it is considered as insignificant and therefore rejected.

Table 1: Identification of kinds of Services offered in Destination “X”

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
Game Viewing	60	4.57	.673	Significant
Tour Guide	60	4.57	.593	Significant
Safari/wilderness	60	4.07	1.023	Significant
Accommodation	60	4.32	.833	Significant
Catering Services	60	2.57	1.477	Insignificant
Conference and events	60	2.57	1.477	Insignificant
Valid N (list wise)	60			

Result shows that some of the products and services rendered in destination “X” comprises of game viewing (mean = 4.57), tour guide (mean = 4.57), safari (4.07) and accommodation (mean = 4.32). However, catering services and conference are found to be insignificant as the calculated value of each is less than the cut-off point of 3.00. This implies that catering services and conference are not up to the expected standard (mean = 2.57).

Table 2: Assessment of the Quality of Service provision in destination “X”

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.114 ^a	4	.011
Likelihood Ratio	13.977	4	.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.652	1	.199
N of Valid Cases	60		



Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.767	.122	1.293	.001
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.561	.128	2.061	.004
N of Valid Cases		60			

Hypothesis

H₀: The quality of service provision in destination “X” does not depend on the respondents’ satisfaction and standardization.

H₁: The quality of service provision in destination “X” depends on the respondents’ satisfaction and standardization.

Result in the chi-square test above shows that (13.114) is greater than the tabulated value at 5% level of significance, $\chi^2_{\alpha, v} = \chi^2_{0.05, 4} = 9.488$. Therefore, since the calculated value (13.114) is greater than the tabulated (9.488), the null hypothesis is rejected and conclude that the quality of service provision in destination “X” depends on the respondents’ satisfaction and standardization of products and services. Result also shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between quality of service provision and respondents’ satisfaction. By positive relationship here, it means that both variables are moving on the parallel direction. This implies that the quality of service provision in destination “X” is influencing visitors’ satisfaction.

Table 3: Challenges facing destination “X” on service provision

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
Lack of qualified rangers	60	3.45	1.371	Significant
Inadequate personnel	60	3.50	1.242	Significant
Insufficient trained personnel	60	3.25	1.144	Significant
Poor motivation	60	3.50	1.282	Significant
Insufficient equipment	60	3.73	1.260	Significant
Valid N (list wise)	60			

There are a number of challenges facing prospective tourists, and these are common in many destinations, destination “X” is one of such. For instance, (Stone and Sharpley, 2008) found that members of the western society are facing death and suffering at a certain distance and were conditioned by the very state of that society. Challenges facing destination “X” comprises of poor or lack of qualified rangers (mean = 3.45), inadequate trained staff (mean = 3.25), poor or lack of motivation (3.50) and inadequate equipment (mean = 3.73). Other challenges were observed during field visit for an on the sport assessment to further authenticate the respondents’ views includes poor maintenance of facilities.

Table 4: Means of Improving the Quality of Service Provision in destination “X”



Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
Courtesy of the staff improves staff motivation in destination "X"	60	4.48	.651	Significant
Having sufficient vehicles that can convey visitors for game viewing in the National Park	60	4.10	.915	Significant
Having tour guide that will serve the need of visitors to the destination "X"	60	4.28	.825	Significant
Serving various food and drinks that will satisfy the needs of all visitors to destination "X"	60	3.90	1.020	Significant
Valid N (list wise)	60			

Satisfaction is thus a multi-faceted concept and is even more complex when the focus is on a destination rather than an individual service provider, but the entire personnel. However, in the case of personnel, satisfaction is assessed by reference to the many individual aspects of the holiday encounter, including the services and facilities used as well as their attitudes (Soutar, 2001). From the above table, respondents opined that the quality of products and services can be improve by politeness of staff and motivation, with (mean = 4.48); having enough vehicle that can convey visitors (mean = 4.10). Equally, for the tourism industry to maintain or improve its current status it is dependent on tourists' travel decisions which are reflected in travel behavior as identified by (Papatheodorou, 2006). Tour guide is also one of the key focus on improving the sector (mean = 4.28) and serving different variety of foods (mean = 3.90) that will satisfy the need of all visitors to the park.

Discussions

It is important for tourism destination "X" and others such as parks (wildlife, amusement, etc.), game reserves, resorts, etc., to understand the travel behavior and more specific the travel motivations of visitors, as it may assist in product development, improved marketing strategies, enhanced service delivery approaches and the creation of a competitive advantage. The quality of service provision in destination "X" is found to be of immense importance and hence its standardization is influencing tours satisfaction. Visitors are subject to certain behavior before, during and after travelling. This is conceptualized as travel behavior. This behavior is the direct result of interaction between certain personal and environmental variables on a continuous basis. Notice is given to the influence of visitors and situations on both sides and the reaction according to this, it influences their behavior base on their attitudes towards certain products, services and facilities and their response by making use of such products, services and facilities (March and Woodside, 2005; George, 2004).

According to George (2004), March and Woodside (2005), travel motivations can be considered as one of the most important psychological influences of tourist behavior. Motivations are the inner state of a person, or certain needs and wants of a person, which forces them to act or behave in a specific way and thus sustaining satisfaction (Decrop, 2006; George, 2004). Maslow's theory is one



of the most frequent used to explain the premise of motivation. Maslow uses five sets of goals which are also referred to as basic needs: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualization (Tikkanen, 2007). There is a need for the improvement of such products quality, among which are politeness and motivation of staff, tour guide with enough vehicle to convey the visitors and different variety of food and drinks that will meet the needs of visitors.

Stone and Shapley (2008) maintain that members of the western society are facing death and sufferings at a certain distance were conditioned by the very state of that society. Rieger considers (quoted in Krippendorf, 1986) as saying tourists are constantly looking for new experiences, out of fear of internal “emptiness”; how that emptiness is filled observing suffering and how the experience affect the visitors will be shown through a research. Every historical sites or tourism attractions are thematically predetermined by an event from history, i.e., various legends or imaginary content, and on its own, attracts visitors with various profiles. Likewise, Kušen (2002) believes that tourism attractions are a magnet that runs the touristic system and determines the development of tourism in a destination. Similarly, Jadrešić (2010), added that a touristic experience belongs in the socio-cultural need of the modern man and represents a long-term investment in the sense of acquiring knowledge of other cultures, experiences and other elements permanently imprinted in the memory of an individual. Hughes (2008) states that the lack of classic curator practices in a destination where historically themed attractions can be found bring the modern visitor to unexpected experiential paths. To mention some of these challenges are lack of experienced and trained staff, lack of motivation and inadequate equipment, and poor maintenance, etc.

Ap and Wong (2001) maintain that tour guides are capable of transforming a visitor’s sightseeing activities into a truly unforgettable experience and have the opportunity to increase environmental awareness and understanding in their visitors. Besides, the job has grown beyond simply showing a visitor unfamiliar sights but further incorporate “interpretation, movement towards sustainable practices and industry certification”.

Although, catering services, conferences and event appeared to be insignificant; serving various food and drinks that will satisfy the needs of visitors to destination “X” could increase visitors’ patronage and raise the revenue especially of that sector.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With above noted, it can be concluded that... ..

It is important for tourism destination “X” and others such as parks (wildlife, amusement, etc.), game reserves, resorts, etc., to understand the travel behavior and more specific the travel motivations of visitors, as it may assist in product development, improved marketing strategies, enhanced service delivery approaches and the creation of a competitive advantage.

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