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SERVICE QUALITY IN 5 STAR HOTEL A case study hotel in Mongolia

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Abstract

During the Covid years, the number of foreign tourists visiting Mongolia decreased and the tourism and hotel service industry stagnated. However, the number of foreign tourists is increasing due to the Mongolian government's policy to develop tourism, flexible visa solutions, international marketing, and the addition of direct flight routes. Previous research in the Hospitality Industry of Mongolia especially at accommodation service facilities was mainly focused on human resources aspects such as psychological problems, work conditions, incentives and career development, job satisfaction, job stress, and turnover intention. There is insufficient research related to the quality of hotel services and foreign guest satisfaction. Since 2017, large international hotel chains have started operating in Mongolia. The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate and assess guest perceptions of service quality in 5-star hotels in Mongolia. A convenient sample of 285 guests drawn from four 5 star hotels was used in the analytical stage. This indicates significant differences between hotel guests' expectations and their actual experiences, thus highlighting managerial implications. The findings indicated that the hotel customers' perceptions of service quality provided by the hotel industry were lower than their expectations and the gaps between customers' expectations and perceptions were significant.

Keywords:*5-star hotels, guest satisfaction, service quality, guest perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

The income of the tourism sector constitutes a considerable share of the income of the world economy. For our country, the tourism sector is the third most important sector in terms of contribution to the economy, after mining and agriculture. The main core of the tourism industry is the hospitality industry, including accommodation facilities for travelers and tourists, or hotels. There are 75 star-rated hotels in Mongolia and 8 5-star hotels in Ulaanbaatar. After the pandemic, the tourism sector has been fixed in a short time and aims to receive one million tourists in 2023-2024. Currently, the performance is 70 percent, and compared to 2019, the number has increased by 12 percent. Declaring 2023-2025 as the year to 'Welcome Mongolia', increasing the number of countries exempted from visa requirements by increasing the number of countries to 34, intensifying the liberalization of air transport and increasing the frequency of direct flights from countries in Europe and Asia has become a factor in increasing the flow of tourists, according to the Ministry of Tourism. The hotel plays a significant role in developing tourism, thus this paper shows the opportunities to increase products and services well fitted to the demands of visitors, hospitality industry trends, competitiveness, and the current situation of the Mongolian hotel tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hotel service quality

Service quality is considered the masses of hotels and the core of service management. Service quality is related to customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction is associated with customers' revisit intentions. If an effective image is portrayed to customers, it will create a competitive advantage for the hotel Lkhamtseden (2017) Service quality was defined by Zeithaml (1988) as "the judgment of customers about the overall superiority of a product or service." Gronroos (1988) posited that perceived quality is considered good when the experienced quality of customers meets the expected quality from the brand. They defined service quality as "a global judgment or attitude relating to the overall excellence or superiority of the service." Based on this definition, they operationalized the concept by applying Oliver's (1980) disconfirmation model of the gap between expectation and perception of service quality levels. Although SERVQUAL has been applied to a variety of service businesses, several dimensions and the nature of the construct were industry-

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specific. Related research showed that the dimensions were not replicable, and sometimes, the SERVQUAL scale was even uni-dimensional or ten-dimensional. These factors or dimensions are tangibles (physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel), reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably), responsiveness (willingness to help and provide prompt service), assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence), and empathy (caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers). The most famous model of service quality was proposed by Parasuraman et al., (1985, 1988). It has five dimensions and can be explained as:
1st – Reliability: "the degree to which a promised service is performed dependably and accurately". 2nd – Responsiveness: "the degree to which service providers are willing to help customers and provide prompt service".3rd – Assurance: "the extent to which service providers are knowledgeable, courteous, and able to inspire trust and confidence".4th – Empathy: "the degree to which the customers are offered caring and individualized attention".5th – Tangibles: "the degree to which physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel are adequate.

Mei et al.,(1999) studied service quality in the hotel industry in Australia, using SERVQUAL, and developed the HOLSERV scale. The results showed that "employees", "tangibles", and "reliability" were the three predictive dimensions of service quality, with "employees" as the best predictor. Another study conducted by Saleh and Ryan (1992) reported five dimensions of "conviviality", "tangibles", "reassurance", "avoid sarcasm" and "empathy", with "empathy" being the most important dimension of service quality. Sierra et al., (1999) designed a similar questionnaire of HOTELQUAL to examine customers' perceptions of hotels and delineated three factors of "hotel facilities", "appraisal of the staff", and "functioning and organization of service". Ekinci et al., (2003) found that tangible and intangible dimensions are the only two distinct dimensions measuring service quality of hotels. Lastly, Lkhamtseden (2017) investigated the service quality expectations of Mongolia's top upscale (from 4 to 5 stars) hotel customers and identified five service quality dimensions, tangibles, adequacy in service quality, understanding customer and caring, assurance, and convenience.

In the hotel industry, as service has direct interaction with customers, that is why customer satisfaction can be are plication of service quality in hotels (Shi&Su, 2007). Hotel performance is directly allied to service quality improvement. There is a significant relationship between improvement in service quality and hotel performance change (Narangajavana and Hu, 2008). Customers revisit intentions and emotions are mediated by customer satisfaction (Han et al., 2009). Customer satisfaction plays the role of mediator in the perceived value of a hotel and behavioral intention (Ryu et al., 2008). Customers revisit intentions and emotions are mediated by customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction plays the role of mediator in the perceived value of the hotel and behavioral intention.

In every organization service and quality plays a vital role for every customer. The customer is the main person who defines the Quality. To provide good quality service to customers, it is necessary for hotel managers to understand the expectations of their customers and then develop such programs that can address the issues of customers and bring improvement in service quality (Chen, 2008).

Hotel rating system

Hotel classification systems are widely used in the accommodation sector as a means of providing an indicator to both consumers and intermediaries on the standards to be found at individual establishments. This is particularly important in a sector where the product (i.e. the accommodation) is bought/listed sight-unseen (i.e., consumers/intermediaries are not able to see or test the product offering before the purchase/listing is made). Moreover, hotel classifications can provide useful marketing platforms for individual hotels and for destinations wishing to promote the quality of their offer.

There is a wide range of hotel types in Mongolia, and there are no clear global criteria for classifying hotels. However, combinations of principal criteria are used. Hotels are commonly referred to as being of different types, such as motels, guest lodges, residential, all-suite, resort, commercial, transient, and airport. As this does not describe the characteristics adequately, some other methods have been adopted. Hotels may be described by location, city, region, resort, country; size, small, medium, or large, in terms of room capacity; type of guest, corporate, leisure, or convention; length of stay, short or long periods; transient or residential; and grading systems, such as the star rating system used in many countries such as Mongolia, Australia and the USA. This research has concentrated on collecting data in the field from five-star hotels as classified by the "Hotel service quality star rating criteria" MNS 5927:2008 /Mongolia National Standard/.

Table 1. Hotel star rating and summative quality reference

Star Rating	Overview of Criteria according to Star Ratings Mongolia
****	Expectations at this level include a degree of luxury as well as quality in the furnishings, decor, and equipment, in every area of the hotel. Bedrooms will also usually offer more space than at the lower star levels, and well-designed, coordinated furnishings and decor. The en-suite bathrooms will have both bath and fixed shower. There will be a high enough ratio of staff to guests to provide services like porter age, 24-hour room service, laundry, and dry cleaning. The restaurant will demonstrate a serious approach to its cuisine.

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*****	Interior design should impress with its quality and attention to detail, comfort, and elegance. Furnishings should be immaculate. Services should be formal, well supervised, and flawless in attention to guests' needs, without being intrusive. The restaurant will demonstrate a high level of technical skill, producing dishes to the highest international standards. Staff will be knowledgeable, helpful, and well-versed in all aspects of customer care, combining efficiency with courtesy.

Source: "Hotel service quality star rating criteria" MNS 5927:2008 /Mongolia National Standard/.

In the service sector industry, a key element of customer satisfaction is the nature of the relationship between the customer and the provider of the products and services. Thus, both product and service quality are commonly noted as a critical prerequisite for satisfying and retaining valued customers. A customer is satisfied when an offering performs better than expected and is dissatisfied when expectations exceed performance (Bolton & Drew, 1991).

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 travelers' satisfaction. A study conducted by B.Lkhamtseden (2017) 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 quality, and value are the top three hotel factors that determine travelers' satisfaction. Providing services that customers prefer is the 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 cards are commonly used for determining hotel guest satisfaction. Guest comment cards are usually distributed in hotel rooms, at the reception desk, or in some other visible place.

METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to assess; The expectations and factors of importance as perceived by guests of 5 star hotels in Mongolia. The actual experience and evaluation of guests of 5 star hotels in Mongolia. The disparity between the specific and overall components of importance and actual stay experience.

Management of four 5 star hotels in Mongolia, was approached to explain the purpose of this study and obtain consent to participate. Front desk, in-house fine dining restaurant service was chosen for the study as being most representative of guest contact and service delivery process representing maximum moment of truth opportunities where the service provider comes in direct contact with the guest **(**Mohsin and Lockyer, 2009).The study was undertaken at different 5-star hotels consenting to participate. The convenience sample contained 375 respondents. Out of the 375 distributed questionnaires, a total of 285, or a response rate of 85 percent was returned. The questionnaire comprised main two sections. Section one gathered data on the importance attributed to different features of the front office, and hotel restaurant by guests. Section two sought an evaluation of how the establishment performed in the opinion of guests, as per the listed features of the front desk office and in-house lounge/restaurant. Questions were asked to rate their degree of importance or agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, where 5 represents the highest importance or agreement with the statement and 1 represents the lowest importance or unacceptable level of service offered. Several statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and reliability tests were used in this study. The period of distributing the questionnaire lasted from the 10th of June 2023 until the 10th of September 2023.

RESULTS

Demographics and statistical measures:

The data obtained from the survey were analyzed for frequency analysis. In the gender variable, out of 285 respondents, the male was 70.5 percent, and 29.5 percent female. Four categories were defined for age description ranging from 20 years to more than 50 years. The percentage of 20-30 years respondents is 25, 31-40 years is 34, 41-50 years is 24 and more than 50 years is 17 percent. While determining the education level of respondents, more percentage was observed of university education or below university education visiting hotels. Only 20 percent of respondents in the hotels have acquired a university education. Observation ofrespondents' professions showed that 9 percent were civil servants, 15 percent of enterprise staff and workers, 18 of institution staff and workers, 23.5 percent were trade/proprietor, 12 percent were retired and 22.5 percent were having some different profession. So, the highest percentile of respondents was trade/proprietor. Only 8 percent of respondents were Mongolian citizens. 50 percent of respondents were from Russia, China, Korea, and Japan, rest were from the USA and European Union countries.

To assess data reliability measures were in access of 0.884, and the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling accuracy was 0.78. The Cronbach Alpha for all the Importance and Performance questions was 0.79.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.791	285

SPSS version 21 was used to accumulate information for analysis.

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Descriptive analysis:

Descriptive analysis of front office features score for importance indicated that respondents consider "important" seven out of ten items listed, i.e mean score is over 4 from the maximum possibility of 5, Restaurants features score for importance indicated that respondents consider "important" eight out of ten items listed, i.e mean score is over 4 from the maximum possibility of 5.

Table 3: Descriptive analysis of Importance

Items	Importance
FRONT OFFICE	4.31
Room layout, furnishings amenities	4.07
Speed of confirming the reservation	4.21
Ease of making a reservation	4.07
Better Hotel prices	4.07
Helpful and friendly staff	4.07
The check-in, and check-out of the hotel	4.07
Your first image of the hotel	4.31
HOTEL RESTAURANTS	
Quality of restaurant served	4.30
Timely service	4.18
Complaint handling	4.20
Knowledgeable staff	4.18
The overall quality of room service	4.10
Better restaurant menu prices	4.10
Staff appearance	4.09
A variety of items on the menu	4.08

Source: Authors' calculation

Having recognized the importance of scores and ranking given by the respondents, the next step was to analyze the experience or performance scores attributed by the respondents to different features of the front office, in the hotel fine dining restaurant.

Importance-Performance analysis:

The importance-performance technique was originally developed by Martilla and James (1997) for assessing the quality of service. It involves assessing different aspects of a firm's output in terms of customers' performance areas. Major parts of the survey in the current study include sets of important performance-type questions. A paired sample t-test was used to determine the difference, if any, between importance-performance.

Table 4: Importance-performance

	Importance		Performance		Mean difference	t-value
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**		
FRONT OFFICE						
Room layout, furnishings amenities	4.31	0.70	3.08	0.72	1.23	1.33*
Speed of confirming the reservation	4.07	0.61	2.92	1.08	1.15	1.32*
Ease of making a reservation	4.21	0.79	3.14	0.88	1.07	1.25*
Better Hotel prices	4.07	0.87	3.02	0.81	1.05	1.20*
HOTEL RESTAURANTS						
Quality of restaurant served	4.30	0.72	3.00	0.94	1.30	1.42*
Timely service	4.18	0.79	3.01	0.96	1.17	1.30*
Complaint handling	4.20	0.69	3.11	0.94	1.09	1.26*
Knowledgeable staff	4.18	0.70	3.16	1.16	1.02	1.16*
The overall quality of room service	4.10	0.68	3.02	0.89	1.08	1.12*
Better restaurant menu prices	4.10	0.70	3.04	0.78	1.05	1.24*
A variety of items on the menu	4.08	0.81	3.06	0.99	1.02	1.10*

It is evident from the above results that in almost all cases performance was rated lower than importance, indicating statistically significant disparity. This clearly means that respondents' expectations are not met, which has hotel managerial implications in improving quality.

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Table 5: T-test

	Importance		Performance		Mean difference	t-value
	Mean	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**		
FRONT OFFICE						
Room layout, furnishings amenities	4.31	0.70	3.08	0.72	1.23	1.33*
Speed of confirming the reservation	4.07	0.61	2.92	1.08	1.15	1.32*
Ease of making a reservation	4.21	0.79	3.14	0.88	1.07	1.25*
Better Hotel prices	4.07	0.87	3.02	0.81	1.05	1.20*
Helpful and friendly staff	4.07	0.79	3.09	0.90	0.98	1.06*
The check-in, and out of the hotel	4.07	0.82	3.10	0.89	0.97	1.05*
Your first image of the hotel	4.07	0.80	3.12	0.90	0.95	1.04*
Initial image formation about the hotel	3.96	0.84	3.07	0.88	0.98	1.01*
Initial encounter with hotel staff	3.90	0.80	3.06	0.87	0.84	1.00*
Attractive and comfortable lobby area	3.79	0.83	3.03	0.91	0.80	0.91*
HOTEL RESTAURANTS						
Quality of restaurant served	4.30	0.72	3.00	0.94	1.30	1.42*
Timely service	4.18	0.79	3.01	0.96	1.17	1.30*
Complaint handling	4.20	0.69	3.11	0.94	1.09	1.26*
Knowledgeable staff	4.18	0.70	3.16	1.16	1.02	1.16*
The overall quality of room service	4.10	0.68	3.02	0.89	1.08	1.12*
Better restaurant menu prices	4.10	0.70	3.04	0.78	1.05	1.24*
Staff appearance	4.09	0.86	2.95	0.92	0.89	0.92*
A variety of items on the menu	4.08	0.81	3.06	0.99	1.02	1.10*
Ambiance of restaurant	3.97	0.76	3.11	0.78	0.86	0.98*
Order taker's swift responsiveness	3.85	0.86	3.05	0.92	0.80	0.92*

Note: * t-test two-tail probability < 0.01

Factor analysis:

Factor analysis was conducted to identify underlying dimensions within a list of separate items. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted using Principal ComponentAnalysis with Varimax rotation. The KMO was 0.82, which indicated suitability for analysis. Four factors emerged from this analysis. These are grouped and classified as follows:

1. Restaurant food and beverage (F&B) service quality factor covers items such as the way the service is delivered to guests in terms of quality, variety, and promptness (variance 39.03 percent).
2. Hotel ambiance and staff courtesy-which covered items such as initial image formation about the hotel, initial encounter with hotel staff, front office staff empathy, and all service encounters between staff and quests (variance 11.08).
3. Hotel reservation service-this factor covers all issues related to the speed of confirming reservations, and ease of making reservations for all hotel facilities (variance 8.25).
4. The overall value for this factor covers items such as better hotel prices, better room service menu prices, and overall value impression of the hotel facilities (variance 6.25).

Table 6: Factor analysis – rotated component matrix

	Component			
	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**	**Factor 4**

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A variety of items on the menu	0.72			
Quality of restaurant served	0.71			
The overall quality of room service	0.70			
Knowledgeable staff	0.70			
Better restaurant menu prices	0.69			
Order taker's swift responsiveness	0.68			
Staff appearance	0.67			
Ambiance of restaurant	0.67			
Initial image formation about the hotel		0.77		
Helpful and friendly staff		0.65		
Initial encounter with hotel staff		0.61		
Your first image of the hotel		0.60		
The check-in, and out of the hotel		0.60		
Room layout, furnishings amenities		0.59		
The external atmosphere of the hotel		0.50		
Timely service			0.76	
Complaint handling			0.71	
Speed of confirming the reservation			0.70	
Ease of making a reservation			0.67	
Accuracy of bill/No errors found in the bill during Check out			0.65	
The hotel reservation system and equipment are always functioning.			0.60	
Politeness responsiveness of staff			0.49	
Better hotel prices				0.80
Quality of service				0.75
Reasonable charge for room service				0.56

Note: Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in eight iterations.

Conclusion

This study intended to increase the comprehension of the expectations and perceptions of hotel service quality from the hotel customers' perspective. This study revealed that hotel customers' perceptions were consistently not meeting their expectations. It is quite evident from the results of the current study that there exist significant differences between expectations of 5 star hotel guests and actual experiences in the area relating to front office service, in in-house fine dining/restaurants. This means that the surveyed hotels do not seem to meet the attributed importance by the guests and that efforts should be exerted by management to meet or better exceed the importance expectation and achieve the desired guest delight through their performance. Being able to recognize considered important by the guests, hotel management should adopt enhanced marketing efforts to make certain that guests' needs are met or exceeded. If the hotel fails to meet such attributed importance as perceived by the guests, then they cannot succeed or grow their business. The managerial implication in this context is to identify, prioritize, and improve the areas of service flaws and allocate important resources to the most efficacious areas. It can easily be deducted from the findings of this study that high-quality 5-star hotels can play an important role in enhancing courtesy, leveraging guest knowledge, creating value for money for guest satisfaction, and pursuing best business practices and excellence in the field of hospitality and tourism. The findings of this study indicate that is important for 5-star hotel staff to be courteous, empathetic, and friendly with their guests.

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