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Service Quality in the Hospitality Industry

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Introduction

Service quality in the hospitality industry becomes one of the most important factors for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage and customers' confidence in the highly competitive marketplace, and therefore service quality can give the hospitality industry a great chance to create competitive differentiation for organisations. It is thus considered as a significant core concept and a critical success factor in the hospitality industry. A successful hotel delivers excellent quality service to customers, and service quality is considered the life of hotel.

Many benefits can be achieved by service quality such as establishing customer satisfaction, contributing to business image, establishing customer loyalty, and providing a competitive advantage to a business. Service quality performance can mean different to different people, for example, employees may show higher perceptions of service quality than customers perceived, and thus managers and their employees never like to identify deficiencies in service quality.

Definition of Service Quality

In some earlier studies, service quality can be defined as the extent to which the service fulfils the needs or expectations of the customers or conceptualised it as the overall impression of customers as regards the weakness or excellence of the service. However, service quality is defined as "what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for" rather than "what the supplier puts in". Therefore, service quality can be seen as the gap as the between the expected service and the actual perceived service.

Dimensions of Service Quality

Service quality consists of three dimensions: physical facilities, staff and materials. It also divided into two aspects: functional quality and technical quality. A similar approach argued that service quality includes three dimensions: functional quality, environment and technical quality. Another approach confirmed that service quality has five dimensions namely: assurance, reliability, empathy, tangibility and responsiveness.

Measurements of Service Quality

Although there is disagreement among researchers about the measurements of service quality, several instruments or measurements have been developed to do so, such as SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, INTSERVQUAL and INSQPLUS. Many measurements have been developed in the tourism industry for evaluating service quality such as HOLSERV, DINESERV, CASERV and LODGSERV. More specifically, DINESERV is used in restaurants; CASERV is used in the casino sector; while LODGSERV and HOLSERV are used in the accommodation sector. Other measurements such as INTQUAL and INTERSERVQUAL are used to measure employees' perceptions of service quality. Due to the specificities of services in the hospitality industry (i.e. impossibility of storage, inseparability, and impalpability), and thus a specific Model (SERVices QUALity) called SERVQUAL was introduced for measuring service quality. The SERVQUAL scale has become the most popular instrument for measuring service quality. The model has been applied in various service industries including tourism and hospitality. The SERVQUAL model consists of five dimensions, namely: empathy, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and tangibility. It evaluates customer's perceptions of service quality and that based on the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions. Since service quality is a multidimensional construct, and therefore each dimension of SERVQUAL has different features for evaluating customer perceptions and expectations regarding service quality in the hospitality industry.

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