Are hotels meeting customer expectations regarding service quality: A study of hotels in Pretoria, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study explores customers’ perceptions of the service quality provided in the hotel industry in Pretoria, in the Republic of South Africa. Considering the growth of the hotel industry in Pretoria, this study revealed that customers expect to receive a high level of service quality, leading to customer satisfaction and producing a positive perception of hotel service quality. An exploratory research design was adopted, and qualitative data were collected by interviewing hotel customers. Regarding limitations, this study was conducted at one selected hotel in Pretoria. Atlas.ti software was used to analyse the collected data. The analysis of the data identified several specific themes that were relevant to shaping the perceptions of the respondents in terms of service quality and their satisfaction with the service quality received. The themes supported existing literature regarding (i) the factors influencing perceptions of service and (ii) the specific influences within those themes, which were elaborated on, finally leading to recommendations for managing service quality perceptions in the hotel industry.

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Introduction

In the hospitality industry, service quality significantly influences businesses' success. Studies have shown that understanding customer perspectives on services and products tailored to their needs is crucial (Ntimane & Tichaawa, 2017). Over the past two decades, the service industry's growth has paralleled overall economic expansion, underscoring its importance to the global economy (Deloitte, 2018). In this competitive landscape, customer satisfaction is paramount, and a focus on quality is evident through the increasing pursuit of the International Organisation for Standardisation's (ISO) awards among businesses (Kariru & Aloo, 2014). This quality-centric approach aligns with customer expectations, and satisfaction arises when product performance meets these expectations (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015).

Customers assess value in the hotel sector using various tangible and intangible elements, such as the quality of the room and ambiance, as well as the dining options and recreational facilities available (Tichaawa & Ntimane, 2017). Despite the importance of supplementary services, customers' essential needs should remain the priority (Cheng, Gan, Imrie & Mansori, 2018). The necessity for exemplary customer service to foster a positive image and reputation is unequivocal (Ali, Gardi, Jabbar Othman, Ali Ahmed, Burhan Ismael, Abdalla Hamza, Aziz, Sabir, Sorguli & Anwar, 2021).

Guests increasingly scrutinise the hotel industry for the service quality they expect. As the industry grows and contributes significantly to tourism advancements, incorporating innovative service elements is critical (Cheng et al., 2018). Guests' varied expectations and needs emphasise the importance of understanding perceived value prior to service experiences, which profoundly impacts business success (Tichaawa & Ntimane, 2017).
In previous studies on service quality and customer perception in the hotel industry, as indicated in Table 1 under literature review, researchers have predominantly focused on customer service, customer satisfaction, service quality, and the SERVQUAL model for assessing service quality, often employing quantitative methods. However, there is a notable deficiency in research concerning customer service perceptions in the hotel industry in Pretoria. This region's lack of service quality can adversely affect customers' perceptions of service, resulting in dissatisfaction.

Therefore, the research problem centres on the dearth of knowledge regarding customer service perceptions in the hotel industry. This study aims to address the following questions to explore the identified gap: What are customers’ perceptions regarding service quality in the hotel industry in Pretoria? How does service quality influence customer expectations in this industry? What factors contribute to Pretoria's hotel industry's perception of service quality?

The primary objective of this study is to explore and articulate customers' perceptions of the service provided by the hotel industry in Pretoria, aiming to enhance understanding and improve service delivery to meet customer expectations effectively.

**Literature review**

This review aims to investigate and discuss the theories and previous empirical studies relevant to the researched topic. Specific dimensions of customer service in the hotel industry are under scrutiny, and the theoretical foundations analysed include the relationships between customer service, customer perceptions, service quality and expectations of customer service in the hotel industry. Special notice is given to the disconfirmation paradigm of perceived service quality. For ease of purpose, the section is divided into subsections, such as the theoretical background and conceptual reviews.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

**Customer service**

Customer service is a series of activities designed to enhance customer satisfaction and provide the feeling that a service has met the customer's expectations (Kimamuka, 2014). In addition, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2013) defined customer service as critical to what “service” means; furthermore, Ramphal and Nicolaides (2014) emphasise that service may, and should, be defined as every interaction between the hotel guest and the service provider.

Machado (2014) defined customer service in the following way:

i. Customer service is the ability of knowledgeable, capable, and enthusiastic employees to deliver products and services to their internal and external customers in a way that satisfies both their identified and unidentified needs, ultimately resulting in positive word-of-mouth advertising and repeat business.

ii. The interaction between a company representative and the customer, which extends beyond sales, is known as customer service.

Additionally, Machado (2014) asserted that providing excellent customer service must be a focal point for any business and form an integral part of the business's total product offering, behaviour, and business culture. Jasinskas, Streimikiene, Svagzdiene and Simanavicius (2016) cited Vitikiené (2004), who asserted that two essential elements are necessary to provide hotel service: material base and service. Due to these elements, hotel owners have an uncertain quality problem. In this view, two different quality aspects can be followed: technical quality, which reflects a material basis; and functional or process quality (service). This alludes to the fact that customers' expectations will continuously develop and evolve; therefore, service delivery must keep pace with those expectations (Machado, 2014).

**Customer perception of service**

As customers are deeply concerned about hotel service, customer satisfaction is the main element of the perception of service quality (Tichaawa & Ntimane, 2017; Butnaru & Licau, 2017). Satisfied customers form positive perceptions and recommend the service to others (Mohamad, Ab Yazid, Khatibi & Azam, 2017). Customers tend to be dissatisfied if the perceived service quality is not up to their expectations, and no positive outcome can be expected from such an exchange (Cheng et al., 2018). According to Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2011), customers experience a feeling of satisfaction when a product has met or exceeded their expectations, which can be explained in the disconfirmation paradigm, as displayed in the figure below.
Positive confirmation is defined as the gap between the service quality the guest expects (e) and the performance (p) of the hotel regarding service quality. This is presented in Figure 1 as a disconfirmation paradigm. When the two are equal (p = e), the customers have received the service quality they were expecting and are, therefore, satisfied. When the customers are offered more than they expect (p > e), the service quality highly confirms their expectations and increases their level of satisfaction. These customers will then positively communicate about the hotel service by word-of-mouth. Lastly, if customers perceive the business performance as lower than expected (p < e), it leads to dissatisfaction with the quality and other services delivered in the hotel. In this study, the disconfirmation paradigm was used as the methodology for the perception of service quality in the hotel industry. It has been shown in this chapter that delivering service quality and considering the customer’s needs and expectations establish customer satisfaction.

In contrast, a lack of service quality results in customer dissatisfaction and leads to a negative perception of service.

**Service quality**

Quality is defined as a high level of customer satisfaction and refers to factors characterising a product or service (Stefano, Casarotto Filho, Barichello & Sohn, 2015). Service quality is defined by hotel standards, such as the hotel’s stars; whereas customer service quality is reflected by guest satisfaction (Luo & Qu, 2016). Therefore, service quality is difficult to evaluate (Stefano et al., 2015) and the quality of services provided should be a common concern for guests and service providers in a hotel (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014). Service quality is composed of tangible attributes and intangible and subjective attributes such as safety, comfort, and satisfaction, which are difficult to measure accurately (Stefano et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential to identify what guests need first and then measure the service quality by assessing their perception of the service (Luo & Qu, 2016). Considering the service characteristics – intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability – measuring its quality becomes even more challenging (Stefano et al., 2015). Service quality is relevant to the hotel industry as customers first look at the value they get for the price they pay (Malik et al., 2020). The functional attributes of service quality, both “during” and “after” the delivery of the service are often evaluated (Rather and Camilleri, 2019).

Furthermore, Butnaru and Licău (2017) suggested that a hotel should be concerned with delivering high service quality and understanding the customer’s needs, thus offering as high a degree of satisfaction as possible. According to Ramphal and Nicolaides (2014), service is an intangible and highly individualised thing that should correspond to the guests’ expectations and satisfy or, if possible, exceed their needs and requirements. Kalotra and Sharma (2017), who investigated the quality of services in the hospitality industry, concluded by claiming that the service quality must be reviewed as customers’ expectations continually increasing.

**Customer expectation of service quality**

Meeting customers’ expectations is critical to the growth and sustainability of businesses in today’s competitive business environment (Malik et al., 2018). Hotel operators should anticipate that different guests always come with various levels of service expectations (Cheng et al., 2018). The customers' expectations contribute to their evaluation of the quality of the service provided (Stefano et al., 2015). They furthermore suggested that perceived service quality will be affected when there is a discrepancy between customers' expectations and management's understanding of customer expectations. Habel, Alavi, Schmitz, Schneider and Wieseke (2016) argued that if customers perceive performance as lower than their expectations, they experience a sense of dissatisfaction. However, if they feel that the performance has exceeded their expectations, they are reassured and satisfied. Businesses reach an acceptable level of satisfaction when the service meets the customer's expectations and exceeds them (Sandada & Matibiri, 2016). Service companies need to monitor the quality of their services when meeting the needs and expectations of their customers, thereby creating a competitive advantage (Stefano et al., 2015). Therefore, it is essential to identify what guests need first and then measure the service quality by assessing their perceptions of the hotel services delivered (Luo & Qu, 2016).
### Table 1: Studies done on quality service and perception in the hotel industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Theme of the study</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ntimane &amp; Tichaawa (2017)</td>
<td>Customers' perceptions of value about hotels in Gauteng, South Africa</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>Customers concerns about value are emphasised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tefera &amp; Govender (2017)</td>
<td>Service, quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty: The perceptions of Ethiopian hotel guests</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>Service quality is significant to customer satisfaction; hotels should know their customer satisfaction level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malik, Akhtar, Raziq &amp; Ahmad (2012)</td>
<td>Customer satisfaction and perceived service quality</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>There is a relationship between customer satisfaction and perceived service quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomnga &amp; Mhlanga (2015)</td>
<td>An assessment of customer satisfaction and service quality: The case of hotels in East London</td>
<td>Qualitative approach</td>
<td>Guests should have additional motivation, and comment card design should follow a more scientific approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kleynhans &amp; Zhou (2012)</td>
<td>Service quality at selected hotels in Pretoria</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>More effort is exerted when servicing international guests; the same should be done for local guests. SA guests had higher perceptions of tangibles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramphal &amp; Nicolaides (2014)</td>
<td>Service and quality and quality service: Satisfying customers in the hospitality industry</td>
<td>Qualitative approach</td>
<td>Quality should be strategically customer-focused, with a scientific approach to decision-making, long-term planning, teamwork, and continuous improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naidoo (2012)</td>
<td>Tourist service quality management in the ecotourism accommodation sector of KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>Qualitative approach</td>
<td>A tool is provided to assess service quality from customers' perspectives and identify areas for improvement during service delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amin, Yahya, Ismayatim, Nasharuddin &amp; Kassim (2013)</td>
<td>Service quality dimension and customer satisfaction in the Malaysian hotel industry</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>Hotel employees play an important role in delivering services. Managers should prioritise enhancing guests' emotions and maintaining relationships by training and upgrading employee skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poku, Zakari &amp; Soali (2013)</td>
<td>Service quality on customer loyalty in the hotel industry in Ghana</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>Service quality impacts customer loyalty. Customers perceive the hotel staff as able to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wu &amp; Ko (2013)</td>
<td>Assessment of service quality in the hotel industry, Taiwan</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>Service quality measurement scale developed in this study can also be used to monitor and improve the quality of services delivered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakwadi, Yang &amp; Fan (2012)</td>
<td>Service quality attributes</td>
<td>Quantitative approach</td>
<td>A link between service quality attributes and customer value is indicated.</td>
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<td>Abukhalifeh &amp; Som (2012)</td>
<td>Service quality management in the hotel industry</td>
<td>SERVQUAL approach</td>
<td>The application of Parasuraman's model: loyalty is directly gained from service quality dimensions, and when higher service quality is perceived, this will turn into loyalty.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prinsloo (2014)</td>
<td>The efficacy dimensions of TQM and their relationship to the 4- to 5-star grading of guest houses in the Western Cape.</td>
<td>Qualitative approach</td>
<td>High service quality is significant in retaining customers, constant improvement of service quality levels will get sustained customer retention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The relationship between service quality, customer expectation and customer perception

According to Machado (2014), most of the customers of any company have assumptions or expectations when dealing with the company. Customer expectations are views about service delivery, standards, or reference opinions to which performance is compared (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Service quality is customers' perceptions of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations (Pride & Ferrell, 2012). When assessing quality service, customers compare their perceptions of performance with these reference points. Because customers compare their perceptions of performance with these evaluative reference points, knowledge about customers' expectations is essential for service marketers (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Companies are conscious of delivering a quality
customer service and know that they must first be aware of the customer's expectations and recognise them; then, more essentially, how to meet and satisfy the customers (Machado, 2014). The first and probably most serious phase of delivering service quality is knowing what the customers expect (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Therefore, companies must identify what customers expect and improve their service products to meet or exceed these expectations (Pride & Ferrell, 2012; Dilotsotlhe & Duh, 201). Meeting customer expectations is difficult and it may be tough to attain (Machado, 2014). Unable to meet a customer's expectations means losing a customer's business when a different company succeeds with the same target (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Customers change and develop their expectations; this makes it hard for companies to meet them continuously (Machado, 2014).

There is a relationship between customer expectation, service quality, and perception. As customers always expect quality service, they are satisfied when their expectations are met, creating a positive customer perception. For example, a gentleman went to stay in a hotel in Johannesburg for the weekend because he had heard from his friend about their quality service. Once he got there, he had a great experience, starting from the reception to the housekeeper and the hotel's restaurant. They offered him a quality service that met his expectations and created a positive perception.

Research and Methodology

Method of research

The approach used in this study was qualitative and exploratory, as the purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of hotel customers in terms of service in the hotel industry in Pretoria. Considering that there is a lack of knowledge about this subject, this approach enabled the researcher to understand the perception of customer service in the hotel industry in Pretoria. Creswell (2014) explained that in qualitative research, researchers collect data by examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants. Furthermore, qualitative methods facilitate data collection when other measures do not exist and provide a deeper understanding of the concepts (Dieudonne, 2014).

Sampling method

The sample size is defined as the number of elements involved in the study, and the nature of the research influences the sample size (Malhotra, 2015). Therefore, the sample size in this study depended on saturation. This meant that when gathering qualitative data, the researcher realised that no fresh data sparked new insights or revealed new properties and decided to terminate the process of data collection (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the participants had to be between 18 and 65 years. In an exploratory research design, such as qualitative research, the sample size is usually small, while in quantitative research, such as a descriptive survey, the sample size is large (Malhotra, 2015). A sample unit was composed of customers from one selected hotel in Pretoria; therefore, there were 25 participants, and the hotel's customers were chosen according to their convenience and depending on data saturation.

Data collection technique

The researcher collected data through interviews with selected customers at one hotel in Pretoria. Data were collected through structured face-to-face interviews, which was appropriate for an exploratory study as it allowed the participants (interviewees) to express their perceptions regarding the subject under research sincerely and enabled them to provide answers in their own words without any restriction from the interviewer. Similarly, the researcher used a device to record the interviews. Firstly, the interviewer asked for permission from the participants to use a device (a recorder) during the interview process. Secondly, the interviewer described the study's primary objective to the participants. Thirdly, the researcher informed the participants that they had the right to, at any time, discontinue the interview process if they wanted to do so. Lastly, the participants were informed about their safety and that no information would be used against them after participating in the interview.

Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a process that goes hand in hand with other parts of developing the qualitative study, specifically data collection and the write-up of the findings (Creswell, 2014). Babbie (2014) defined qualitative data analysis as analysing data without converting it into a numeric format. Moreover, Creswell (2014) argued that the researcher may analyse the interview conducted, writing memos that may ultimately be included as a narrative in the final report. The researcher used the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti in this study. Creswell (2014) asserted that computer analysis software assists in data analysis because using a hand-coding technique is time-consuming. Petrova (2017) further established that Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software electronically provides more flexibility in how coded data (whether that is text, images, videos, etc.) are viewed and analysed. Software designed to analyse qualitative data has the increased capacity to retrieve, sort, and interrogate unstructured data in ways that were impossible with pencil and paper (Bazeley, 2013).

Findings and Discussion

Reason for visit

The participants had different reasons for staying in the hotel – this may be for business, pleasure, or other reasons. Evidently, the participants stayed in the hotel for business and pleasure. The identification of one participant as a student attending classes at one of Pretoria's universities was another significant aspect. The participant always stayed in the hotel for one week, once a month.
Participant 7: “I am attending classes at the university as a part-time active, so I come for a week once a month, and that week I always stay here.”

Customer service in the hotel

Excellent customer service is vitally important in all businesses. This means customer service establishes the connection between the client and the hotel’s service delivery (Kimanuka, 2014). Figure 2 provides a graphic representation of the five codes developed from this theme from Atlas.ti. These include service delivery, value for money, customer expectation, hotel service change, and service quality; each code will be discussed in more detail.

Figure 2: Customer service; Source: This figure was exported directly from Atlas.ti

As a result, the hotel must ensure that any changes made maintain the service at a high standard. In this regard, if employees change, hiring highly skilled individuals who can deliver high-quality service to the customers is essential. Hotels must consistently prioritise delivering high-quality service to their customers as they place great importance on the level of service provided. Customers anticipate receiving a service of high quality that justifies the amount of money they spend. Customers’ expectations are met when their wants and needs are satisfied.

Service delivery

Service delivery is those aspects of the service experience that involve direct interaction between the customer and the service provider (Rauch, 2015). Therefore, service is challenging to evaluate. Quality should, therefore, be a common concern for guests and hotel service providers (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014).

Participant 2: “The quality of their service is first-class.”

Participant 4: “Personnel is very good.”

Participant 7: “The first time I came here, they welcomed me with a warm hand like they showed me the place and did some sort of introduction, and everyone was friendly.”

According to some participants, the service delivered in the hotel was good and quick, and the staff were accommodating. Other participants said they would return to the hotel because of the good service they received. The participants noted that the hotel offers an available and punctual shuttle service; the participants could get fast transport to go anywhere they wanted to, and it was always on time. The parking service delivered was also good. It should be noted that no extra money was charged to the participants for parking. The participants were treated well during their stay in the hotel; therefore, they felt that the service delivery from the hotel was excellent because of the employees’ friendliness and helpfulness. It was evident that the hotel delivered exceptional service. Hotels should always ensure service quality is delivered to their customers, as customers are very concerned about service delivery.

Value for money

According to Machado (2014), customers perceive price as the cost, time, and effort they must put in to receive the desired benefits. The author also stated that customers regularly expect that a high price equates to excellent quality and a low price to low-quality offerings.

Participant 1: “To me, service quality is when you pay, you have money, and you expect to get what you paid for.”

Participant 3: “I mean, as a customer, I always believe that you are delivering a service, and I am paying for the service.”

Participant 5: “Service quality should mean that you have value for your money.”

Participant 5: “The physical environment is fine; the value of the money you pay is okay.”
Participants considered the money they paid as the cost of staying in the hotel; however, they expected to receive quality service, which meant value for their money. As indicated, the participants valued their stay at the hotel. They felt that the service and the hotel’s environment were well worth the price they paid to stay there. It should be noted that, according to the participants, when customers pay, they expect to receive a service quality that is worth their money.

Customer expectation

Customers are satisfied when the hotel meets their expectations (Kotler, 2015). Customers might opt to stay there if the hotel’s service surpasses their expectations (Rather & Camilleri, 2019). One participant mentioned that the service in the hotel was excellent and that he was treated like a king. Other participants stated that the service they received met their expectations. They expected to sleep in a comfortable room, receive help with what they needed, and receive quality service from the service provider.

Participant 1: “In the hotel, you expect to be served well; in the hotel, you expect to be treated like a king; this is exactly what they are doing here.”

The participants further indicated that they expected to receive good service, which included a clean room, a shower and bath in good condition, good service in the restaurant, a television in the room, and being treated like a king. In general, customers felt that the hotel services had met their expectations, while some felt the service provider had even exceeded them. It appeared that most of the participants had their expectations met. However, a participant with a family did not agree. They were expecting a cooking facility in the room or being given a choice about the kind of food they liked or were used to eating since they were staying for an extended period. Customers’ expectations are met when their needs are met. Hotels should always ensure that the needs of their customers are met.

The change of service in the hotel

A participant visiting the hotel mentioned that nothing ever changes there. The service has been good, and the employees are still friendly, but everything has been just the same since the first day they went there. A participant mentioned that the hotel had not changed, but compared to 10 years ago, it had improved the rooms and kept up the standard. A participant also mentioned that the hotel has merged with another hotel group, which has maintained both the hotel's standards and its improvements.

Participant 1: “It has not changed; I mean, it has always been the best. Since I started from day one, food is nice, people are nice, and barmen are nice. And people who come here are friendly.”

Participant 2: “It’s still the same; it hasn’t changed. Instead of what they do here, they have refresher courses in the bar and kitchen.”

Participant 15: “As I said, I have been here for the past ten years. I have also seen the company change hands, but I haven’t felt anything in terms of quality or anything. You know you should come here in the summer evening and walk down here, and you will see a nice garden; it is so beautiful. The whole place has a lot of plants outside.”

The respondents showed that the hotel has maintained the standard of service delivery. Some participants have never noticed any change in the hotel’s services, while others have seen changes. Any changes made to the service have been positive, like the change of the hotel name, employees, renovation of the rooms, and when the hotel merged with another hotel. Therefore, the hotel should ensure that the change keeps the service up to standard. For example, if they change employees, they must hire qualified people who provide excellent customer service. Should they renovate, it must be up to standard to meet the customers’ needs. Should they merge with another hotel or change the franchise, they need to make sure that the other hotel’s policies align with their own concerning the standards of services delivered.

Service quality

Service quality is a comparison of a service’s perceived expectations (E) with its perceived performance (P). Therefore, there is service quality when the perceived service exceeds the customer’s expectations (Dubey & Sahu, 2019). When assessing quality service, customers compare their perceptions of performance with specific reference points.

Some participants defined service quality differently: the value they get for their money, first-class service quality, service that is up to standard, or a friendly employee that makes the customers feel like they are at home.

Participant 1: “To me, service quality is when you pay, you have money, and you expect to get what you paid for. So, in that sense, I only come to this hotel. I think since 1991, I have been a customer at this place.”

Participant 6: “Definitely, it is important; service quality is the quality of service you receive; obviously, you pay for quality and staying.”

Participant 7: “For me, service quality is like a friendly employee who makes us feel at home and understands what I am getting here.”
Participant 8: “Service quality means that you get good attention, your queries are adapted to, and when you go to the restaurant, you get good service there, good food, cleanliness, and good service in the room. Coming back in the evening, the room is smelling good, the air conditioner is important to me, and the TV is nice; those things make your stay nice.”

Participant 16: “Quality of service is like today the standard is at this level and tomorrow the standard is out. The approach of all employees here, the ability of the transport to work, the way the driver greets the guests in the morning, and politeness. Good quality is evidence.”

Participant 18: “Service quality means you don’t wait for a long time, you don’t have to call a waiter, and the waiter must make his way around to your table to check if you are fine with everything, even if you are done eating. He must clear the table as soon as possible.”

Other participants explained that service quality is getting good attention and an excellent response to customers’ queries; it is when the customer is satisfied with the service, he/she received. Another participant highlighted that service quality occurs when the customer experiences a sense of freedom and comfort within the hotel and receives comprehensive information about the hotel upon arrival at the front desk. A participant explained that service quality is achieved when everything in the hotel is in good working condition, like the lifts, light switches, and irons. The participant also highlighted the importance of the restaurant’s food and drink quality and the hotel’s cleanliness standards. Other participants mentioned that service quality is essential and means a lot to them. Therefore, they may come back to the hotel and would be willing to refer others to the hotel if they received good service. Evidently, the hotel provided quality service; some participants were willing to return and recommend the hotel to others in their network.

Service quality is essential to the customers, as they experience service quality when the perceived service meets what they expect.

Conclusions

This study explored the perception of customer service in the hotel industry in Pretoria. It is worth noting that the lack of service quality in the hotel industry in Pretoria can negatively affect customers’ perceptions of customer service. In the same vein, this situation could result in customer dissatisfaction. The staff’s lack of friendliness, poor response to requests, an unsatisfactory internet services, and environmental factors like noise and the air conditioning in the passage all contributed to this. Participants who expressed dissatisfaction developed a negative perception of the hotel’s service. The hotel should attend to service failures and train staff to always be friendly to guests. Customers also consider service quality to be a means of meeting their expectations. Some customers determined that the service quality was worth the money they paid. Others value the service by how they are treated, the room service, the quality of the food, and the hotel’s response time. Some customers prioritise the hotel’s safety above all else. The hotel should, therefore, ensure that they meet the expectations of their customers and go beyond those expectations. The hotel should know what their customers are expecting in order to meet their needs. Therefore, if a service provider delivers quality service, the customer’s expectations are met.

The perception of customer service plays a vital role in the hotel industry because it can contribute to improving the hotel industry in Pretoria. In this study, the perception of customer service from the participants who have been in the hotel and have experienced the hotel’s service was analysed. The study’s findings revealed that customers form perceptions based on the services provided in the hotel. Of the participants who visited the selected hotel in Pretoria, most were South African citizens, and only a few others were foreigners from other African countries. The hotel welcomes a diverse range of customers from different backgrounds. Most participants were at the hotel for business, and only a few for pleasure. It should be important for the hotel to ensure service delivery to all customers with different backgrounds, as they are all concerned about the quality of services provided in the hotel. Customers expect to receive service quality that is good value for their money; this includes a comfortable, safe, clean room, responsive and helpful employees, and safety in the hotel. Therefore, the hotel industry must deliver services that meet the expectations of its customers. It is important to note that the participants evaluated the hotel’s service differently, with the majority expressing satisfaction with the quality they expected. This has established their satisfaction and led to their positive perceptions of service quality in the hotel. As a result, they will spread positive word-of-mouth communication to their network, and some have developed a feeling of “being home” in the hotel.

The study was limited to the perception of customer service in the hotel industry in Pretoria. The researcher collected the data from one selected hotel in Pretoria, conducting interviews with 25 customers available for their convenience. The participants were customers who had stayed in the hotel for at least one night. The participants were all adults between the ages of 18 and 65. Therefore, the results could not apply to all the customers of the selected hotel or all the hotels in Pretoria, so they cannot be generalised. Given the qualitative nature of the research study, future studies on this topic should employ a mixed-methods approach to investigate customer perception in the hotel industry.

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