

SERVICE QUALITY IN HOSPITALITY ESTABLISHMENT - A COMPERATIVE STUDY OF TWO RESTAURANTS IN BUEA SUBDIVISION

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ABSTRACT

When a customer enters a restaurant or any eatery house he/she has an ideal expectation of the service he/she expects to receive, service quality therefore measures how well a service is delivered compared to customer expectations. Businesses that meet or surpass customers' expectations are considered to have high service quality and high return over other businesses. A hospitality business, i.e., restaurants, etc., should therefore conduct regular assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the client's expectations and they should do this in order to improve their services, to quickly identify problems, and to better assess client satisfaction if they want to stay in business or be competitive in the market place. Customers expect service providers to be reliable and they believe that it is important to be reliable than have shiny new equipments or flashy uniforms, therefore service providers can use SERVQUAL dimensions in determining specific customer and site needs. The service quality model (SERVQUAL model) was used to compare two restaurants in the Buea subdivision and both primary and secondary research method was used to collect information. The result obtains from the comparative study of the two restaurants; indicates that service quality is largely based on reliability and responsiveness.

Keywords: Service, Quality, Service Quality, Servqual Model, Service Industry.

INTRODUCTION

The service industry plays an increasingly important role in the economy of many countries and in today's global competitive environment delivering quality service is considered as an essential strategy for success and survival. Service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of specific dimensions of service: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, Empathy, tangibles. Satisfaction, on other hand, is more inclusive: it is influenced by perceptions of service quality, product quality, and price as well as situational factors and personal factors (<http://www.serviceperformance.com>).

This research paper is aimed at reviewing, evaluating and comparing service quality in two restaurants; all situated in Buea Subdivision, South West Region - Cameroon. This study seeks to clarify the perception that customers do

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have concerning service quality in the restaurants businesses when compared with what is observed in the field and this could lead to the improvement of services rendered to customers as well as help to retain them. This research tries to suggest important dimensions of service quality that customers do expect or gives them satisfaction, recommendations were made. SERVQUAL model was the model that used to measure the types of service quality been offered in both restaurants.

BACKGROUND OF BUEA SUBDIVISION AND THE TWO RESTUARANTS

Buea, a small historic town located at the foot and eastern slopes of Mount Cameroon, the highest mountain in west and central Africa was ones the capital of German Kamerun during German colonial rule, capital of Southern Cameroons under British colonial rule, the capital of the Federated State of West Cameroon, and now regional capital of the South West Region. The location of Buea at the foot of Mount Cameroon and the proximity of the town to the Atlantic coast of Cameroon, result is a humid climate. Upper elevations of the town tend to be cool and cloudy, while lower elevations tend to be much warmer and less humid. As in most of the rest of Cameroon and it experiences dry and wet seasons. The dry season runs from November to February and the rainy season from March to October. Rainfall in Buea is on average much more than the rest the country. During the rainy season, the town experiences extended periods of drizzle and fog which sometimes last for weeks, and sometimes heavy downpours which tend to last for not more than a few hours. The average temperature is mild, between 23°C and 25°C (<http://www.ubuea.cm>).

RHEMA Restaurant is located at the University of Buea junction - Molyko, opposite Njei Forbi Bakery; it has one of the best locations for an eatery- just besides the University junction and close to the main road (<http://www.wasamundi.com>).

ULICS FOOD is located in Bonduma, Main Street directly opposite the public tap at Bonduma and this food outlet comprise of a restaurant and bar services and takeaway services are also available. Ulics food specialises in African and European dishes (<http://www.wasamundi.com>).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality can be seen as the gap between the expected service and the actual perceived service received by the customer. Though there is disagreement among researchers about the measurements of service quality, several instruments or measurements have been developed to do so, such as SERVQUAL Model. The SERVQUAL scale or model has become the most popular instrument for measuring service quality and this model has been applied in various service industries including tourism and hospitality (Abam, 2017). The SERVQUAL model consists of five dimensions, namely: empathy, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and tangibility. It evaluates customer's perceptions of service quality and that is based on the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions. 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 (<http://www.businessdictionary.com>).

Service providers benefit by establishing internal service level agreement

(SLAs) for things like returning phone calls, emails and responding on-site and whether it's 30 min, 4 h or 24 h, it's important customers feel providers are responsive to their requests not just emergencies, but everyday responses too (<http://www.serviceperformance.com>).

Jay (2009) suggest that employees have to develop stronger role in customers loyalty and performance and need to have best skills and feel competent in their jobs, whereas managers have to use feedback to evaluate employees performances and correct them when need do arise through short courses and training. It is critical for managers to understand their customer's perceptions of services. What distinguishes the features of its service styles are the power on which an organisation's image and its brand are build, its services must be consistent (Abam, 2017).

Reid & Bojanic (2010) in their study of hospitality marketing management concludes that successful firms are using customer's perception of service quality so as to set performance standards rather than relying solely on operationally defined standards for service quality meanwhile Liu (2006) concludes that the evaluation of service quality should not embrace only the service delivered, but also the manner in which this service is delivered. In the hospitality industry, perceptions of service quality rely heavily on the development of positive perceptions of the host. However, because of the increasing competitiveness for international marketplace, service quality is seen as providing edge of competitive advantage.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An empirical tactic is the collection and analysis of data and this could be quantitative or qualitative, primary or secondary as no research is purely empirical; it is usually informed by some sort of theory or conceptual frame work. Some researchers are of the view that a single research technique may use both quantitative and qualitative techniques and procedures in grouping as well as use primary and secondary data. The quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analysis procedure each have their own strength and weaknesses (Veal, 2006). For this research work both primary and secondary methods of data collection was use, primary data was information gotten from the said hospitality institutions (Rhema and Ulics restaurants) through the service quality model while secondary research method entails information that was gotten from their websites.

FINDING AND ANALYSIS

This comparative research on service quality two restaurants (Rhema restaurant and Ulic Food) all situated at Buea subdivision. Information that concern service quality evaluation was noted as the researcher visited these two food outlet in Buea subdivision. The information obtained was analysed using the SERQUAL MODEL to assess their performances as shown on the Table 1.

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Table 1. Showing a comparative study of two restaurants in Buea subdivision using SERVQUAL model.

Dimensions	RHEMA RESTAURANT	ULIC FOOD (RESTAURANT)
Reliability	Services delivered on time, exactly what was seen on their posters or billboards	Services were not delivered on time as was seen on their posters or billboards
Assurance	Employees have a good knowledge of products and strong brand name	Employees have a good knowledge of products and weak brand name
Tangibility	Staff properly dressed, attractive facilities, no sticky tables and dirty toilets as they were not taken care of as seen on their notice board	Staff poorly dressed and assorted colors also noticed and facilities not attractive, sticky tables and dirty toilets
Responsiveness	Frontline staffs or employees willingly help customers and provided prompt services as promised.	Frontline staffs willingly help customers and provided services after a long waiting period
Empathy	Greater attention to customers, understands customers' needs, listen, patient and good eye contact	Greater attention to customers, understands customers need, listen, eye contact ok, patient, suggested another meal that matched what the consumer wanted

Source: fieldwork

Reliability refers to the ability to provide the service as it was promised on a regular basis. It is very important that businesses are able to fulfill the service that they advertise.

Responsiveness or responding to customers in a timely manner is another dimension that affects service quality. It is very important that businesses are prepared to respond to customers quickly.

Tangibles are the physical features of the service being provided, such as the appearance of the building, cleanliness of the facilities and the appearance of the personnel. Even though this is the least important dimension, appearance matters, though it is not just as much as the other dimensions, service providers will still want to make certain their employees appearance, uniforms, equipment and work areas on-site.

Assurance: Service providers are expected to be the experts of the service they're delivering.

Empathy: Services can be performed completely to specifications, yet customers may not feel that service providers or employees care about them during delivery. And this hurts customers' assessments of providers' service quality.

CONCLUSION

When a customer perceives a high value or service, the results is that they become loyal and may talk about these services or his experiences to friends and

relatives and these service businesses will have better turnover. From this comparative study, service quality is largely based on reliability and responsiveness, this reliability and responsiveness in the hospitality industry (hotels and restaurants) have made significant and positive impacts on customer's satisfaction.

RECOMMENDATION

In order to provide better service quality and keep customers as well as get a good business return, management of both restaurants should endeavor to regularly improve on the skills of employees through short courses, training and orientation sessions.

Management should be able to get feedback from customers regarding the quality of services provided to them and be able to work hard to improving services where they fall short. Managers should make sure that toilets in these restaurants are check and cleaned about every 30-40 min, for there is a popular saying 'if the toilets are dirty so too is the kitchen'. Also there should be someone who should be responsible for cleaning of tables and all dirt within the restaurant areas.

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