MEASURING QUALITY IN RESORT ACCOMMODATIONS

Dennis A. Rauch; Coastal Carolina University; Conway, SC 29528
Robert D. Nale; Coastal Carolina University; Conway, SC 29528
Michael D. Collins; Coastal Carolina University; Conway, SC 29528
Peter B. Barr; Glenville State College; Glenville, WV 26351

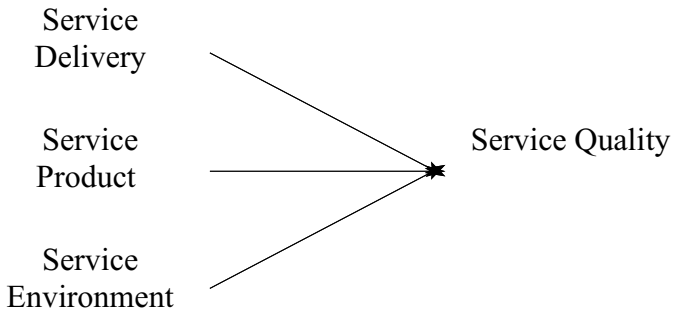
ABSTRACT

This brief paper reports on research conducted to develop a methodology to measure service quality in the resort accommodations industry. The measurement of Service Quality in general will be briefly discussed as well. This will be followed by a description of an approach adapted from the Information Systems literature [3] based on work by Rust and Oliver. [5] Finally, the approach will be applied and its reliability and validity will be evaluated.

RESORT ACCOMMODATION QUALITY MEASUREMENT

A number of factors influence consumers' perceptions of quality in service encounters. SERVQUAL [4] perhaps the most widely researched and applied methodology, suggests five: 1) tangibles, 2) reliability, 3) responsiveness, 4) assurance, and 5) empathy. However, research has shown these factors to be unstable in practice [1]. Rust and Oliver [5] propose three: 1) service delivery, 2) service product, and 3) service environment. These three form the basis for the proposed model of accommodation service quality which is illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1



Service delivery is defined as those aspects of the service experience that involve direct interaction between the customer and the service supplier; for example, making reservations or checking in. The service product would be the actual service itself; for example, the use of the room and amenities. The service environment refers to the appearance and condition of the facilities, personnel, etc. that are part of the service encounter.

DATA

The data used in this study come from proprietary studies conducted for ten resort hotels in a major Southeast beach destination. Managers from these hotels developed twenty seven items on which they wanted to evaluate their performance as perceived by their guests. The items were as follows:

1. Reservations System a. Reservation Ease b. Accuracy of Your Reservation c. Courtesy of Reservationist 2. Check-in/Check-out a. Check -In/Check-Out Speed b. Accuracy c. Courtesy of the Staff 3. Physical Facilities (Grounds, land-scaping, parking, outside areas, pools, etc. a. Cleanliness b. Maintenance 4. Room Accommodations a. Cleanliness b. Maintenance 5. Overall Courtesy of Hotel Staff	6. Amenities a. Restaurant b. Lounge c. Beach Area d. Fitness/Sports Facilities e. Indoor Pool f. Outdoor Pool g. Sauna/Whirlpool h. Conference Facilities I. Gift Shop j. Parking 7. Services/Programs a. Baby Sitting b. Courtesy Airport Pickup c. Room Service d. Golf Packages e. Summer Children's Program 8. Location in the area

A self administered questionnaire was sent to recent guests who were asked to rate their accommodations on these items on a seven point quality scale from "Very Poor" to "Excellent." Respondents were also asked to rate how well their hotel met their expectations and the overall value for the money on a similar scale. Additionally, they were asked to indicate if , given the opportunity, they would return.

RESULTS

The twenty-seven items were subjected to a principle components analysis and a Varimax rotation. Three factors emerged. The results are presented in Table 1. Two items - parking and golf packages - did not load cleanly on any factor and will be excluded from further analysis. The three factors appear to confirm with Rust and Oliver. [5] Factor one contains the facilities and programs that one would think of as the service product. Factor two contains the points of contact with the service provider. And, factor three is made up of the service environment items.

TABLE 1

	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3
Conference Facilities	0.84504	0.14001	0.20199
Indoor Pool	0.83179	0.13804	0.17295
Baby-sitting	0.81392	0.26893	0.08559
Gift Shop	0.79726	0.17877	0.16063
Fitness/Sports Facilities	0.79699	0.14040	0.24750
Lounge	0.77590	0.19206	0.23240
Room Service	0.77536	0.31525	0.21366
Sauna/Whirlpool	0.77001	0.23095	0.19595
Airport Pickup	0.75440	0.31942	0.08804
Outdoor Pool	0.74504	0.24938	0.29495
Kids Programs	0.72701	0.29881	0.13679
Restaurant	0.71252	0.26422	0.23217
Beach Area	0.68790	0.20580	0.18633
Location	0.55464	0.39013	0.24542
Parking	0.40112	0.35507	0.33451
Reservation Courtesy	0.25312	0.78991	0.23208
Reservation Accuracy	0.23498	0.78240	0.12867
Check-in/out Accuracy	0.20835	0.77748	0.26440
Res. Ease	0.28750	0.77309	0.17372
Check-in/out Courtesy	0.21299	0.73973	0.37160
Check-in/out Speed	0.20555	0.68235	0.20434
Staff Courtesy	0.27610	0.60934	0.53740
Golf Packages	0.42796	0.49741	0.24807
Facilities Maintenance	0.25985	0.26836	0.86039
Facilities Cleanliness	0.26320	0.29249	0.83791
Room Maintenance	0.26528	0.32860	0.83092
Room Cleanliness	0.27953	0.33545	0.81093

In order to test the validity of the instrument, factor scores must be calculated. Because so few people used and rated the conference facilities, kid's programs, baby sitting, room service, and airport pickup, they will be dropped from further analysis. When these items are left in their missing values reduce the effective sample size from 2511 to fewer than 250. The recalculated factor structure is presented in Table 2. All the remaining items loaded cleanly on the appropriate factors with 70.3% of the variance explained.

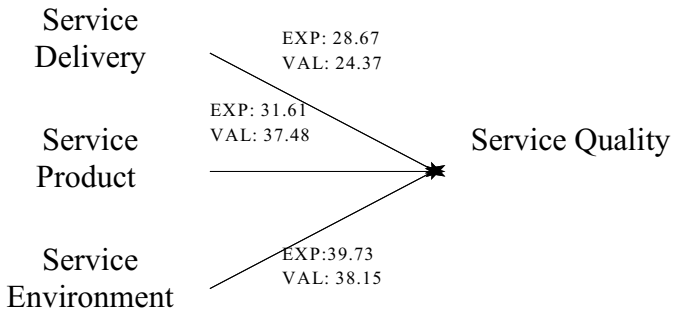
TABLE 2

	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3
Indoor Pool	0.83244	0.18745	0.16499
Sauna/Whirlpool	0.80605	0.23351	0.20475
Fitness/Sports Facilities.	0.79643	0.17002	0.21679
Outdoor Pool	0.76744	0.24162	0.26955
Gift Shop	0.76021	0.16760	0.17044
Lounge	0.75084	0.20790	0.20763
Beach Area	0.67813	0.23674	0.23023
Restaurant	0.67190	0.25824	0.25358
Location	0.50775	0.38854	0.18341
Check-in/out Accuracy	0.19295	0.81165	0.18207
Reservation Courtesy	0.23897	0.78619	0.21957
Check-in/out Courtesy	0.24276	0.77844	0.26779
Reservation. Accuracy	0.17812	0.75552	0.19425
Check-in/out Speed	0.20166	0.75525	0.15639
Res. Ease	0.26213	0.72493	0.19800
Staff Courtesy	0.33731	0.63697	0.45346
Room Maintenance	0.26347	0.29458	0.83053
Room Cleanliness	0.28148	0.32289	0.82393
Facilities Maintenance	0.34942	0.26651	0.82356
Facilities Cleanliness	0.35681	0.29510	0.79813

An examination of Table 2 reveals that, with the exception of location, all the items load highly on their respective factors and low on the others. In addition, the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct is .794, .830, and .943 for factors 1 through 3 respectively; thus, establishing convergent validity for the scales. [2] Discriminant validity can not be tested because of the orthogonal nature of the factors. However, if a non-orthogonal (Promax) rotation is applied the correlations among the factors are in the .52 to .57 range; still lower than any square root of the average variance explained for any factor. [2] Cronbach's alpha was calculated to establish internal consistency. They are .945, .935, and .929 for factors 1 through 3 respectively.

Having established the reliability and validity of the scales, the model must be tested. SERVQUAL uses the differences between expectations and perceptions of performance as the measure of quality. Here we use a direct measure of how well expectations were met as well as perceptions of overall value for the money as proxy measures for service quality. All variables were standardized and the factors were regressed against "Met Expectations" and "Overall Value". The resulting regression coefficients are Betas which when squared sum to R^2. Dividing these squared Betas by R^2 yields the portion of explained variance due to each factor. For "Met Expectations" the variance explained is 69.2% ($p<.0001$) and for "Value" it is 53.8% ($p<.0001$.) Figure 2 shows the portion of variance explained for each construct (all betas $p<.0001$.)

FIGURE 2



CONCLUSION

The results indicate that service delivery, service product, and service environment are good predictors of service quality measured as expectations met and perceived overall value. From the ACCOMMODATIONS service provider standpoint, a close examination of the various performance items identified earlier will allow each property to make more well-informed decisions which might make a more positive impact on certain key items. In other words, spending may be more easily prioritized in such a way as to achieve more leveraged results regarding consumer perceptions and, ultimately, their decision to return. Further testing and refinement of the model are currently underway to improve variance explained.

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