



Research Article

Service quality and customer delight in the hospitality sector of Pakistan

Muhammad Yasir¹, Noreen Kanwal², Muhammad Asad Khan^{3*}

^{1,2}Sunway Business School, Sunway University, Sunway City, Malaysia

³Department of Management Science and Commerce, Bacha Khan University, Charsadda, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author email: muhammadasadkhan@bkuc.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigates the relationship between service quality and its dimensions with customers' delight in the hospitality sector of Pakistan. Using a convenient sampling technique, data was collected through a survey questionnaire in order to examine customers' hotel experiences. Returned and usable questionnaires were 157. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, common method bias, reliability and correlation analysis. Results of this study showed a positive link between service quality and customer delight in the context of Pakistani hotels. Finally, implications, limitations and future research suggestions are provided.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary business era, the service industry has emerged as the driving force of economic development (Gurmani et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021). Particularly, the notion of customer delight has started to receive attention from practitioners and scholars (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). Delight indicates the maximum level of customer satisfaction thereby exceeding a customer's expectations (Anabila et al., 2022). Thus, the hotel service providers should provide positive service experiences thereby positively influencing customers' emotions for instance joy and pleasure which are important factors of a service delight (Magnini et al., 2010). That is why, customer perceptions of service quality are widely recognized as a crucial basis for shaping positive attitudes toward restaurants (Chow et al., 2007; Wu & Mohi, 2015).

In order to improve business performance, the service providers need to consider and assess customers' perception of service quality which the business is providing thereby positioning themselves at a higher place in the competitive market (Jain & Gupta, 2004). As previous literature shows that the researchers and practitioners need to examine the work environment of organizations (Yasir et al., 2017). Thus, it is very much necessary for a service provider to pursue competitive advantages thereby providing quality service (Desfitrina et al., 2019). According to Zeithaml et al. (1988), service quality is the customers' judgment of the overall superiority or excellence of the service. That is why, researchers and



practitioners are increasingly interested in investigating the significance of providing excellent services specifically in the context of hotels (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005; Wilkins et al., 2007). Moreover, Parasuraman et al. (1988) highlighted that service quality has five dimensions, for instance: tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy. As previous literature examined the association between service quality in relation to loyalty in different service contexts (Fullerton, 2005; Thaichon & Quach, 2015), however, customer delight has received less attention (Anabila et al., 2022; Coetzee & Coetzee, 2019). Thus, this research aims at investigating the effect of service quality (its dimensions) on customer delight in the context of hotels in Pakistan.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality is defined as the perceived efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided by an organization (Salamah et al., 2022). Service quality is recognized as the result of customers' overall assessment of a service provider, which involves comparing their expectations with the quality they perceive (Wu & Mohi, 2015). Previous literature shows five dimensions of service quality: tangibility (physical appearance of service), reliability (consistency and dependability of performance), empathy (paying attention individually and passionately), assurance (increase of confidence and trust), and responsiveness (willingness to serve provision on time) (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

2.2. CUSTOMER DELIGHT

The fulfillment of expectations results in customer satisfaction, while surpassing expectations creates customer delight (Christ-Brendemühl & Schaarschmidt, 2020). The distinction between satisfaction and delight lies in the element of surprise (Jiang, 2020). Delight includes joy, arousal, and pleasure, which can be heightened by surprise; consequently, the delightful experience is more memorable than a merely satisfactory one (Berman, 2005; Jiang, 2020). However, literature also shows that the element of surprise is not necessary for customers to experience delight, making it a more achievable objective for organizations. (Barnes et al., 2011; Chitturi et al., 2008). Thus, scholars have not reached a consensus on a unified conceptualization of delight (Christ-Brendemühl & Schaarschmidt, 2020; Finn, 2012). Recently, Ball and Barnes (2017) extended the definition of delight from not only surprise and joy to also include other positive emotions for instance gratitude. Thus, organizations have more avenues for delighting their customers (Barnes & Krallman, 2019). Lastly, this study is having following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: Service quality is positively and significantly related to customer delight.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the current study, the hospitality sector was selected as limited literature exists in the context of the hospitality sector of Pakistan (Khan et al., 2022; Ullah et al., 2021; Yasir & Javed, 2024; Yasir et al., 2022). Data from 157 hotel customers' was collected through a self-

administered questionnaire. The current research used a convenient sampling technique. Prior studies have also utilized convenient sampling methods in the Pakistani services sector (Khan et al., 2021; Ullah et al., 2021; Yasir & Jan, 2023). Service quality was measured using a scale provided by Parasuraman et al. (1988), having 21 items. Customer delight was measured using a scale provided by Anabila et al. (2022), having 4 items. Items were anchored at a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree”.

4. ANALYSIS

In the current research, the following analyses were conducted.

4.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

The following Table 1 highlights the demographic details of this research.

Table 1. Demographic description (N 157)

Demographic		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	110	70.100
	Female	47	29.900
	Total	157	100.000
Age	<30 years	32	20.400
	30 to 40 years	104	66.200
	40 to 50 years	21	13.400
	Total	157	100.000
Experience	1 to 5 years	84	53.500
	5 to 10 years	70	44.600
	>10 years	3	1.900
	Total	157	100.000
Education	Graduate	87	55.400
	Postgraduate	70	44.600
	Total	157	100.000

4.2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 2 shows the understudy descriptive statistics. The mean value varies between the lowest value of 2.4427 and highest value of 2.7818 of responsiveness and tangibility respectively.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics (N 157)

Construct	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev
Service Quality	1.570	4.100	2.575	.582
Customer Delight	1.750	4.500	2.723	.656
Reliability	1.400	4.400	2.619	.710
Responsiveness	1.250	4.250	2.442	.597
Assurance	1.000	4.500	2.479	.697
Empathy	1.500	4.250	2.541	.648
Tangibility	1.500	4.500	2.781	.757

4.3. COMMON METHOD BIAS

The Harman single factor analysis was examined thereby to analyze common method bias in this study. Table 3 highlights an overall variance of 39.8%, which is less than the 50% threshold.

Table 3. Harman single factor (N 157)

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	Percentage of Variance	Cumulative Percentage	Total	Percentage of Variance	Cumulative Percentage
1	10.538	42.152	42.152	9.966	39.864	39.864
2	1.977	7.910	50.062			
3	1.478	5.911	55.973			
4	1.346	5.384	61.357			
5	.980	3.922	65.279			
6	.889	3.558	68.836			
7	.801	3.202	72.038			
8	.738	2.953	74.991			
9	.678	2.712	77.703			
10	.634	2.535	80.237			
11	.592	2.368	82.605			
12	.552	2.207	84.812			
13	.500	2.001	86.813			
14	.472	1.887	88.700			
15	.406	1.624	90.324			
16	.349	1.395	91.719			
17	.340	1.359	93.078			
18	.321	1.283	94.361			
19	.267	1.068	95.429			
20	.238	.954	96.383			
21	.228	.911	97.294			
22	.218	.874	98.168			
23	.196	.785	98.953			
24	.149	.596	99.549			
25	.113	.451	100.000			

4.4. RELIABILITY

The Cronbach alpha value for service quality was 0.93, responsiveness was 0.73, reliability was 0.81, assurance was 0.79, empathy was 0.77, tangibility was 0.82 and customer delight was 0.80, hence, values are within the acceptable range (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010).

4.5. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Table 4 indicates the correlation analysis.

Table 4. Correlation (N 157)

Construct	Service Quality	Customer Delight	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Tangibility
Service Quality	1						
Customer Delight	.656**	1					
Reliability	.876**	.504**	1				

Construct	Service Quality	Customer Delight	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Tangibility
Responsiveness	.827**	.524**	.603**	1			
Assurance	.879**	.562**	.756**	.666**	1		
Empathy	.860**	.520**	.655**	.721**	.737**	1	
Tangibility	.809**	.678**	.627**	.609**	.581**	.596**	1

Table 4 illustrates a significant and positive relationship exists between service quality (its dimensions) and customer delight.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research investigated the relationship between service quality and customer delight in the context of the hospitality sector. Results of the current research indicate a positive link between service quality (its dimensions) and customer delight. Therefore, the understudy hypothesis is accepted. Current study findings are also in line with the prior literature which shows a positive association between service quality and customer delight (Anabila et al., 2022).

The current study has several implications. For instance, the service quality of the hotel plays an important role in order to make customers delighted. Thus, top management and the managers of the hotels need to focus on the service quality of the hotel, for example, the ambiance and décor of the hotel, physical facilities, appearance of personnel, providing prompt service, courtesy of employees, and customers care will contribute towards delighted customers. The current research also contributes to the existing literature and addresses the literature gap related to the link between service quality (its dimensions) and customer delight.

The current research has some limitations and future research suggestions. For instance, the understudy sample size is only from the hotels located in Islamabad, Pakistan, therefore, more studies are suggested to be conducted in other sectors and countries. The current research framework does not have any moderator or mediator; therefore, further research is required in order to examine the underlying mechanisms between service quality and customer delight. Lastly, this research used a convenient sampling technique and has a low sample size, thus, future research is required thereby to use a more robust sampling technique and have a higher sample size.

Author Contributions:

Conceptualization, Muhammad Yasir and Noreen Kanwal.; methodology, Muhammad Asad Khan.; software, Muhammad Yasir.; validation, Noreen Kanwal and Muhammad Asad Khan.; formal analysis, Muhammad Yasir.; investigation, Noreen Kanwal.; data curation, Muhammad Asad Khan.; writing—original draft preparation, Muhammad Yasir.; writing—review and editing, Noreen Kanwal. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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