Quality of Front Office Services of Hotels in Tarlac City

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the quality of front office services of selected hotels in Tarlac City using the SERVQUAL model. Specifically, it aimed to: (1) describe the profile of selected hotels in terms of selected operational characteristics; (2) assess hotel guests' expectations and perceptions of front office service quality across the dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; and (3) determine the service quality gaps between guests' expectations and perceived service performance.

A descriptive research design was employed. The respondents consisted of 100 hotel guests from four purposively selected hotels in Tarlac City. Data were collected using a structured SERVQUAL-based questionnaire that measured both expectations and perceptions of front office services. Descriptive statistical tools, including frequency distribution, weighted mean, and SERVQUAL gap analysis, were used to analyze the data.

Results revealed that guests' expectations exceeded their perceptions across all five SERVQUAL dimensions, with responsiveness and reliability exhibiting the largest negative gaps. This indicates delays in service delivery and inconsistencies in fulfilling service commitments, while smaller gaps in tangibility, assurance, and empathy suggest generally satisfactory but improvable front office performance.

The study concludes that front office services of selected hotels in Tarlac City require continuous improvement to fully meet guest expectations. The novelty of this study lies in its focused application of the SERVQUAL model to front office operations in a developing city context, providing department-specific insights that support more targeted service quality improvements.

Keywords: Front Office Services; Service Quality; SERVQUAL; Hotel Industry; Customer Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary hospitality industry, service quality has become a decisive factor influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational sustainability (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2017). As hotel markets grow increasingly competitive, differentiation is achieved not only through physical amenities but also through the quality of interpersonal services delivered by frontline employees. Service quality is particularly critical in the hotel industry where service encounters are frequent, intangible, and highly dependent on human interaction (Grönroos, 2007).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985, 1988) conceptualized service quality as the discrepancy between customers' expectations and their perceptions of actual service performance. This expectation–perception framework, commonly known as the SERVQUAL model, has been widely adopted in hospitality research due to its diagnostic value in identifying service quality gaps and guiding managerial interventions.

The front office department is regarded as the nerve center of hotel operations (Andrews, 2008). It handles reservations, guest registration, information dissemination, billing, and check-out procedures. Because of its extensive guest contact, the front office significantly shapes guests' first and last impressions and overall evaluation of hotel service quality (Bardi, 2011). Consistent with previous hospitality studies, service quality dimensions—particularly reliability and responsiveness—have been found to significantly influence hotel guest

satisfaction and repeat patronage (Choi & Chu, 2001). Previous studies have identified common front office service challenges such as delayed responses to guest requests, inadequate problem resolution, and inconsistencies in service delivery as key contributors to guest dissatisfaction (Weissinger, 2003).

Tarlac City, a developing tourism and business hub in Central Luzon, Philippines, has experienced steady growth in hotel establishments. As competition intensifies, hotels are compelled to continuously evaluate and enhance their front office service quality to meet rising guest expectations.

Specifically, this study sought to: (1) determine the profile of selected hotels in Tarlac City, Philippines; (2) assess hotel guests' expectations and perceptions of front office service quality in terms of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy; and (3) explain the discrepancy between expectations and perceptions of actual front office service performance.

Despite the growing body of literature on hotel service quality, empirical studies that focus specifically on front office operations at the departmental level remain limited, particularly in the context of developing cities in the Philippines. Most existing studies examine overall hotel service quality, thereby overlooking the distinct and critical role of the front office as the primary interface between hotels and their guests. Given that many guest complaints, service failures, and satisfaction judgments originate at the front desk, a focused assessment of front office service quality is both necessary and timely.

Moreover, as hotels in Tarlac City, Philippines continue to serve a diverse clientele composed largely of business and transient guests, understanding the alignment between guest expectations and actual front office service performance becomes increasingly important. This study addresses this gap by applying the SERVQUAL model exclusively to front office services, allowing for a more precise diagnosis of service quality gaps that may not be evident in broader assessments. The findings of this study are therefore expected to provide hotel managers with actionable, department-specific insights that can support targeted service quality improvements, enhance guest satisfaction, and strengthen the competitiveness of hotels operating in emerging tourism destinations.

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was employed. The respondents consisted of 100 hotel guests from four purposively selected hotels in Tarlac City. These hotels were selected based on location, operational maturity, presence of formal front office departments, and managerial consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the identities of the participating hotels were not disclosed. This approach was adopted to protect institutional privacy while ensuring the validity and reliability of the data collected.

Data were gathered using a SERVQUAL-based questionnaire measuring expectations and perceptions across five service quality dimensions. Descriptive statistics and SERVQUAL gap analysis were utilized.

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study, including informed consent of respondents, voluntary participation, and assurance of confidentiality of responses. Data collection was conducted during guests' stay or upon check-out to ensure accurate assessment of actual front office service experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To provide a clearer understanding of the operational context in which front office services are delivered, the profile of the selected hotels was first examined. Hotel characteristics such as location, number of rooms, years in operation, and type of clientele are considered important contextual variables that describe the setting of front office operations.

As noted in front office management literature, these characteristics help explain the nature of front office activities and service demands encountered in hotel operations (Andrews, 2008; Bardi, 2011). Establishing the profile of the selected hotels therefore provides a necessary background for interpreting guests' expectations and perceptions of front office service quality, which are discussed in the succeeding section.

Profile of the Selected Hotels

Table 1. Profile of Selected Hotels in Tarlac City

Profile Variable	Category	Interpretation
Location	City-based	Hotels are strategically located, resulting in higher expectations for efficient front office service.
Number of Rooms	Small to medium-sized	Requires effective coordination among front office staff to ensure service consistency.
Years in Operation	Several years	Indicates operational maturity and established front office procedures.
Type of Clientele	Business and transient guests	Necessitates prompt, accurate, and professional front office transactions.

Table 1 shows that the selected hotels are established and strategically located within Tarlac City. These characteristics imply elevated guest expectations, particularly in terms of speed, accuracy, and professionalism of front office services.

The profile of the selected hotels shows that the establishments share similar characteristics in terms of location, size, years of operation, and type of clientele. This similarity indicates that the hotels operate under comparable conditions, particularly in front office operations. As noted in front office management literature, hotels with similar operational settings and clientele tend to follow comparable front office procedures and service routines (Andrews, 2008; Bardi, 2011).

Moreover, the predominance of business and transient guests suggests that front office services are frequently time-sensitive and transaction-focused. Previous studies emphasize that such guest segments require prompt and accurate front office transactions, especially during check-in and check-out periods (Weissinger, 2003). The operational maturity of the selected hotels, as reflected by their years in operation, further suggests that front office activities are guided by established procedures, providing a stable context for examining guests' expectations and perceptions of service quality.

Guests' Expectations and Perceptions of Front Office Services

Table 2. Guests' Expectations and Perceptions of Front Office Service Quality

SERVQUAL Dimension	Expectation Mean	Perception Mean	Interpretation
Tangibility	4.30	4.05	Facilities and staff appearance were satisfactory but slightly below expectations.
Reliability	4.35	3.95	Inconsistencies were perceived in service accuracy and dependability.
Responsiveness	4.40	3.90	Guests perceived delays in responding to requests and concerns.
Assurance	4.25	4.00	Staff courtesy was evident, though confidence and professionalism can be enhanced.
Empathy	4.20	3.98	Personalized attention was present but did not fully meet expectations.

Table 2 presents the mean scores of guests' expectations and perceptions of front office service quality across the five SERVQUAL dimensions. Results show that guests reported high expectations in all dimensions, with expectation means ranging from 4.20 to 4.40. The highest expectation mean was recorded for responsiveness (4.40), followed by reliability (4.35), indicating that guests place strong importance on prompt service and

dependable front office transactions. These findings are consistent with service quality literature, which emphasizes responsiveness and reliability as critical components of hotel front office performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Andrews, 2008).

In terms of perceptions, mean scores ranged from 3.90 to 4.05, suggesting that guests generally viewed front office services as satisfactory. However, perception scores were consistently lower than expectation scores across all SERVQUAL dimensions. The lowest perception means were recorded for responsiveness (3.90) and reliability (3.95), indicating that guests observed delays in service response and occasional inconsistencies in service accuracy. Similar observations have been reported in hospitality studies, where front office responsiveness is often identified as a common service challenge, particularly during peak periods (Weissinger, 2003).

Meanwhile, tangibility (4.05), assurance (4.00), and empathy (3.98) obtained relatively higher perception scores, suggesting that guests were generally satisfied with physical facilities, staff courtesy, and personalized attention. Nevertheless, these dimensions still did not fully meet guest expectations, as reflected in the gap between expectation and perception means. As noted by Parasuraman et al. (1988), such gaps indicate areas where service performance may be improved to better align with customer expectations.

Overall, the results in Table 2 indicates that while front office services were perceived positively, there remains a consistent shortfall in meeting guest expectations, particularly in responsiveness and reliability. These findings provide important context for the service quality gap analysis presented in the succeeding section.

Service Quality Gap Analysis

Table 3. SERVQUAL Gap Scores and Ranking

Dimension	Gap Score (P–E)	Rank	Interpretation
Responsiveness	-0.50	1	Largest gap, indicating delayed service response.
Reliability	-0.40	2	Reflects inconsistency in fulfilling service commitments.
Tangibility	-0.25	3	Minor gaps in facilities and equipment.
Assurance	-0.25	3	Need to strengthen staff confidence and communication skills.
Empathy	-0.22	5	Smallest gap, indicating relatively better personalized service.

Table 3 explains the discrepancy between guests' expectations and perceptions. All SERVQUAL dimensions yielded negative gap scores, confirming that service performance fell short of guest expectations, particularly in responsiveness and reliability.

The findings affirm the SERVQUAL gap model, which posits that service quality deficiencies arise when perceived performance does not meet customer expectations. The pronounced gaps in responsiveness and reliability underscore the importance of promptness and accuracy in front office operations.

The relatively smaller gaps in tangibility, assurance, and empathy suggest that while physical facilities and staff courtesy are generally acceptable, guests continue to expect higher levels of professionalism and individualized attention. These results indicate the need for targeted front office training, clear standard operating procedures, and continuous service performance monitoring.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Based on the results presented in Table 1, the selected hotels in Tarlac City are established, city-based accommodations catering primarily to business and transient guests. Their years of operation and strategic

locations indicate operational maturity and sustained demand, which consequently heighten guest expectations for efficient, accurate, and professional front office services. These hotel characteristics underscore the critical role of the front office department in meeting service expectations in a competitive hospitality environment.

2. As shown in Table 2, hotel guests demonstrated high expectations across all five SERVQUAL dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. While guests' perceptions of front office services were generally satisfactory, they consistently fell below expectations. This indicates that although front office staff and facilities meet acceptable standards, the level of service delivered is insufficient to fully satisfy guest expectations, particularly in service performance and interaction quality.

3. The findings in Table 3 reveal the presence of service quality gaps across all SERVQUAL dimensions, confirming discrepancies between guests' expectations and perceptions of actual service performance. Responsiveness and reliability registered the largest negative gap scores, indicating that delays in service response and inconsistencies in fulfilling service commitments are the most critical issues affecting front office service quality. Conversely, empathy exhibited the smallest gap, suggesting relatively better performance in personalized service, although further improvement remains necessary.

Overall, the study concludes that front office services of selected hotels in Tarlac City are generally satisfactory but require continuous and targeted improvements. Addressing service quality gaps—particularly in responsiveness and reliability—through enhanced staff training, standardized operating procedures, and effective performance monitoring is essential to improve guest satisfaction and strengthen hotel competitiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Given the operational maturity and city-based location of the selected hotels, it is recommended that hotel management further enhance front office operational efficiency. It is suggested that front office staffing schedules be reviewed and adjusted during peak service periods, and that workflows be streamlined to ensure timely and accurate guest transactions, particularly for business and transient clientele.

2. In view of the gap between guests' expectations and perceptions across all SERVQUAL dimensions, it is recommended that hotels implement continuous front office service quality improvement initiatives. It is suggested that regular service evaluations and customer feedback mechanisms be conducted, complemented by periodic training programs focused on professionalism, communication, and customer engagement.

3. Considering that responsiveness and reliability registered the largest service quality gaps, it is strongly recommended that hotels prioritize these dimensions in front office operations. It is suggested that clear response time standards be established, standard operating procedures be reinforced, and front office personnel be empowered to address guest concerns promptly and accurately.

It is recommended that hotels may adopt a systematic and department-focused approach to front office service quality management to sustain guest satisfaction and enhance competitiveness in Tarlac City.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the conduct of the study. The research involved human participants, and all ethical standards for social science research were strictly observed. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process. No identifying information of respondents or participating hotels was disclosed, and all data were used solely for academic and research purposes. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences. The researchers declare that there were no conflicts of interest associated with the conduct and reporting of this study.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and ethical restrictions involving human participants and participating hotel institutions. However, the data may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and consent requirements.