

Full Length Research Paper

Do Botswana's restaurants meet customers' expectations?

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The purpose of this paper is to assess perceptions of service quality in Botswana's restaurants. The methodology used was a survey employing modified SERVQUAL instrument to suit the Botswana environment. Perceptions of 166 diners on the quality of service were solicited. The major findings of the study were that Botswana's restaurants only meet customers' expectations in the tangible areas; there were, however, significant differences between the expectations and experiences in the intangible aspects of SERVQUAL. The study was limited to the restaurants and did not extent to other tourism sectors. Since this is one of the few studies to address service quality in the hospitality sector, it can be used for future comparative studies in other sectors of the tourism industry. The deficiencies in the quality of service point to the fact that workers in the tourism and hospitality industry need to be more professionally trained in order to increase the competitiveness of the industry. The paper contributes to the understanding of SERVQUAL from an African perspective. The study also contributes to the growing field of cross-cultural studies which show the globalization of customer interests.

Key words: Botswana, Africa, service quality, restaurants, destination competitiveness, customer behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Botswana has acknowledged the role that tourism plays in its economic development. Consequently, the Botswana government has put in place legislation and policies which promote tourism. As Table 1 shows, tourism in Botswana has grown tremendously over the years to become the second income earner after mining (WTTC, 2007). Table 1 shows an average growth rate of 8.4% between 1994 and 2009. Its direct contribution to Botswana's gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to be 4.3% (WTTC, 2007) and the contribution of the travel and tourism economy to employment is expected to rise from 10.3% of total employment to 11.8% of total employment by 2020. Botswana tourism recorded 1, 499,794 in international arrivals and 2.9 billion pula in receipts.

However, Botswana has only recently opened up tourism and hospitality training institutions which help equip employees with the necessary skills to operate in the tourism industry, thereby meeting customer expectations. Botswana has also adopted a tourism philosophy of "high cost and low volume" which has meant that paying for the trip is deliberately made expensive to discourage the development of a mass market (Mbaiwa,

2005). However, the policy has its own drawbacks. High costs should also translate into a high quality of service. To satisfy such a market niche and remain competitive, it is important that customers are profiled so that their needs and wants are not only met but are also exceeded.

Problem statement

Tourism is the world's fastest growing industry. Though challenged by the economic recession, the tourism industry is witnessing a rebound in tourist numbers as witnessed by expansion in emerging countries-as both generating and destination regions (WTTC, 2007). In general, prospects for the growth of tourism globally are positive. Tourism in Botswana is not exempt from this trend.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2007) (WTTC), Botswana is weak in the human resource areas. For example, it has one of the highest HIV/AIDS infections in the world with a life-expectancy of 40 years. Moreover, the education system is considered inadequate to adequately equip employees with the required

Table 1. Tourist arrivals in Botswana 1994-2009.

Year	Arrivals	Growth rate (%)
1994	463, 196	-
1995	521, 041	12.5
1996	512, 118	-1.7
1997	606, 781	18.5
1998	749, 544	23.5
1999	831, 875	11.0
2000	923, 250	11.0
2001	1, 193, 399	29.3
2002	1, 273, 814	6.7
2003	1, 405, 985	10.4
2004	1, 522, 847	8.3
2005	1, 474, 421	-3.2
2006	1, 425, 994	-3.3
2007	1, 455, 151	2.0
2008	1, 499, 794	3.1
2009	1, 552, 611	3.5
Average annual growth Rate (%)	8.4%	

Source: Department of tourism, 2009.

skills. It was against this background that a study of this nature was felt to be necessary. Few studies have, however, focused on customer expectations of service in Botswana (Mmopelwa et al., 2007; Thapisa, 1999, Sebusang and Moeti, 2005). The paper pursued the following objectives:

- (1) To explore diners expectations and experiences of the quality of service in Botswana's restaurants;
- (2) To explore the extent to which Botswana's restaurants meet customers' expectations.
- (3) To explore whether there are significant differences between expectations and experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research undertaken in other parts of the world has confirmed the importance of adopting a customer-oriented culture for the long-term success of any business enterprise (Iraqi, 2006; Briggs et al., 2007; Parasuraman et al., 1988). The benefits of a customer-oriented culture are enormous (Hsieh et al., 2008; Benitez et al., 2007). It enhances the organisation's reputation of offering quality service (Gonzalez et al., 2007). Dissatisfied customers tend to "bad mouth" the company thereby driving away potential customers. Whereas, highly satisfied customers become loyal to the organisation (Kincaid et al., 2010; Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Loyal customers are less price-sensitive, and increase revenue for the organisation (Briggs et al., 2007;

Hudson et al., 2004; Heung, 2000). Delighted customers on the other hand help in the increase of a customer base for the organisation through word-of-mouth advertising of the organisation's services to friends, relatives and other acquaintances (Kotler, 2000; Ekinci et al., 2003).

Several instruments have been developed to measure the quality of service in the tourism industry. One of the very first to be adapted to the tourism industry was SERVQUAL which was originally developed by Parasuraman et al (1988). SERVQUAL uses five dimensions to measure the quality of service (Table 2).

Tourism researchers have, however, criticized SERVQUAL as cumbersome to administer (O'Neill and Palmer, 2001) and not appropriate for the tourism Industry hence the need to develop instruments that would be appropriate to the tourism industry (Caro and Garcia, 2008; Martin-Cejas, 2006). Despite these criticisms SERVQUAL remains a valid and reliable instrument to measure the quality of service in any service industry because the five empirical factors in the model are generic and therefore valid and reliable for any service organization (Albacete-Saez et al., 2007). This study extended and modified the SERVQUAL instrument to suit the Botswana environment, especially the restaurants.

METHODOLOGY

A pilot study was undertaken in Gaborone on a group of University of Botswana employees (10 lecturers and 10 support staff). The

Table 2. SERVQUAL framework.

Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Physical appearance of facilities	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately	Willingness to help the customers	Knowledgeable staff	Displaying caring attitude to customers
Equipment		Provision of prompt service	Courteous staff	Individualized attention to customers
Personnel			Staff ability to convey trust	
Communication material				

Source: Parasuraman et al. (1988).

Table 3. SERVQUAL dimensions in Botswana restaurants.

Tangibles	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Comfortable and clean seating area	Staff offer informed advice	Short waiting period	Trustworthy staff	Individual attention to customers
Appropriate décor	Efficiency in billing system	Job knowledge	Friendly and courteous staff	Willingness to handle special requests
Attractive food presentation	Consistency in serving customers		Enthusiasm about their job	Staff enthusiasm to serve
Appropriate equipment	Well trained and experienced staff	Complaints attended to quickly	Knowledge about the menu	Can answer queries and questions completely
Appearance of staff		Quick solving of problems		
		Restaurants action on customer suggestions		

aim of the pilot study was to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. A reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was performed resulting in a robust alphas of .96 and .93 respectively. An alpha of 0.7 or greater is acceptable as a good indication of reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). The results of the pilot study were used to refine the questionnaire that was finally adopted for the study.

A descriptive survey design methodology was adopted. Data were collected using a questionnaire. The study targeted a sample of two hundred diners at restaurants around Botswana. One hundred and sixty six questionnaires were completed yielding 80% return rate. The questionnaire measured the five key dimensions of SERVQUAL (Table 3). Respondents were asked to use a 7-point Likert scale to evaluate the extent to which they expected the restaurants to conform to the dimensions listed and also the extent to which restaurants actually met their expectations.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A asked demographic data and elicited respondents' expectations/perceptions of a quality restaurant using a 7-point Likert scale. Section B asked them to use the same scale to rate the restaurant they had visited. The questionnaire was randomly distributed to diners. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that different types of restaurants found in Botswana were represented.

Data analysis

SPSS was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics were used to identify frequencies, means, and the standard deviation. Paired t-tests were used to compare the mean score of the expected level with the mean score of the perceived level on the 24 hospitality service attributes. The significant p value was set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Demography

The results showed that more men than women ate in restaurants since 61% of the respondents were male. When respondents were classified by age, the median was diners falling in the age group of 21 to 40 years (70%), followed by 41 to 60 (18%), below 21 (10%) and the least represented were those who were over 61 years with only 2%. The respondents were predominantly local.

Table 4. Popular restaurants in Botswana.

Name of restaurant	Number	Percentage	Type of menu
Kentucky Fried Chicken	29	18.7	Chicken
Nandos	22	13.2	Chicken
Wimpy	14	8.4	Mixed
Hungry Lion	11	6.6	Chicken
The Braai Place	11	6.6	Mixed
Barcelos	7	4.2	Chicken
Chicken Lickin	7	4.2	Chicken
Bimbos	6	3.6	Mixed
Fish monger	6	3.6	Fish
Street food	4	2.4	Beef and chicken
Dros	4	2.4	Mixed
Spurs	3	1.8	Beef
News cafe	3	1.8	Mixed
Okavango	2	1.2	Mixed
Max Frango	2	1.2	Mixed
Primi Piatti	2	1.2	Pasta mainly
Grill Master	2	1.2	Beef
Raja	1	0.6	Indian food
Caravella	1	0.6	Mixed
Kwest	1	0.6	Mixed
Debonairs	1	0.6	Pizza
Requim	1	0.6	Mixed
Gaborone Hotel	1	0.6	Mixed
Gaetsho restaurant	1	0.6	Mixed
Indian restaurant	1	0.6	Indian food
Moghul	1	0.6	Indian food
Mu and Bean	1	0.6	Coffee and mixed
Nox restaurant	1	0.6	Mixed
Total	155	100	

Botswana citizens represented 70% of the respondents. Respondents from other African countries represented 28% of the sample, and those from outside Africa represented 2% (2 Americans, 2 Asians and 1 European). The largest percentage of respondents (55%) earned between P7000-10,000 a month, 20% earned between P3000-P6000 a month, 20% earned below P3000 a month, the smallest percentage (5%) earned over P10000 a month.

Popularity of restaurants in Botswana

Respondents were asked to list their favourite restaurant (Table 4). According to the sample of this study, fast-food restaurants were more popular than traditional restaurants. This did not differ from similar studies where it was observed that fast food restaurants by their very nature offer convenience for the customers because the waiting time is much shorter than in a traditional sit-in restaurant (Brown, 1990). Among the take-away

restaurants, Kentucky Fried Chicken was the most popular as demonstrated by 17.4% who listed it as their favourite restaurant. Nandos ranked second with 13.2%. It is important to note that both Nandos and KFC are regional and international franchises respectively. This was not surprising considering the fact that the participants in study earned relatively higher salaries when compared to the rest of the Botswana population where it is estimated that 45% of the population earn less than one USA dollar a day (US\$ = P7.70). Also interesting to note about the results is the type of food preferred by Botswana diners. The results show that Botswana diners prefer chicken menus compared to other types of dishes. Wimpy, was the exception. It is dining-in restaurant which came 4th in the ranking of favourite restaurants. The competitive advantage of Wimpy is that it offers diners a variety of menus including breakfast menus. Also, it offers a variety of children's menus and has a children play ground which specializes in a variety of children's games and other supervised activities for children. For traditional restaurants, Dros

Table 5. Results of paired t-tests between foreigners' expectations and experiences of Botswana's restaurants

Restaurant attributes	Expectation mean	SD	Experience mean	SD	Mean difference	t-value	Significance (two-tailed)	Dimension
Enthusiastic about their job	5.07	1.40	6.69	0.61	-1.62	11.94	0.000	Assurance
	4.48	1.75	6.46	0.88	-1.98	8.12	0.000	
Knowledge of menu	4.58	1.80	6.78	0.70	-2.20	12.12	0.000	Responsiveness
	4.18	1.86	6.72	0.62	-2.54	8.77	0.000	
Short waiting period	4.95	1.73	6.30	1.23	-1.35	7.78	0.000	Responsiveness
	4.75	1.94	6.36	1.12	-1.61	5.45	0.000	
Comfortable and clean seating area	6.60	0.90	5.45	1.49	1.15	7.78	0.000	Tangibles
	6.61	0.93	5.34	1.42	1.27	4.76	0.000	
Décor appropriate	5.71	1.84	5.24	1.57	0.47	2.67	0.086	Tangibles
	6.26	1.74	5.00	1.26	1.26	4.37	0.003	
Appearance of staff	6.51	0.86	5.64	1.42	0.87	6.17	0.000	Tangibles
	6.43	0.94	5.47	1.22	0.96	5.65	0.000	
Friendly and courteous staff	5.25	1.54	6.80	0.68	-1.55	-9.94	0.000	Assurance
	5.00	1.83	6.81	0.58	-1.81	6.24	0.000	
Trustworthy staff	3.80	2.03	6.88	0.49	-3.08	15.83	0.000	Assurance
	4.58	2.19	6.76	0.64	-2.38	6.80	0.000	
Restaurants acts on customer suggestions	3.54	2.00	5.94	1.51	-2.40	-11.51	0.000	Responsiveness
	3.45	1.88	6.02	1.18	-2.57	7.16	0.000	
Staff can answer questions completely	4.01	2.08	5.44	1.89	-1.43	6.42	0.000	Empathy
	4.18	1.86	6.72	0.62	-2.54	8.77	0.000	
Job knowledge	4.78	1.52	6.87	0.48	-2.09	14.30	0.000	Responsiveness
	4.61	1.52	6.73	0.49	-2.12	-9.46	0.000	
Staff enthusiasm to serve	5.07	1.40	6.69	0.61	-1.62	11.94	0.000	Empathy
	4.48	1.75	6.46	0.88	-1.98	8.12	0.000	
Attractive food presentation	5.34	1.63	6.21	0.61	-0.87	9.12	0.764	Tangibles
	5.47	1.41	6.01	0.63	-0.54	6.07	0.509	
Well trained and experienced staff	4.45	1.68	6.42	0.93	-1.97	12.02	0.000	Reliability
	4.61	1.41	6.71	0.63	-2.10	-9.46	0.000	
Consistency in serving customers	4.92	1.45	6.81	0.41	-1.89	-13.85	0.000	Reliability
	4.20	1.62	6.75	0.61	-2.55	10.81	0.000	
Appropriate equipment	5.99	1.51	6.00	1.25	-0.01	-.059	0.796	Tangibles
	5.67	1.35	5.79	1.44	-0.12	.589	0.559	
Efficiency of billing system	4.88	1.81	6.32	1.21	-1.44	9.77	0.000	Reliability
	4.18	1.84	5.46	1.60	-1.28	4.11	0.000	

Table 5. Contd.

Complaints attended to	4.99	1.56	6.74	0.60	-1.75	14.17	0.000	Responsiveness
	4.84	1.72	6.72	0.54	-1.88	7.35	0.000	
Quick solving of problems	4.51	1.63	6.68	0.80	-2.17	14.40	0.000	Responsiveness
	4.47	1.50	6.68	0.70	-2.21	10.64	0.000	
Staff offer informed advice	4.58	1.80	6.78	0.70	-2.20	12.12	0.000	Reliability
	4.18	1.86	6.72	0.62	-2.54	8.77	0.000	
Adequate security	5.15	1.74	6.89	0.41	1.47	6.50	0.367	Assurance
	5.23	1.68	6.60	1.02	-1.37	4.44	0.000	
Individualized attention to customers	4.45	1.68	5.95	1.47	-1.50	8.52	0.000	Empathy
	4.60	1.82	6.16	1.13	-1.56	5.83	0.000	
Willingness to handle special requests	4.08	2.10	5.87	1.64	-1.79	9.37	0.000	Empathy
	4.58	2.01	6.20	1.37	-1.62	4.89	0.000	

First column under restaurant attributes represents citizens and second column represents foreigners. SD= Standard deviation, T-test= assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other.

was the most popular restaurant. Spurs, News Café and Okavango all came third. Again traditional restaurants were least popular as they were only mentioned by one person (Raja, Caravella, Kwest, Requin, Gaborone, hotel restaurant, Gaetsho, Indian, Moghul, Mug and Bean and Nox restaurant). The author was surprised though that Debonairs which is a pizza take away restaurant was the least popular among the respondents of the study.

Customers' perception of service quality

The findings of the study are presented in Table 5. The table compares views of Botswana and foreigners. Table 5 shows that there are high expectations on restaurants in Botswana. This was confirmed by the average mean of 6 on a 7-point Likert scale.

Tangibles

There were 6 factors measured under tangible, that is comfortable and clean seating areas, décor appropriate, appearance of staff, attractive food presentation, and appropriate equipment. The perceptions of both Botswana and foreigners show restaurants to be meeting the expectations of customers on most factors. In three of the five factors, comfortable and clean seating area; appropriate décor, and appearance of staff, had a positive mean difference between expectations and perceptions. Where there was a negative mean, for example, food presentation (-0.87 for Botswana, -0.54 foreigners), appropriate equipment (-0.01(Botswana), 0.12 (foreigners) the differences between the means were relatively small in comparison to the means of the other dimensions. What is important to note is that the differences between means were not statistically

significant (staff appearance, attractive food presentation). Table 3 has shown that respondents of this study frequented take away restaurants. Take-away restaurants do not normally present their food. Customers order on the basis of a pictorial presentation on the wall and the final product is presented to the customer in a carry bag. So tangibles were not a big issue among the respondents.

Assurance

The respondents' perceptions on assurance were based on three factors: trustworthiness of staff, friendly and courteous staff and enthusiasm about their jobs. Botswana's restaurants performed dimly in this dimension. In fact, the worst score was from one of the factors under this dimension, "trustworthy staff" which had a mean difference of

-3.08 (Botswana), -2.38 (foreigners) and was statistically significant. Botswana's restaurants did not meet customer expectations in the other characteristics; they were perceived to be rude and hostile to customers. In addition, they were perceived not to be interested in their jobs (as seen for the statement "friendly and courteous staff" and "enthusiastic about their jobs"). The mean differences were -1.55 (Botswana), -1.81 (foreigners) and -1.62 (Botswana), 1.98 (foreigners) respectively. The differences were also statistically significant. Customers had very high expectations of the restaurants in these dimensions. Restaurants were, however, performing below customers' expectations.

Responsiveness

According to the perceptions of the respondents of this study, Botswana's restaurants had incompetent staff. They tend to ignore customers' suggestions, and are ignorant of menus of the restaurants they worked for. They do not attend to customers' complaints, and therefore, problems remain unresolved. These are confirmed by the negative mean differences between expectations and experience and were also statistically significant. It is important to note that foreigners' rating of "responsiveness" was much lower than that of Botswana.

Reliability

The results from this dimension were in line with some of the factors under responsiveness (Table 5). Of particular note is the extremely low rating by foreigners of two dimensions- "well trained and experienced staff" with mean difference of -2.12 and "consistency in serving customers with mean difference of -2.55.

Empathy

Botswana restaurants received negative rating under this dimension. Again foreigners rated restaurants much lower than Botswana did with the exception of "willingness to handle special requests" where the rating by Botswana was lower than foreigners' rating.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The aim of this research was to investigate whether restaurants in Botswana offer quality service to customers. In particular, whether there were significant differences between expectations and experiences.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the findings are that Botswana's restaurants only meet customers' expectations in tangibles and perform below expectations

with regard to intangible dimensions. Customers are subjected to long waiting periods. Even if they try and make suggestions on how to improve the service, they feel that their suggestions are ignored. The results show that customers do not trust the restaurant staff. Without mutual trust customers will be reluctant to return to the restaurant because they do not believe in the information given by the service providers. The results show that employees are not well trained and experienced to work in the restaurants. This is indeed a critical element in the hospitality industry (Kvist and Klefsjo, 2006). Without trained and experienced staff it is difficult to deliver quality service (Tsau and Lin, 2004). Hence there are inconsistencies in serving customers.

Botswana suffers the deficiencies that have been observed in other parts of Africa. Poor service delivery is a region-wide problem. Christie and Crompton (2001) have noted that a shortage of suitably qualified and experienced personnel affects all aspects of the tourism sector in almost all the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries. Formal training in service delivery is a good start in preparing young Botswana to work in the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the government of Botswana charges a training levy for every tourist who visits a tourism and hospitality establishment in Botswana. This is the money that can be used to run executive development programmes for front line employees in the tourism and hospitality industry. Poor delivery of service impacts on Botswana's competitiveness as a tourist destination and should be of concern to the tourism industry (Yoon and Uysal, 2005).

What needs to be noted is that this study was limited to restaurants in Botswana and did not include other sectors of the tourism and hospitality industry, such as the accommodation sector, Museums and Monuments, private and national parks. Perhaps it is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies that compare various sectors of the tourism industry and how they can exceed customers' expectations and become a competitive tourism destination. In a nutshell, this study examines the views of diners at restaurants in Botswana; the findings suggest that restaurants met the expectations in tangible areas but fell short on intangible areas, that is customer service which was considered poor. The study has indeed demonstrated that restaurants lack the capacity to handle international tourists. The tourist industry is dependent on "word-of-mouth" advertising. Bad experiences can have a lasting effect on the country's competitiveness as an international tourist destination.

The deficiencies in the quality service point to the fact that workers in the industry need to be more professionally trained in order to increase the competitiveness of the tourism industry (Botswana Tourism Board, 2009).

In conclusion, the present study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on SERVQUAL, especially from a developing African country's perspective. The

study also contributes to the growing field of cross-cultural studies which show the globalization of customer interests.

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