The Impact of Front Office Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction: Evidence from Hospitality Sector in West Java

Ananta Budhi Danurdara[1], Nisrina Andranaswari Paramitha[2]

[1,2]Politeknik Pariwisata NHI Bandung
ananta_budhi@stp-bandung.ac.id

Abstract

This study aims to explain and explore the links between service quality and customer satisfaction, emphasizing front-office service quality, and to explore the effect of the service quality of front-office staff at the Hospitality Sector in West Java on customer satisfaction. This study uses qualitative methods and relies on primary data derived from questionnaire responses. The number of respondents is 215 guests who are currently staying or have stayed at Hospitality Sector in West Java. The sampling technique was carried out by purposive sampling. The analysis was done descriptively, and it shows the analysis of service quality, guest expectation analysis, guest satisfaction analysis, gap analysis between two variables, and correlation analysis. The results of the study concluded that customer satisfaction with the services provided by the front office staff of Hospitality Sector in West Java as a whole has only reached 69.45%. Customers are most satisfied with the tangible dimension (X5), followed by the reliability dimension (X1), empathy dimension (X4), assurance dimension (X3), and responsiveness dimension (X2). Based on the correlation tests, it was found that the service quality (X) of the front office at Hospitality Sector in West Java has a positive effect on customer satisfaction (Y). To increase customer satisfaction, it is suggested to Hospitality Management in West Java to make service improvements, especially in the responsiveness dimension (X2). Furthermore, the management of Hotel in West Java can conduct the training program on delivering service and repair or replace the equipment that used in the front-office area to ensure comfort for guests.

I. Introduction

Service quality is one of the important factors which support success in the business service environment, leading to customer satisfaction (Huang et al., 2019). Customer satisfaction itself depends on the product efficiency in giving relative value in the same manner as the customer expected to. As stated by Bergmann and Klefsjö (2004), quality begins from the customer's needs and ends in the customer's satisfaction. Also, Akbaba (2006) argues, improved understanding regarding what the customer wants is essential since it has a major impact on the success of the hotel itself. It follows logically that through the improvement of service quality, it is expected that the customer's satisfaction can also be improved (Lenka et al., 2009). Alternatively, poor service quality may cause customer dissatisfaction.

Service quality is an abstract and elusive concept because of its intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability which sets it apart from goods quality that can be

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measured by such indicators such as the number of defects (Crosby, 1979; Garvin, 1983). In this context, the SERVQUAL framework is considered an effective way to measure service quality within service sectors, emphasizing on the identification of gaps between customer expectations and satisfaction and the allocation of resources where maximum benefit can be achieved (Buttle, 1996; Butt and de Run, 2010). This framework consists of five dimensions which are tangibility, empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Development is a systematic and continuous effort made to realize something that is aspired. Development is a change towards improvement. Changes towards improvement require the mobilization of all human resources and reason to realize what is aspired. In addition, development is also very dependent on the availability of natural resource wealth. The availability of natural resources is one of the keys to economic growth in an area. (Shah, M. et al. 2020)

From the above considerations and from the perspective of hotel management, it follows logically that to meet customer needs and increase their satisfaction, hotels should develop service quality. This is particularly important for Front Office employees whose duties are to assist customers more intensely than other departments. In fact, their engagement with customers extends from arrival until departure time (Sulastiyono, 2006). As mentioned by Baum and Devine (2007), the front office employee has their responsibility of understanding their guests and deliver a high level of service quality.

The hotel is categorized as a business hotel based on the location, type of guests, and facilities provided. To provide support to the rationale of this study, the author conducted simple short pre-research about front-office service quality and customer satisfaction with 45 respondents staying at the hotel, for each month of the examined period (November 2020- January 2021). In this, respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with four statements. As illustrated in Table 1 the service quality provided by its front-office employees does not seem to satisfy all of its customers:

Table 1. Guest Comments at Hospitality Sector in West Java Period November 2020 – January 2021

No.	Comments	November 2020		December 2020		January 2021	
		Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
1	Front Office employees often do not showfriendliness when serving thecustomers, especially during hectic hours.	11 (24%)	34	9 (20%)	36	9 (20%)	36
2	Front officeemployees often are not responsive to guest requests.	9 (20%)	36	11 (24%)	34	9 (20%)	36
3	Front officeemployees often not provide a Complete explanation ofhotel facilities to the customers.	14 (32%)	31	14 (32%)	31	16 (36%)	29
4	The receptionist often serves guests during check-out for a long time and causing a long line at the front desk.	13 (28%)	32	11 (24%)	34	16 (36%)	29

Average Total	12 (26%)	33	11 (25%)	34	13 (28%)	32

Source: authors own pre-research data

Specifically, it can be seen that there were still some visitors who were dissatisfied with the friendliness, responsiveness, and explanation of hotel facilities of the front- office staff as well as with the long waiting times spent at the front-desk of the hotel. Taken together, these preliminary findings indicate that Front Office employees at Hospitality Sector in West Java did not satisfy customers with respect to three out of five dimensions that consist service quality, which are responsiveness, empathy, and reliability.

Previous studies have shown that service quality in business service sectors plays a vital role that businesses always want to improve (Tsang, 1991; Jones, 1996; Antony et al., 2004; Briggs et al., 2007; Wu and Ko, 2013). The author was able to identify a number of studies related specifically to Hospitality Sector in West Java (see Wahyuni and Kuswardhani, 2016; Nuranisa, 2018; Choirudin, 2018; Nurrachman, 2017; Harahap, 2016; Naphia, 2011). However, none of these studies examined service quality issues. Following these considerations and based on the fact that service quality is of utmost importance for businesses operating in a service context, the author decided to address the issue of Front-office service quality and customer satisfaction in the specific context of Hospitality Sector in West Java, which provides an appropriate research context.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Front Office

Hospitality is one of the world's most rapidly expanding service sectors (Ivasciuc and Brasov, 2014). In many ways, the hospitality industry and the tourism industry are inextricably connected. Hotels operate within the hospitality industry, providing a range of services. According to Lawson (1976) and Pendit (2005), hotels are places to stay in that provide visitors with a range of facilities and services, including room service, food and beverage services, and other hotel accommodation in exchange for payment. One of the most important departments within a hotel that plays a crucial role in dealing with visitors is the front office department.

The Front Office department is responsible for more than selling the hotel's main product, which is rooms. Front Office employees are responsible to give a good first impression to customers in order to create a comfortable feeling during their stay (Wagen, 1999). This statement is also supported by Soenarno (2006) who explains that a hotel will be directly perceived as a neat, big, and comfortable company when arriving customers and welcomed with great service from the employees. This suggests that Front Office employees have to be able to give a good service upon guest arrival, during the stay, and upon check out.

2.2 Service Quality

Consumers use a number of tangible cues to assess quality when they buy physical products such as product design, color, material, texture, package, brand name, and others (Djajadiningrat et al., 2004). On the other hand, consumers can only rely on some available cues when buying products in the form of services. Lukman (2011) defined service as a sequence of activities that occurs in direct interaction between a person and another that provides satisfaction in an intangible form. Services can only be consumed without

involving transfer of ownership. Thus, service capacity cannot be stored for sale in the future (Tjiptono and Chandra, 2005).

2.3 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most extensively researched subjects in the hospitality literature, owing to researchers' strong interest in quantifying it. (Deng et al., 2013; Rahimi and Kozak, 2015; Ali et al., 2016; Mathe et al., 2016; Oh, and Kim, 2017; Lee and Whaley, 2019; Prayag et al., 2019; Sharifi, 2019; Nunkoo et al., 2020). The word 'satisfaction' is derived from the Latin satis (quiet, good, adequate) and facio (doing or making). It can be translated as "the attempt to complete something" or "to render something satisfactory." Then, satisfaction is described as a function of work performance and expectation, and customers will be dissatisfied if performance falls short of expectations (Tse and Wilton, 1988; Sivadas and Baker- Prewitt, 2000; Gustafsson et al., 2005). Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction, according to Rust and Oliver (1994), is a "cognitive or affective reaction" that develops as a result of a single or repetitive sequence of service experiences.

III. Research Method

According to Sanapiah (2007), the aim of the methodology is to be able to discover new information that can be trusted by addressing a problem in an orderly and structured research approach. Secondary research is discussed in this chapter, followed by primary research conducted with the use of a questionnaire to collect quantitative data. The author provides details on how this research was conducted, concerning sampling, questionnaire development, and primary data collection. The data analysis method is also presented along with ethical consideration in the end.

IV. Result and Discussion

4.1 Respondent's Profile

The respondents of this study were customers who were staying or had stayed at the Hospitality Sector in West Java. A total of 215 respondents participated in this study. The profile of the respondents in this study are presented below.

Table 2. Composition of Respondents by Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	141	65,58
Female	74	34,42
Total	**215**	**100**

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

According to the table above, male respondents accounted for 141 people, or 65.58%, while female respondents accounted for 74 people or 34.42%. According to this composition, the majority of research participants are men.

Table 3. Composition of Respondents by Age

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
<20	14	6,67
21 – 30	65	30

31 – 40	97	45,24
> 40	39	18,10
Total	**215**	**100**

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

The majority of respondents are between the ages of 31 – 40, representing 45.24%, followed by those between the ages of 21 – 30 (30%).

Table 4. Respondents' Gross Monthly Income

Respondent's Gross Monthly Income	Number	Percentage (%)
Rp. 2.000.000	36	16,67
> Rp. 2.000.000 – Rp. 5.000.000	103	47,78
> Rp. 5.000.000 – Rp. 8.000.000	53	24,44
> Rp. 8.000.000 – Rp. 10.000.000	19	8,89
> Rp. 10.000.000	4.8	2,22
Total	**215**	**100**

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

The majority of respondents have a gross monthly income in the range of Rp. 2,000,000 - Rp. 5,000,000, accounting for 47.78%, followed by those with an income range of Rp. 5,000,000 - Rp. 8,000,000, accounting for as much as 24.44%. This demonstrates the guests are middle-class individuals with a good income, which is already higher than the regional minimum wage of Bandung.

Table 5. Respondent's Reason to use Hospitality Sector in West Java

Reason	Number	Percentage (%)
Private	29	13,72
Work Necessity	93	43,34
Family	68	31,82
Holiday	24	11,12
Total	**215**	**100**

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

Most respondents used Hospitality Sector in West Java for work necessity purposes (43.34%), followed by family purposes (31.82%) and private purpose (13.72%).

Table 6. The Frequency of Respondent's staying at Hospitality Sector in West Java

The Frequency	Number	Percentage (%)
Once in a month	18	8,52
2 – 4 times per month	31	14,34
≥ 5 times per month	22	10,01
Once in per 3 months	37	17,12
Twice per 3 months	21	9,54
Once in per 6 months	45	21,12
Twice per 6 months	23	10,54
Once in a year	19	8,81
Total	**215**	**100**

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

The highest number of respondents staying at Hotel in West Java was once in per 6 months (21.12%), followed by once in three months (17.12%), and 2 – 4 times per month (14.34%). This demonstrates that the respondents frequently stay at the Hospitality Sector in West Java.

4.2 Perceive Service Analysis

Based on the calculation results of each indicator in the reliability dimension, the speed in providing the service is the weakest point indicator, with a score of 260, the lowest score among other indicators. According to Zeithaml et al. (2000), a company is said to be reliable if it is able to fulfill promises to customers, particularly promises about the core service attribute. One way to improve the speed in providing the service is to give continuous information that focuses on setting service time standards for each staff member at the hotel's front office. The main finding is there are several indicators that Enhaii Hotel management must consider for improvement, especially in punctuality and speed in providing service to the guest by emphasizing the service time standards for front-office staff. As stated by Sujatno (2008); Septariani et al. (2020); Aryatmaja et al. (2021), in order to achieve guest satisfaction, the front office staff must be responsible for delivering the best service promptly and creating a sense of comfort by giving a chance for visitors to address their complaints.

Based on the results of data processing, it was found that the customer's perception of the performance from the tangible dimension. Based on the assessment per indicator of customer perception in the table above, it shows that the respondents give total score of 1.789. Main Findings: There are still indications that need to be addressed, such as the physical condition and cleanliness of the front office, the front office additional facilities (such as the waiting room), the provision of technical equipment, and the way the staff dresses. As stated by Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (1998), the front-office staff must be well-dressed, as making a good first impression is only one part of building a lasted relationship between the hotel and its guests.

According to the results, guests place the highest score on the tangibles dimension, with an average of 4.40, followed by the responsiveness dimension with an average of 4.38, the assurance dimension with an average of 4.36, the empathy dimension with an average of 4.33, and last is the reliability dimension with an average of 4.26.

4.3 Customer Satisfaction Analysis

Customer satisfaction is measured by calculating the comparative function between customer expected service and customer perceived service for each dimension of service quality.

Table 7. Guests Satisfaction Level at Hospitality Sector in West Java

Dimension	Satisfaction Levelper Dimension (%)
Responsiveness (X2)	63,64
Assurance (X3)	68,93
Empathy (X4)	69,57
Reliability (X1)	71,33
Tangible (X5)	73,80
Overall Guest Satisfaction Level	**69,45**

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

According to tables 7 the customer satisfaction with the services provided by the front-office staff of Hospitality Sector in West Java was only 69.45%. Customer satisfaction varies according to each dimension of service quality. Customers are most satisfied with the tangible dimension (X5), which has a score of 73.80%. Following that are reliability dimension (X1), which has a satisfaction level of 71.33%, empathy dimension (X4) with 69.57%, Assurance dimension (X3) which reached 68.93%, and responsiveness dimension (X2) with 68.93%.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

This correlation analysis was carried out in order to determine the correlation and significance of each service quality variable. According to the calculation results, there was a correlation between each dimension of service quality at the front office of Enhaii Hotel and customer satisfaction, as shown in the table below.

Table 8. Results of the Correlation Calculation between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

		SerV_X	CSatf_Y
SerV_X	Pearson Correlation	1	,656**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	90	90
CSatf_Y	Pearson Correlation	,656**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	90	90

Source: Data processed by the author (2021)

Based on the table above it is known that there is a correlation of 0.656 or 65.6% between service quality and customer satisfaction, which shows a strong correlation. Based on the table above and it is known that there is a correlation of 0.578 or 57.8% between the reliability dimension and customer satisfaction, which is a medium correlation. Between responsiveness dimension and customer satisfaction, there is a correlation of 0.607, or 60.7% (strong correlation). It was also found that there is a correlation of 0.491 or 49.10% between assurance dimension and customer satisfaction (medium correlation). For the empathy dimension and customer satisfaction, there is a correlation of 0.401 or 40.10% which includes in the medium correlation category. And the last, between tangible dimensions and customer satisfaction there is a correlation of 0.480 or 48.0% (medium correlation).

V. Conclusion

As a result, the first objective of the study was met because the analysis of the theories allowed the study's findings to be validated. Furthermore, the main findings of the secondary research were in accordance with the findings of the primary research, indicating that there is a strong correlation between service quality at the front office and customer satisfaction. The survey questions were created for visitors who are currently staying or had previously stayed at Hotel in West Java, inquiring about their perceptions of the perceived and expected service at front office of the examined hotel, as well as guest satisfaction. With respect to the second objective, this research study's key findings include:

1. Based on the gap analysis results, it was discovered that the Responsiveness dimension (X2) had the highest gap followed by the Assurance (X3), Empathy (X3), Reliability (X1) dimensions (X5).
2. The service quality of front office staff at the Hotel in West Java has an impact on customer satisfaction. Reliability dimension (X1) and responsiveness dimension (X2) are the aspects of service quality that have an impact on customer satisfaction (Y).
3. It was discovered that the overall score for customer satisfaction at Hotel in West Java was only 69.45%. Customers are most satisfied with the tangible dimension (X5), followed by the reliability dimension (X1), empathy dimension (X4), assurance dimension (X3), and responsiveness dimension (X2).

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