Service Quality in Riyadh's Elite Hotels: Measurement and Evaluation

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Abstract. Previous research has offered several models for conceptualizing service quality, the best known of which is the *disconfirmation model* as expressed by the SERVQUAL scale. However, the literature reveals two major points of debate; the disagreement among scholars on the ideal method of measuring service quality, and their disagreement on SERVQUAL's dimensionality and generalizability. This paper discusses these issues and concludes that the *performance model* represented by the SERVPERF scale proves statistically better than the *disconfirmation model* as expressed by SERVQUAL scale in measuring service quality in the hotel industry. Service quality is measured in the elite hotels of Riyadh City from the perspectives of both hotel receptionists and guests. The findings also indicate that hotel managers should take into account the cultural idiosyncrasies of the Saudi society when planning their hotel service strategies with reference to specific traditions. The authors argue against using a generic instrument like the SERVQUAL to measure service quality in all types of service organizations. Rather, they advocate using the SERVPERF scale and modifying it for each organization to accommodate its unique, service-specific attributes.

Introduction

The lodging business has evolved over the past few centuries from an aboriginal service limited to just providing space for overnight rest to an augmented product designed to meet the overall needs of its guests. This evolution of the attribute bundle in the lodging industry took place due to several factors. The most important of these are the industry's desire to increase guests' satisfaction—both local and out-of-town guests, the intensity and globalization of competition, the complexity of the modern environment, and the fast pace of change in it. Prompt service, attractive atmosphere, cleanliness, and sports facilities are but a few examples of such attributes. The industry continues to make every endeavor to satisfy its customers as it recognizes that they are the key to success or even a prerequisite for survival in today's competitive world. Therefore, service quality that leads to customer satisfaction is considered a prime objective pursued by all hospitality establishments at the present time.

Assessing service quality is a troublesome exercise due to service intangibility. In a restaurant, for example, two things are provided; food, which is obviously tangible, and personal service, which is intangible. In hotels, on the other hand, the tangible and intangible products are highly intertwined and have even greater impact on guests' assessment of service quality. Moreover, as some unique aspects of the Saudi culture shape -or sometimes dictate- some hotel attributes, the idiosyncrasies of the Saudi traditions cannot be ignored when we study hotel service quality in the Saudi market.

Literature Review

In a seminal article, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [1] introduced ten dimensions for assessing service quality. These are *Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Communication, Credibility, Security, Competence, Courtesy, Understanding,* and *Access.* Later, the same researchers [2] examined the applicability of these dimensions to five services: appliance repair and maintenance, retail banking, long distance telephone service, securities brokerage, and credit cards. Based on their analysis, the ten dimensions were collapsed into five where *Communication, Credibility, Security, Competence, and Courtesy* were merged together into a new dimension called *Assurance.* In addition, *Understanding* and *Access* were merged together to form the fifth dimension, *Empathy.*

SERVQUAL, the service quality scale used in their study capturing the five newly-constructed dimensions, is based on measuring service quality (Q) as the difference between consumer perception of performance (P) on one hand, and consumer expectations (E) on the other (i.e., Q = P - E). After establishing the instrument's validity and reliability, they recommended using it across a broad spectrum of services. A cornerstone in SERVQUAL conceptualization is the gaps model of service quality developed by the same researchers [3] in which they defined four gaps separating the void between customers' perceived service and customers' expectations of delivered services. These gaps are: (a) not knowing customer's needs, (b) mis-selecting the service designs, (c) failure in delivering the service, and (d) not fulfilling promises.

Further research on the SERVQUAL scale has generated considerable theoretical and operational criticism [4-15]. For example, Carman [4] used the ten original dimensions developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [2] on four service settings; dental school patient clinic, business school placement center, tire store, and an acute care hospital. He came up with different sets of dimensions for the different services and concluded that although the instrument was stable, the dimensions were not so generic. He also questioned administering both the perception and the expectation questionnaires together, as expectations may be influenced by the subject's experience of the service.

Other researchers questioned SERVQUAL's conceptualization as well as its operationalization. For example, Cronin and Taylor [5] expressed their concerns of using the difference between expectations and perceived performance as a valid operational measure of service quality. According to them, the disconfirmation model used by

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [2] in measuring perceived service quality is not equivalent to an attitude-based model, whereas consumers' expectations are defined in what you *should* expect rather than what you *would* expect. Further, Cronin and Taylor suggested using only perceived performance as a measure of perceived service quality. Thus, they recommended using the scale SERVPERF, the perception part of SERVQUAL as a better scale of perceived service quality (i.e., P only).

To retest the reliability of the SERVQUAL scale, Cronin and Taylor [5] conducted a survey on four services; banking, pest control, dry cleaning, and fast food. At the same time, item importance was introduced in this survey. The four alternatives; SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, importance-weighted SERVQUAL, and importance-weighted SERVPERF were analyzed. Among the four scales, SERVPERF was empirically proven to be better than all other scales in explaining the variation in service quality.

In another attempt to examine the validity of SERVQUAL, Teas [6] tested the proposed gap between consumers' perception and normative expectations on three local discount stores. He reported, "The measures lack discriminate validity with respect to the concepts of attribute importance, performance forecasts, and classic attribute ideal points." (p.29). He concurred with Cronin and Taylor [5] that using unweighted perceived performance as a service quality measure provides better concurrent and construct validity.

It is worthy to note that Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml [7], the SERVQUAL originators, re-examined the scale's reliability by reapplying it to three services; a telephone company, two insurance companies, and two banks. Their results reconfirmed the scale's reliability and validity, sub-classified the *Tangibles* dimension into two sub-dimensions, and recommended minor changes in the wording of the expectation section of the questionnaire.

In another replication study, Mels, Boshoff and Nel [8] tested SERVQUAL on five services; banks, insurance brokers, vehicle repairs, electrical repairs, and life assurance. After applying factor analysis with oblique rotation on the data, they concluded that only two empirical factors were supported by SERVQUAL, which they called intrinsic and extrinsic service quality.

To summarize, the current literature on service quality demonstrates two major points of debate. The first point is the apparent disagreement among scholars on the method of measuring service quality from the customer's viewpoint. This is evidenced by the disagreement of scholars on the definitions of expectations, customer satisfaction, service quality and the interrelationships among these constructs [2,5,9,10]. The second point of debate relates to the SERVQUAL scale's dimensionality and generalizability. The argument given here is that the five dimensions proposed by this scale lack the capability of measuring perceived service quality generically; i.e., across all service industries and, accordingly, each service sector should define its own measuring tool [4,11,12], albeit starting with SERVQUAL.

The need for a hotel-specific measure

In the hospitality arena, comment cards have been commonly used to measure customers' perception of quality. However, comment cards are not indubitable for three reasons. First, they lack the validity needed to confirm their suitability of measuring customers' perception of quality. Second, many guests do not fill out these cards which necessarily results in non-response bias [16]. Third, usually only dissatisfied customers fill out these cards, which inevitably results in response bias [17]. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, many hotels allocate valuable resources and even change their strategies based on their interpretation of the biased results of these cards. A reliable and valid, hotel-specific measure is, therefore, needed to enable hotels make better decisions.

Another problematic area in measuring customer judgment of the quality of hotel services is the wide range of attributes suggested by recent studies that may not all be reflected in the SERVQUAL scale. For instance, Saleh and Ryan's [11] review of previous research dealing with hotel services included 37 hotel attributes as shown and updated in Table 1. In order to measure hotels' service quality correctly, these attributes should, somehow, be taken into consideration. Furthermore, not only should the hotel location be taken into account, but the impact of the location on the hotel's service attributes should also be realized. For instance, a beachside hotel should have different attributes than a downtown hotel where the stay objective is totally different.

Another important dimension: The Saudi cultural environment

Culture is another factor affecting customers' perception of quality. Culture is composed of two major components; moral/abstract and material. The moral/abstract component of culture consists of people's values, customs, traditions, attitudes, social and religious beliefs, and aesthetics. On the other hand, the material component of culture consists of the tangible products of the society such as architectural outcomes, computers, cars, electric and electronic products, and the like [21]. It is argued that these elements have greater impact on the service sector than on the merchandise/goods sector because of the service encounter; i.e., the personal interaction between the service provider and the customer, especially in the hotel industry [22].

Upon examining the Saudi culture, we find it characterized by strict customs and traditions where Islamic values and views dominate the culture and shape the behavior of its people. Over the years, the socialization process has been directing the new generations to adhere to this heritage, and violators are not tolerated. In this respect, one of the important values of the Saudis is privacy, especially when it comes to the family and the presence of female family members in public. This situation has its impact on the tendency of Saudis to prefer segregated dining sections for families in restaurants as compared to non-Saudis.

Table. 1. Updated review of Saleh and Ryan's hotel attributes measured by previous research

Attribute*	Lewis/ Pizam 1981	Lewis 1983	Nightingale 1985	Moller et al. 1985	Lewis/ Klein 1988	Knutson 1988	Barsky/ Labagh 1992 [18]	Garretson/ Clow/Kurtz 1995 [19]**	Min/Min 1966 [20]
Actual price	x	x			x	x	x	x	x
Price/value	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Good reputation	x	x		x	x			x	
Prestige of hotel	x	x		x	x			x	
Location	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Safe parking nearby	x	x			x		x		
Cleanliness of room/baths	x	x	x		x	x			x
Size of rooms/baths	x	x	x		x				x
Quality of TV/radio	x	x			x				
Comfort of bed	x	x	x		x	x	x		x
Décor/furnishing of rooms	x	x		x	x				
Exterior aesthetics	x	x			x			x	
VIP rooms/sections	x	x			x	x	x		
Physical condition of rooms/baths	x	x			x		x		
Variety of services	x	x			x				
Promptness of services	x	x			x	x			
Professionalism of all staff	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Quick check in / out	x	x		x	x				x
Staff friendliness	x	x		x	x		x	x	x
VIP treatment	x	x		x	x	x			
Quality of bar	x	x		x	x	x			
Restaurant food quality	x	x		x	x				

Table 1. (Contd.).

Attribute*	Lewis/ Pizam 1981	Lewis 1983	Nightingale 1985	Moller et al. 1985	Lewis/ Klein 1988	Knutson 1988	Barsky/ Labagh 1992 [18]	Garretson/ Clow/Kurtz 1995 [19]**	Min/Min 1966 [20]
Restaurant service	x	x			x	x			
Year-round pool		x	x	x	x	x			
Sauna, steam bath, exercise equipment	x	x		x	x	x			x
Shops in hotel	x			x	x				
Small amenities, e.g., soap, mints	x	x			x		x		
Quietness of room	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Quietness of hotel	x	x	x		x	x			
Security of hotel	x	x			x	x		x	
Security of area	x	x			x	x			
Reservation system	x	x	x		x				x
Walk-up call service	x					x			
Plentiful towels	x	x				x			
Valet parking service						x			
Laundry service				x		x			

Source: Saleh and Ryan [11]. The last three columns are added by current authors.
*Some of these attributes were not explicitly given these names in the above-mentioned studies. Generalization of terms has been adopted in order to accommodate minor differences and establish a common frame of reference.
**This study also includes the attribute, "service quality", which covers several attributes in the first column.

Another dimension of the idiosyncrasies of the Saudi environment is that cross-cultural interaction plays a more important role in the hotel business in Saudi Arabia than in any other country. This is so because a considerable proportion of both hotel guests and hotel employees come from different cultures. According to the latest available statistics [23], non-Saudis who work in the service sector in Riyadh represent 39% of the Riyadh's population in the year 1416/1417H (1996G), while Saudis who work in the same sector in the same year represent only 5.4% of the Riyadh population. In fact, the majority of hotel employees come from other countries such as India, Pakistan, Egypt and the Philippines.

Another issue that deserves consideration is that Riyadh, unlike most other cities in Saudi Arabia, is considered the major business center since the offices of the central government, all embassies, and the main hospitals are located there. By contrast, the city lacks entertainment and recreational facilities such as sea fronts for example. This may explain the drop in occupancy rates in the weekends at Riyadh's hotels in general. In addition, since alcohol, music, and live entertainment are prohibited in Saudi Arabia, this may deter foreigners from extending their stay at local hotels.

On the other hand, for Saudis, Arabian hospitality usually calls for catering to guests at home, not in hotels. Furthermore, rental apartments, which are abundantly available, offer a larger space and greater privacy; therefore, representing a more attractive alternative to hotels for the typical Saudi family. Such cultural issues and barriers are important to consider if we are to improve the design and delivery of hotel services in Saudi Arabia.

Problem Definition and Research Objectives

The main problem of this research is concerned with identifying the service quality model that proves statistically better in measuring service quality in the hotel industry in Riyadh City, and developing the corresponding scale that incorporates both hotel-specific attributes and the cultural idiosyncrasies of the Saudi society. Accordingly, the objectives of this research are:

1. To determine which model of service quality performs better in the case of the hotel industry;
2. To compare the perceptions of hotel employees --especially contact personnel-- with those of hotel customers in regard to these attributes and test the differences if any;
3. To identify the perceptions of guests in regard to hotel-specific attributes and their rankings from the guests' point of view; and
4. To find out whether cultural peculiarities influence the perceptions of Saudi guests in regard to certain hotel attributes as compared to non-Saudi guests.

Importance of the Study

Research is scant in the Saudi market on the measurement of service quality in general, and in measuring hotel service quality, in particular. Very few studies have been conducted in other service areas in the Saudi market such as health care [e.g., 24], airline services [e.g., 25], and bus transportation [e.g., 26]. However, we did not find any studies on hotel service quality in Saudi hotels, and only one study was found on the quality of hotel services in Jordan [27]. So, to our knowledge, this research is the first to be conducted on the service quality of Saudi hotels. This type of studies is needed both by academicians and by practitioners alike. On the academic level, past worldwide research has offered four models for conceptualizing service quality, as explained above. We need to know which model is the most suitable to use in measuring hotel service quality in general, and in the Saudi market in particular.

On the other hand, competition is intensifying in the Saudi market over time and Saudi Arabia is taking solemn steps in the present time to join the World Trade Organization, which will even make competition in this market fiercer. Shedding light on the true needs of hotel guests will help hotel managers improve the performance and quality of their establishments, subsequently enhancing the satisfaction and loyalty of their customers.

Hypotheses

The above review introduced two advocated models in measuring service quality. The first is *the disconfirmation model*, which is based on measuring the difference between perceived performance and customers' expectations (Q=P-E). The second is *the performance model*, which is based on measuring customers' perceived performance only (Q=P). Both models have been widely used in prior studies with various services. However, no comparison has been made to determine which model performs better in the hotel sector. Accordingly, we will test the two models with regard to the elite hotels in the City of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. This test is the focus of the first hypothesis.

H_1: *The Performance Model, SERVPERF (the customer perceived performance of service quality) is expected to be better in explaining the variation in service quality in the hospitality industry than the Disconfirmation Model, SERVQUAL (the difference between customers' perceived performance and expectations).*

This, too, is consistent with the fact that hotel guests in Saudi Arabia are heterogeneous in terms of their expectations as a result of their diverse backgrounds and varied cultures.

One objective of this study is to investigate the extent to which hotel mangers understand their customers; this is the first of four gaps proposed by the gaps model [3] as explained before. The extent to which hotel personnel understand customers' needs will be represented by the degree of divergence between the hotel staff's perceptions of

service performance and customers' perceptions of service performance. Based on the existing system of employment and given that the Saudi market is still learning modern marketing techniques especially in the service sector, we expect that there will be a difference (gap) between hotel employees, on one hand, and hotel customers, on the other, in terms of the perception of hotel service quality. Accordingly, the second hypothesis states:

H_2: *There will be a gap between the perceptions of hotel employees and the perceptions of guests concerning hotel service quality, and guests' mean perception is expected to be smaller than employees' mean perception.*

As mentioned before, the Saudi culture values family privacy, which is expected to extend to dining rooms inside the hotels. In addition, there is indication that Saudis have higher rates of overweight and obesity than their counterparts in Europe and the United States [28]. Therefore, it is expected that Saudi guests will not appreciate sports facilities inside the hotels in the same manner that non-Saudi guests will. Accordingly, the third and fourth hypotheses state:

H_3: *The mean perception of Saudi hotel customers regarding segregated family dining sections is expected to be greater than that of non-Saudi customers.*

H_4: *The mean perception of Saudi hotel customers regarding hotel sports facilities is expected to be smaller than that of non-Saudi customers.*

Sampling

According to the specifications of the Hotels Department of the Saudi Ministry of Trade, hotels in Saudi Arabia are classified into six classes. These specifications include such factors as room area and available services. The six classes are: Deluxe, First Class A, First Class B, Second Class A, Second Class B, and Third Class. This study covers only the elite hotels in Riyadh that include the two top classes (Deluxe and First Class hotels) since the services provided by these hotels are augmented and differentiated in a way that allows for the measurement of various aspects of service quality.

In Riyadh, there are more than fifty hotels, of which twenty-one fall within the two designated classes. After contacting all twenty-one hotels, only ten hotels agreed to participate in the study. The hotels' managers were asked to administer two questionnaires; one for all the hotel employees who have daily contact with guests, and the other for guests. For each hotel, the guests' self-administered questionnaires were distributed randomly in their rooms throughout the weekdays and the weekend in order to avoid time bias. It was felt that administering the guests' questionnaires during their hotel stay would yield more accurate answers than getting them at a later time after they leave the hotel.

A stratified probability sample was planned. Each hotel was given a number of questionnaires equivalent to 20 percent of the hotel's total room capacity. Two thousand

(2,000) questionnaires were distributed to the ten hotels that agreed to participate in the study. The managers were contacted several times before collecting the questionnaires from them, urging them to meet their samples fully. However, 182 questionnaires were eventually received back, of which 41 were excluded from the analysis for various reasons; e.g., incomplete answers, response bias, conflict of answers, etc. A total of 141 useable questionnaires were entered the analysis (79 from hotel guests and 62 from hotel employees). Table 2 exhibits the demographic characteristics of the sample.

Table 2. Sample characteristics

Characteristics	Hotel guests		Hotel employees	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
19-24	10	13.5	8	13.3
25-34	29	39.2	33	55.0
35-44	21	28.4	15	25.0
45-54	9	12.2	3	5.0
55-64	5	6.8	1	1.7
No answer	5	---	2	---
Total	79	100	62	100
Education				
Less than high school	2	2.8	5	8.9
Finished high school	13	18.1	17	30.4
Some college	7	9.7	11	19.6
College graduate	29	40.3	16	28.6
Some graduate school	5	6.9	5	8.9
Post-graduate degree	16	22.2	2	3.6
No answer	7	---	6	---
Total	79	100	62	100
Nationality				
Saudi Arabia	31	41.9	3	5.8
Gulf States/Yemen	9	12.1	---	---
Egypt	5	6.8	11	21.2
Tunisia/Morocco	2	2.7	2	3.8
Lebanon/Jordan/Palestine	6	8.1	1	1.9
USA/Canada	4	5.4	---	---
Europe	11	14.9	---	---
India/Pakistan/Bangladesh	5	6.8	18	34.7
The Philippines/Srilanka/Nepal	1	1.3	16	30.8
Ethiopia	---	---	1	1.9
No answer	5	---	10	---
Total	79	100	62	100
Purpose of stay				
Leisure	25	36.2		
Business	44	63.8		
Total	79	100		

This low response rate wasn't expected, but several factors might be attributed to it. First, only ten hotels of the sampling population (21 hotels) agreed to participate. Second, even though the research objectives were explained to the participating hotel managers and their cooperation was strongly solicited, there were several reasons that would possibly work against their collaboration. For one, this task represented extra, unpaid work for them and for their employees. In addition, managers in the Saudi market usually take extra caution in protecting their operations and in concealing any information about their businesses for fear that competitors know it. Finally, since both hotel managers and guests came from diverse backgrounds and various ethnic identities, we should not expect that all of them would equally appreciate marketing research.

Methodology

The refined version of the SERVQUAL scale was used as per the guidelines of its authors [7], so all the statements were worded positively. One statement was deleted (statement no. 19: "XYZ has operating hours convenient to all its customers") since hotels are usually open to their customers 24 hours a day. Furthermore, to capture the unique characteristics of hotels, a notion we argue strongly for it in this paper, seven statements were added in both the expectations and perception sections using the same style in wording. These statements were intended to measure specific attributes pertinent to the hotel environment and were based on the literature review; namely sports facilities, family dining room, parking, price, reservation system, the comfort of rooms and furniture, and location.

Also, an overall quality measure of hotel services was added in the perception section of the questionnaire in order to use it in testing the concurrent validity of the scale. This overall quality measure states: "Taking every thing into consideration, the XYZ hotel is an excellent hotel." This statement was placed at the end of the perception section (SERVPERF) as statement no. 29 (see the Appendix). Finally, a demographics section was included at the end of the questionnaire.

To make sure the scale still maintains its high level of reliability after adding the seven hotel-specific statements, the modified scale was pretested on a sample of 48 hotel customers and Coefficient Alpha was calculated. Adding these seven statements to the SERVQUAL scale appears not to influence Coefficient Alpha for the whole scale negatively. On the contrary, Coefficient Alpha for the whole scale was impressively .97. In general, the results obtained from the test permit us to assume safely that the modified scale is reliable. Table 3 shows Coefficient Alpha test results.

Table 3. Reliability tests for the hotel-specific SERVQUAL scale

Dimension	Inter-item correlation	Coefficient alpha
Tangibles	.62	.87
Reliability	.71	.92
Responsiveness	.77	.93
Assurance	.78	.93
Empathy	.66	.89
Hotel-specific attributes	.41	.74
Total scale		.97

Both Arabic and English versions of the questionnaire were prepared since Arabic speaking and non-Arabic speaking staff and guests were expected to participate in the study. The Arabic version was reviewed first for translation inaccuracy twice by the researchers. Then, it was pretested on 60 graduating seniors at a major university in the Central Province of the Kingdom in order to discover and correct any ambiguity or bias resulting from the translation. Minor changes were made accordingly.

As per the guidelines of the refined SERVQUAL scale [7], negative statements were avoided and seven points were used in the scale with 1= strongly disagree and 7= strongly agree. In addition, the same questionnaire was administered both with the hotel employees and with the guests.

To test H_1, the 28 individual items of each of the SERVQUAL and the SERVPERF scales were regressed against the measure of overall quality using the stepwise routine [5]. In addition, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the single measure of overall perception of quality and each dimension of the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF scales as well as the overall scale in each case. With regard to H_2, a t-test was performed on the perception means of the two subsamples of employees and guests. Similarly, another t-test was calculated for the subsample perception means of Saudi and non-Saudi customers for each attribute stated in H_3 and H_4 in order to test these hypotheses.

Findings

Table 4 shows the results of the statistical analysis pertaining to H_1. As evidenced from the table, SERVPERF ($R^2 = .7836$, adjusted $R^2 = .7652$) explains the variation in the data better than SERVQUAL ($R^2 = .6517$, adjusted $R^2 = .6394$). Since the coefficient of determination (R^2) of SERVPERF is larger than that of SERVQUAL, the former proves to be a better indicator of the predictive accuracy of the regression equation and a better index of fit where the regression line fits the data better than in the case of SERVQUAL [29]. In addition, although all coefficients are statistically significant at the .000 alpha level, SERVPERF has higher correlation coefficients than SERVQUAL in terms of all scale dimensions as well as the overall scale.

Table 4. A comparasion between the results of the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF scales

Statistic/Dimension	SERVQUAL	SERVPERF
Variation explained by stepwise regression for the two scales		
Multiple R	.8073	.8852
R^2	.6517	.7836
Adjusted R^2	.6394	.7652
Standard error	.8006	.6424
Correlation coefficients between dimensions/total scale and overall quality mesure		
1. Tangibles	.6478*	.7402*
2. Reliability	.4467*	.6183*
3. Responsiveness	.5022*	.7479*
4. Assurance	.4929*	.7487*
5. Empathy	.5327*	.7703*
6. Hotel-specific attributes	.4835*	.5676*
Total scale	.5749*	.7716*

* $\alpha < .000$.

These results indicate that *perceived performance* measures are better in measuring service quality than the *disconfirmation* measures in the hospitality sector. Moreover, they concur with studies conducted on other service sectors [5, 6]. Consequently, H_1 is supported.

Based on these results, the remainder of the analysis was confined to the SERVPERF model. The first step in the analysis was to examine the gap between perceptions of the guests and those of the employees. Table 5 lists the results of the t-tests for means of the two groups. The results show the presence of a service gap between the perceptions of hotel employees and those of guests. All the perception means of employees are greater than the perception means of the guests even though not all the dimensions' differences are statistically significant. The mean differences of three dimensions (responsiveness, empathy, and hotel-specific attributes) in addition to the mean difference for the whole scale are statistically significant. The intriguing observation here is that the differences in mean perceptions between the two groups with regard to the hotel-specific attributes as well as the whole scale are significant at the .01 alpha level. Therefore, H_2 is also supported.

Table 5. T-tests of perception means for hotel guests and employees regarding service dimensions

Dimension	Guests means*	Employees means*	Mean difference	Alpha
1. Tangibles	21.69	22.97	-1.27	NS
2. Reliability	28.92	31.45	-2.53	NS
3. Responsiveness	23.15	25.10	-1.95	.012
4. Assurance	23.82	24.69	-0.87	NS
5. Empathy	22.39	24.13	-1.74	.028
6. Hotel-specific attributes	38.02	41.97	-3.85	.002
Total scale	153.57	168.39	-14.82	.002

*7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree

When the means of Saudi guests are compared with those of non-Saudi guests, no significant differences were found in relation to price, convenient parking, comfortable rooms, hotel location, and sports facilities. However, high significant differences were found with regard to segregated family dining rooms as shown in Table 6. The Saudis' appreciation of separate family dining sections is a logical outcome of their high value of family privacy. Accordingly, H_3 is supported.

Table 6. Tests of mean expectations of Saudi and non-Saudi guests concerning hotel-specific attributes

Dimension	Saudis means*	Non-Saudi means*	Mean difference	T-test
Price	6.06	6.19	-.12	NS
Parking	6.53	6.23	.30	NS
Location	6.20	5.98	.22	NS
Comfortable rooms	6.77	6.70	.07	NS
Separate family dining sections	6.55	5.02	1.53	.000
Sport facilities	6.60	6.33	.27	NS
Reservation system	6.52	6.49	.03	NS

*7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree

On the other hand and contrary to what was predicted, the Saudi guests showed their appreciation and interest in hotel sports facilities, and their perceptions' mean (6.60) was slightly higher than the non-Saudis' mean (6.33) but not significantly different from it (see Table 6). This finding might be justified both in social and in demographic terms. Socially, Saudi Arabia lacks widespread sports facilities and centers where Saudis can exercise on a regular basis. This situation might trigger their desire to look for, and use, these facilities while staying in a hotel. On the other hand, and from a demographic point of view, as this study targeted the elite hotels, it might have targeted a sample in the high-income segment of the society that is characterized by better education and a higher level of health consciousness. Thus, H_4 is not upheld.

Last, It was mentioned before that one objective of this study was to identify the perceptions of guests in regard to hotel-specific attributes and their rankings from the guests' point-of-view. Table 7 displays these rankings.

Table 7. Ranking of guests' perceptions concerning hotel-specific attributes

	All guests		Saudi guests		Non-Saudi guests	
	Mean	Rank	Mean*	Rank	Mean*	Rank
Comfortable rooms & furniture	6.75	1	6.77	1	6.70	1
Reliable reservation system	6.53	2	6.52	5	6.49	2
Sports facilities	6.45	3	6.60	2	6.33	3
Convenient parking	6.38·	4	6.53	4	6.23	4
Proper price	6.16	5	6.06	7	6.19	5
Convenient location	6.12	6	6.20	6	5.98	6
Separate family dining sections	5.66	7	6.55	3	5.02	7

*7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree

Several observations can be made in regard to this table. First, for the whole sample (both Saudi and non-Saudi guests), the six hotel-specific attributes are arranged according to their importance to guests in a descending order as follows: comfortable rooms and furniture, reliable reservation system, sports facilities, convenient parking, proper price, convenient location, and separate family dining sections.

Second, the attribute, "comfortable rooms and furniture," ranks first in importance by both Saudis and non-Saudis. Third, the attribute "reliable reservation system," seems more important to non-Saudis (ranks 2nd to them) than to Saudis (ranks 5th to them) even though the Saudis' mean is slightly larger than the non-Saudis' mean (6.52 for Saudi guests and 6.49 for non-Saudis) and the difference between the two means is not statistically significant (refer to Table 6 above).

Fourth, the attribute, "sports facilities," is more important for Saudis than non-Saudis even though the difference between perception means for both is not statistically significant as we saw before in Table 6. It ranks second in importance by Saudis, while it ranks third by non-Saudis. In addition, the attribute, "separate family dining sections," is more important to Saudi guests than to non-Saudis as it ranks third by Saudis while it ranks seventh (last) by non-Saudis. If we refer to Table 6, we find that the difference in the means of the two groups is large and statistically significant (alpha = .000). The attribute, "parking," ranks fourth, and the attribute, "convenient location," ranks sixth equally by both Saudis and non-Saudis. "A reliable reservation system" is second in importance to non-Saudis and more important to them than to Saudis; it ranks fifth by the latter. Finally, "a reasonable price" does not seem to be an important attribute both to Saudis (seventh in rank) and to non-Saudis (fifth in rank), but seems to be less important for the former than for the latter.

Study Implications

The findings of the study carry several implications both for practitioners and for academicians. As for practitioners, the findings support using the SERVPERF scale (perceived performance only) as a measure of hotel service quality after adding the hotel-specific attributes to it as shown above. Using comment cards to measure perceived performance of hotels is not sufficient since these cards do not capture all service quality dimensions, and only dissatisfied customers tend to fill them out. Moreover, and as supported by this study's results, perceived performance by hotel guests falls short of perceived performance by hotel employees. Accordingly, hotel managers need to investigate the reasons behind this gap and attempt to raise the level of employees' performance to the level of guests' expectations in those areas that require improvement.

In addition, hotel owners and managers in Riyadh (and in Saudi Arabia at large) are advised to maintain the current design of their hotels' dining rooms. Separate dining sections for families are strongly recommended to protect their privacy; a deeply rooted value and well-trenched tradition among Saudi families. In the hospitality context,

culture is a factor that the lodging industry should consider in order to improve its services in this global era. Not only does the Saudi culture need to be recognized by hotel managers and employees, but other cultures from which customers come must also be taken into account.

As the findings of this study indicate, the expectations as well as perceived performance from the guests' perspective are far away from those held by hotel employees. Furthermore, the expectations of Saudi guests in regard to hotel-specific attributes and the weights given to them are different from those held by non-Saudi guests. Every hotel manager is advised to conduct surveys such as this with his employees and guests on a continuous basis, and the differences in perceptions between the two groups should be analyzed and resolved.

As the new millennium is here, many extraneous forces such as fierce competition, the globalization of services, and the emergence of new technologies are shaping the face of the market and dictating themselves on the strategies of all types of firms that want to survive and grow. Indeed, the key to survival with these forces is to know customers' needs and to cater to them in the best possible way.

At the academic level, having a single instrument to measure service quality across all sorts of services is a noble objective but far from real. One characteristic that distinguishes services from physical products is the former's heterogeneity. Hotel staff's performance of the same service possibly differs from day to day and from time to time on the same day due to the presence of the human element in the service operation. Such factors as personal and family problems, boredom, fatigue, stress, lack of experience, nervous reaction to customers' provocation, and human errors are but a few examples of the factors characterizing the human nature.

Moreover, since different services possess dissimilar and, sometimes, unique attributes, using a standardized SERVQUAL or even SERVPERF scale might pose several methodological and nomonological problems. The scale to be used should be adapted to the nature of the service under consideration by adding to it the service-specific attributes. Since this study and past research indicate that SERVPERF is a valid, reliable, and better instrument than SERVQUAL, the former scale can be used after adding the appropriate service-specific attributes to it as was done in this study. Similar attempts can be made in other service businesses to test SERVPERF with the extra appropriate attributes and establish the service industry specific scale.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study is limited geographically to the city of Riyadh. Also it is limited to the elite hotels (the five-and four-star hotels), which excludes more than 30 other hotels in the city belonging to lower grades. Future studies might look into the evaluation of lower-grade hotels in terms of their service quality. On the other hand, a national study

on the service quality of Saudi hotels will give more insights and directions on how to improve it, but it is also costly and has been beyond the financial resources of the researchers.

For the non-Saudi reader, it is important to remember that the regulations in Saudi Arabia do not allow females to stay alone in a hotel without a spouse or a close male family member such as her father or her brother. This makes our sample more male-biased.

In addition, alcohol consumption and musical entertainment are prohibited in Saudi Arabia. In other countries, bars, clubs and concerts are considered major sources of income to hotels. In the Saudi market most hotels, instead, have wedding halls and female sports centers that compensate, to some degree, for the lost revenues from those sources. Our study concentrated on lodging, the hotels' core business, only. However, other hospitality activities in Saudi Arabia might be investigated too in order to improve the fulfillment of customers' overall needs.

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APPENDIX
The modified hotel-specific SERVPERF scale

The following statements relate to your feelings about the XYZ hotel. For each statement, please show the extent to which you believe the XYZ hotel has the feature described by the statement. Circling a "1" means that you strongly disagree that the XYZ hotel has that feature, and circling a "7" means that you strongly agree. You may circle any of the numbers in the middle that shows how strong your feelings are. There are no right or wrong answers; all we are interested in is a number that best shows your perception about the XYZ hotel. (Titles are not given in the questionnaire. They are just stated here for illustration purposes only).

Tangibles
1. The XYZ hotel has modern-looking equipment.
2. The physical facilities are visually appealing.
3. The XYZ hotel's employees are neat-appearing.
4. Materials associated with the service are visually appealing.

Reliability
5. When the XYZ hotel promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.
6. When you have a problem, the XYZ hotel shows a sincere interest in solving it.
7. The XYZ hotel performs the service right the first time.
8. The XYZ hotel provides its services at the time it promises to do so.
9. The XYZ hotel insists on error-free records.

Responsiveness
10. The XYZ hotel employees tell you exactly when services will be performed.
11. The XYZ hotel employees give prompt services to customers during check in/check out.
12. The XYZ Hotel employees are always willing to help you.
13. The XYZ Hotel employees are never too busy to respond to your requests.

Assurance
14. The behavior of the XYZ hotel employees instills confidence in customers.
15. You feel safe in your transactions with the XYZ hotel.
16. The XYZ hotel employees are consistently courteous with you.
17. The XYZ hotel employees have the knowledge to answer your questions.

Empathy
18. The XYZ hotel gives you individual attention.
19. The XYZ hotel has employees who give you personal attention.
20. The XYZ hotel has your best interest at heart.
21. The XYZ hotel employees understand your specific needs.

Hotel-specific atributes
22. The XYZ hotel has sports facilities.
23. The XYZ hotel has separate family dining sections.
24. The XYZ hotel has a convenient location.
25. The XYZ hotel has convenient parking.
26. The XYZ hotel has comfortable rooms and furniture.
27. The XYZ hotel charges the proper price.
28. The XYZ hotel has a reliable reservation system.

The overall quality measure
29. Taking every thing into consideration, the XYZ hotel is an excellent hotel.

جودة الخدمة في الفنادق الممتازة بمدينة الرياض : قياسها وتقييمها

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(قدم للنشر في ١٤٢٠/١١/٨هـ ؛ وقُبِل للنشر في ١٤٢١/١/١٦هـ)

ملخص البحث. قدمت لنا الدراسات السابقة عدة نماذج علمية لصياغة وقياس جودة الخدمة في منشــآت الأعمال لعل من أشهرها نموذج "عدم التأكد" الذي يعبر عنه مقياس "ســيرفـكوال" . ومع ذلك تكشف الدراسات المتعلقة بهذا الموضوع عن مجالين رئيسيين للجدل بين الباحثين، هما : عدم اتفاقهم على الطريقــة المثلى لقياس جودة الخدمة، وكذلك عدم اتفاقهم على الأبعاد الأساسية لمقياس "ســيرفــكوال" وعلــى إمكانية تعميم استخدامه مع جميع أنواع الخدمات . يناقش هذا البحث هذه القضايا وينتهي إلى أن نمــوذج "الأداء" الذي يمثله مقياس "سيرفبيرف" أثبت إحصائيا أنه أفضل من نموذج "عدم التأكد" الذي يمثله مقيــاس "سيرفكوال" في قياس جودة الخدمة في مجال الفنادق ، علما بأن قياس جودة الخدمة تم من وجهة نظر كــل من موظفي الاستقبال وضيوف الفندق. تشير النتائج أيضا إلى أنه يجب على مديري الفنادق أن يــأخذوا في الاعتبار الخصائص المميزة للثقافة السعودية عند وضع الخطط الاستراتيجية لخدمات فنادقهم مع الإشــارة إلى تقاليد معينة في هذا الخصوص . ويؤيد الباحثان استخدام مقياس "سيرفبيرف" مع تعديله ليأخذ في الاعتبــار الخصائص الفريدة للخدمات التي تقدمها كل منظمة خدمية على حدة وعدم استخدام مقياس واحد نمطــي لقياس جودة الخدمة في جميع أنواع المنظمات الخدمية بلا استثناء .