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Gender bias in hotel guests' perceptions of service quality: an empirical investigation of hotels in Mauritius

The study investigates the service quality of hotels of Mauritius on the basis of their customers' perceptions and expectations and explores how gender differences affect hotel guests' perceptions of service quality dimensions. The result of an empirical study of international tourists staying in hotels of Mauritius generally support the hypothesis that gender affects service quality perceptions and the relative importance attached to various service quality dimensions of hotels. This research provides relevant and important information to hotel managers in Mauritius and the neighbouring islands to use in developing tourism strategies – operational, human resource and marketing – and in targeting these strategies in terms of the gender difference in service quality perceptions among their hotel guests.

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Introduction

Mauritius' success as a destination is due to its natural beauty, high standard of accommodations, facilities and services (relative to other competing destinations like Seychelles), enhancements and investments in local infrastructure, improved air access with non stop flights to and from Europe, carefully targeted promotional campaigns and government support to the industry. Mauritius is perceived as a quality, multilingual destination that is safe, exotic and desirable (Islander, 1999).

The tourist industry in Mauritius has become the most important foreign exchange earner after the financial services sector. The main objective of the government and of the Mauritius Tourism and Promotion Authority (MTPA) has been to continue to attract 'high spending' visitors whose economic impacts are acknowledged to be more beneficial to the economy than low spending visitors (Wing, 1995).

As tourism becomes an important foreign currency earner for Mauritius, improving the level of service quality will become a critical issue to the success of the hotel industry in Mauritius in the new millennium. Hotels are embarking on various quality management programmes to improve the quality of service and meet with international hotel standards (Nield and Kozak, 1999). In order to achieve customer satisfaction and resource productivity, hotels in Mauritius are employing various techniques and strategies and the principles and practice of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Environmental Management are helping them to achieve this balance (Ministry of Tourism, 2008).

Some hotels have already been accredited with the ISO 9000 certification and others are striving towards this goal to improve quality in their respective hotels (Sun Resorts, 2006). This will also help in giving hotels a significant quality differential and hence raising their international competitiveness. Studies conducted by Vision 2020 (Ministry of Tourism, 1993) further re-inforce the need to maintain Mauritius as a high quality tourist destination

An insightful understanding of the marketplace is crucial for hoteliers to make the correct decisions for both comprehensive marketing programmes and designing product and service offerings. There has been a proliferation of specialised segment and niche marketing in the hospitality industry (Ster,1998).The best use of resources, especially the 'perishable' room commodity, demands that hotel managers have a keen understanding of the segments they are selling.

Within the quest for enhancing service quality in the hotel industry, studies have demonstrated the need to focus on customers' expectations and perceptions based on gender perspectives (Yavas *et al.,* 1999, Catteral *et al.*, 2000). The present study therefore seeks to discriminate on demographic variables such as gender to determine which elements of a hotel's service quality are important to this demographic segment and does not study the theory of gender as a whole. Management and staff have to heighten their awareness of the needs of female guests and the differences in hotel selection criteria and service quality dimensions based on gender will help in designing an effective product mix for hotels and meet the needs of these customers (Middleton, 1995).

Ryan *et al* (1998) have emphasised upon the importance of gender market segmentation and argue that tourism destinations are selected by men and women by using different criteria. This conclusion (Ryan *et al,* 1998) recognises gender as a sufficiently strong consideration to count as a driver of market segmentation and provide the basis of a marketing strategy. As a genuine variable it is categorised as substantial, and easy both to assess and access. Gender also represents a 'differential potential' sufficient to justify that a destination specifically draws attention to its qualities that separately appeal to males and females.

The author contends that the changing role of the women in the travel market (business or leisure) will have an impact on the delivery of service quality in hotels of Mauritius. For

example the female business traveller market hardly existed 20 years ago, yet it is a market that the hospitality industry must consider (Bartos, 1973). Whether viewed as a biological or a socio-culturally determined characteristic, gender is a widely used variable in marketing studies (Yavas *et al.,*1999).The focus on this variable owes to its importance as a segmentation criterion (Catteral *et al*.,2000) and the belief that gender roles and differences contribute to a better study of consumer behaviour and help in devising better marketing strategies ranging from product' service design to retailing strategy and development of communication campaigns (Carsky and Zuckerman,1991;Blythe,1997)). Recent studies have revealed that women account for over 40% of the travel market (HCareers, 2011). The author therefore attempts partially to fill in the gap in the service quality literature and report on the impact of gender based differences in Mauritius with the context of hotel services.

The present aims to add to the scarce research on gender based differences in the hospitality industry and explores distinct dimensions which are important to male and female guests. This paper tries to focus on the importance of gender -based differences in the hospitality organisations and tries to investigate whether hotels take into account the feminine values, principles, and characteristics when designing their marketing strategies.

Objectives of the present study

Based on the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman *et al.,* (1988), the research objectives of the study aims at assessing whether:

- Significant gender differences exist between the perceptions and expectations of male and female guests while evaluating the service quality dimensions of hotels

- Gender-based related differences emerge from the degree of importance attributed to various dimensions of service quality by guests staying in hotels of Mauritius

Literature review

Service quality concept and measurement

Researchers have defined quality in different ways. This quality construct has been variously defined as value (Feigenbaum,1951),conformance to requirements (Crosby,1979),fitness for use (Juran *et al*.,1974) and meeting customers' expectations (Parasuraman *et al*., 1985).However because of increased importance from the service sector, researchers are defining quality from a customer's perspective. Among services marketing literature, the widely used definition of service quality is to meet customers' expectations defined by Parasuraman *et al.,*(1985).In their review of service quality, Parasuraman *et al*.,(1985,1988,1991) found that service quality could neither be conceptualised nor evaluated by traditional methods of goods quality because services possess four characteristics :intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability and inseparability. For this reason, they have defined and conceptualised service quality as a form of attitude, which results from a comparison of customers' expectations with perceptions of performance. They have also developed an instrument called SERVQUAL to measure service quality.

Women, Gender, Hotels and Service Quality

In the leisure area there have been a number of studies that have considered gender differences in leisure participation (Firestone and Shelton, 1994; Shaw, 1994; Jackson and Henderson, 1995). However a small number of tourism researchers have considered gender, as a basis for segmentation, in tourism (Norris and Wall, 1995; Stoner, 1998). Other studies considered the tourism behaviour over the 50's (Javalgi *et al.,* 1992; Zimmer *et al.,* 1995). It is argued that one strategy to success is the delivery of high service quality in the hotel industry, especially during times of intense competition both domestically and internationally (Rao and Kelkar,1997, Le Boeuf,1987, Zemke and Albrecht,1985) .In such a highly and

competitive market like the hospitality industry it is essential for all travel suppliers to foresee future trends ,adapt quickly to market changes and by way of their own research understand and make efforts to cater for the needs of their customers.

Concerning the gender based differences in business travellers' lodging preferences, Mc Cleary *et al.,* (1994) conducted an extensive research among 250 business travellers and the findings highly supported the fact that there were significant differences attributes for hotel selection by male and female business travellers. Those findings revealed that female business travellers consider security, personal business services, and low price to be more important hotel selection criteria than do male business travellers. Business travel aside, women-whether single, married and working of housewife, exert considerable influence on the vacation travel market .As female travellers grow in numbers, and as a percentage of all hotel guests, hoteliers need to grasp another message 'We want to be secure and comfortable in rooms, with pleasing designs and amenities we use most. However we don't want to be patronised because we are women.'(Duarte, 1992:76).

As James Evatt (1985), a Hyatt senior vice president said 'women have different needs and wants, but most have indicated that they do not want to be singled .Our research shows those needs include security; services such as extended room service hours and valet service; bath amenities such as make up mirrors and hair dryers, well lit bathrooms, skirt hangers, more electrical outlets, light food entrees; and open air lounges where they can enjoy a drink without being hassled.' The literature review on the service quality dimensions required by female travellers have suggested stereotypical solutions to attracting the female business traveller (de Luca 1986, Barbaran 1987). Additional articles offer numerous, logical suggestions backed only by supposition and intuition. (Iacobucci & Ostrom, (1993), Manges 1988). Howell *et al.,* (1993) conducted a research study to learn more about female business

travellers' perceptions of services and amenities being offered. Focus group discussions held emphasised upon the need for cleanliness first followed by security, room size and décor.

Crawford-Welch (1988) added insight to the possibility of micro market within the business traveller market when he indicated that the term business traveller may be misleading. It implies a homogeneous market made up of individuals seeking similar services, amenities or features when choosing a hotel.

Hospitality marketing should consider the female business traveller as a micro segment. De Luca (1986) explored the specific needs of female travellers and based on the study conducted there was one major lesson to be learnt 'most women don't want special treatment –they just want equal treatment'. The gendered nature of tourists, the tourist experience and the tourist's structural role is but poorly researched and understood' (Kinniard and Hall, 1996). In their study the authors identified that gendered patterns of travel and tourist wants are of direct interest to the tourist industry in that specific types of accommodation, transport and activities could be developed to meet them. Security is an issue that concerns all business travellers, but perhaps women feel its impact most keenly.

In a recent study conducted by Sanchez-Hernandez *et al*., (2010), differences were assessed between men and women in the association of perceptions of service quality with customer evaluations. Functional (efficiency with which the service is delivered) and relational (customers' emotional benefits, beyond the core performance, related to the social interaction of customers with employees) dimensions of service quality were measured as well as customer satisfaction and loyalty. Analysis indicated that the women and men differed in the association of functional and relational dimensions of service quality with their satisfaction and loyalty. Functional service quality was higher for the men than the women, while relational service quality showed greater predictive power for women than for men, although these accounted for only 4% of the customers' satisfaction variance and 6% of the

loyalty variance. What is deemed important, in such a highly lucrative and competitive market like the hospitality industry, is the need to foresee future gender based trends in the business and leisure travel market and adapt quickly to market changes and by way of their own research understand and make efforts to cater for the needs of their customers (Crawford-Welch, 1998).

Hotel marketers can use the differences in hotel selection criteria and service quality dimensions between male and female guests to help design their product mix and meet the needs of these customers. Unfortunately it is not possible to provide conclusive answers concerning the nature of connections between gender and service quality. Rather the intent of the present research is to create a consciousness that such relationships exist and should be addressed in further research.

Methodology

The instrument

The data collection instrument consisted of a two part self –administered questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire was to measure the hotel guests' expectations of service quality in hotels and the second part examined their perceptions of service quality in the hotel of their stay. A pilot test was conducted with 30 tourists in different categories of hotels of Mauritius. The results of the pilot test provided valuable information on the design and wording of the questionnaire and validity of the measurement scale used.

The sample population

The target population of the study consisted of all the international tourists (n=410) who stayed in the different categories of beach hotels of Mauritius In Mauritian norms a 'tourist' is defined as a non resident staying in the island for more than 24 hours but less than a year

and is not involved in any gainful occupation during his stay (Ministry of Tourism, 1999).For the present study, tourists are those non residents coming from countries of Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania countries.

The sampling procedure

A disproportionate stratified sampling method was used.600 questionnaires were sent to hotel guests and 423 responded positively.410 questionnaires were found to be usable in the study representing a response rate of 68%.

Data Analysis

There were two methods, which were used to evaluate the goodness and the validity of the testable proposition. The first method involved univariate tests statistics such as independent t-tests and ANOVA for the independent variables on service quality on both expectations and perceptions separately on the 39 item variables on service quality. Secondly there were multivariate test statistics conducted for the purpose of the study. Data collected from the questionnaires were analysed by using factor analysis and multivariate techniques like MANOVA and Multiple Discriminant Analysis. Chi-square tests, a non parametric test of significance, were also carried out to reveal differences between nominal data such as gender and other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, purpose of visit, frequency of visit, number of visits and whether accompanied by children or not. Its applications included testing for differences between proportions in populations and testing for independence. The independent t-tests tested the hypothesis that the two gender groups means for both expectations and perceptions of service quality in hotels were equal for each variable while the MANOVA tested the hypothesis that the two gender means were equal for all the service quality dimensions.

The 39 service quality variables in relation to their gap scores (perceptions minus expectations) were factor analysed to determine whether there existed underlying dimensions of service quality. A Principal Component Analysis with VARIMAX rotation was conducted on the 39 items measuring the service quality of hotels in Mauritius.

Only factors with eigenvalue equal to or greater than 1 were considered significant and chosen for interpretation. A variable with factor loadings of 0.40 was considered, that is, items with less than 0.4 were excluded.

Identification of nine hotel service quality factors

The difference score between perceptions and expectations were factor analysed, using Principal Components Analysis with orthogonal Varimax rotation, to identify the underlying dimensions or service quality variables that explained the variance in the attributes. From the Varimax rotated factor matrix, 9 factors representing 61.76 % of the explained variance were extracted from the original 39 variables. Nine factors with 36 variables were defined by the original 39 variables that loaded most heavily (loading .0.40) on them. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was calculated to test the reliability and internal consistency of each factor. The results showed that alpha co-efficients of the factors ranged from 0.60 to 0.75, well above the minimum value of 0.50 considered acceptable as an indication of reliability for basic research (Nunally, 1967).The final structure explains 61.76% of the variance in service quality with "Reliability Factors" (Factor 1) accounting for 22.754% of the total variance and contains 6 of the 39 items from the scale. In the present research study, after several trial rotations, 9 factors were regarded as theoretically appropriate, corresponding to the "Tangibles", "Responsiveness", "Reliability", "Assurance", and "Empathy" identified by Parasuraman et al., 1988 plus the emergence of new factors such as "Food and Service Related Factors", "Extra Room Amenities Factors", "Staff Communication Skills and

Additional Factors", "Room Attraction and Décor Factors", "Staff Outlook and Accuracy

Factors" and "Hotel Surroundings and Environmental Factors

Results and Analysis

The results and findings are presented in the following order

1. Demographic profile of respondents

2. Perceptions and expectations of service quality based on gender

Demographic Profile of respondents

Data for the study were collected among 410 guests, out of which 9 were discarded on

grounds of being non-usable. Out of 401 usable responses obtained, 191 were obtained from

males, 194 were from females and 15 were not valid, as respondents did not tick their gender.

A comparison of male and female guests reveals that they were similar in age and the overall

demographic similarities suggest that the sample is appropriate for addressing the study

objective.

The discussion was focused on these demographic and socio-economic characteristics

and the chi square test used proved no significant differences between socio –demographic

characteristics ($p \geq 0.05$) that is in differentiating between male and female hotel guests. The

overall homogeneity across males and females hotel guests allows any similarities or

differences between the two to be attributable to gender and not to other socio-demographic

factors.

Perceptions and expectations of service quality based on gender

This part on data analysis evaluates the relative importance of the SERVQUAL dimension

and service quality variables based on gender, which can be used to segment hospitality

markets and to allocate resources in hotels. It was found that hotel guests, whether male or female have high expectations of service quality in hotels of Mauritius. However there are differences in the service quality dimensions, which were deemed to be more important for males than females and vice-versa. These differences were further explored and confirmed in the next step of the analysis where t-tests of expectations and perceptions were used to test respective propositions and also to compare the hotel guests' expectations and perceptions based on their gender.

Independent t-tests- Expectations of service quality based on gender differences

The independent t-tests tested the hypothesis that the two genders group means were equal for both perceptions and expectations for the 39-service quality variable and the 9 service quality dimensions. Table 1 shows the significant values of independent t-tests carried out on the expectations of male and female guests (n=401).

Service quality variables	Mean scores of expectations (male)	Mean scores of expectations (Female)	t-value	Significance level p-value
The hotel will provide healthy menus	6.22	6.60	-3.376	0.001*
The hotel will provide timely service	2.26	1.85	2.246	0.015*
The hotel will provide utmost privacy to guests	5.11	5.74	-3.389	0.001*
The hotel will ensure security of the guests	6.37	6.60	-2.049	0.041*

The hotel will handle complaints and problems graciously	6.29	6.47	-2.539	0.012*
The hotel will project a quality service image	6.02	5.66	1.989	0.047*
The hotel will provide clean beaches	6.64	6.80	-2.570	0.011*
The hotel will have visually appealing brochures	4.47	5.19	-3.611	0.000*
The hotel will respect environmental norms	5.99	6.25	-2.138	0.033*

*p<0.01, **only significant differences are revealed**

Table 1: Values of independent t-tests carried out on the expectations of male and female guests (n=401)

As seen in Table 1, 9 out of 39 mean scores have shown statistically significant differences in the expectations of service quality in hotels by female and male guests in hotels. In 7 out of 9 variables the mean scores for female guests were higher than that of males, which depict that women have higher expectations of service quality as far as the following factors are concerned namely:

- The hotel will provide healthy menus

- The hotel will respect environmental norms

- The hotel will have visually appealing brochures

- The hotel will provide clean beaches.

- The hotel will handle complaints and problems graciously

- The hotel will ensure security of the guests

- The hotel will provide utmost privacy to the guests

Out of the remaining 30 variables, which were not statistically significant, 26 out of 30 variables showed higher mean ratings among female guests than male guests on the expected level of service.

Independent t-tests- Perceptions of service quality based on gender differences

Similarly independent t-tests were carried out on the perceptions of male and female guests (n=401). 6 out of the 39 item variables on service quality revealed significant differences (p<0.01, p<0.05) in perceptions of service quality by male and females hotel guests. It is to be noted that regarding the mean scores on perceptions, which were statistically significant, those for female guests were comparatively lower than those of male respondents in 5 out of 6 variables, except for 'the hotel has proximity to events and attractions'. In the mean scores for male and female guests in the remaining 33 variables which were not statistically significant, again scores for female guests were lower than that of males in 20 out of remaining 33 variables which clearly depict that female guests had rated the level of service in hotels of Mauritius lower than that of males.

Independent t-tests with nine service quality dimensions

When the nine service quality dimensions based on expectations of service quality in hotels were subjected to a *t-test* among the two groups based on gender differences, then the results revealed significant differences across 6 out of 9 dimensions, namely in 'food and service related factors', 'assurance factors ', 'extra room amenities ', 'hotel location and surroundings', 'reliability' and 'staff communication skills'. Table 2 displays the evaluation of service dimensions across gender differences.

Service quality dimensions	Mean scores of males	Mean scores of females	t-test	Significance level

Food and service related factors	6.09	6.36	-2.758	0.006**
Assurance factors	5.40	5.52	-2.424	0.016*
Empathy	5.88	6.01	-1.306	0.192 ns
Extra room amenities	4.85	5.28	-3.166	0.002**
Hotel location and surroundings	5.14	5.11	0.279	0.780 ns
Reliability	5.97	6.27	-3.128	0.002**
Room attractiveness and decor factors	6.52	6.54	-0.318	0.751 ns
Staff communication skills	5.87	6.14	-2.650	0.008**
Staff outlook factors	6.35	6.38	-0.236	0.814 ns

**p<0.01; *p<0.05

Table 2: Evaluation of service dimensions across gender differences (n=401)

As indicated in the Table 2 above, for the nine service dimensions, 5 service quality

dimensions revealed statistical differences and for all the five dimensions, means scores for

female guests are higher than that for male counterparts. An examination of the mean scores

based expectations on the 39 service quality variables reveals the same trend across

significant differences except for two variables namely 'the hotel will provide better service'

and 'the hotel will have promotion strategies to project a good image of the hotel' where male

guests gave a higher rating. It can also be seen from Figure 1 below that the expectations

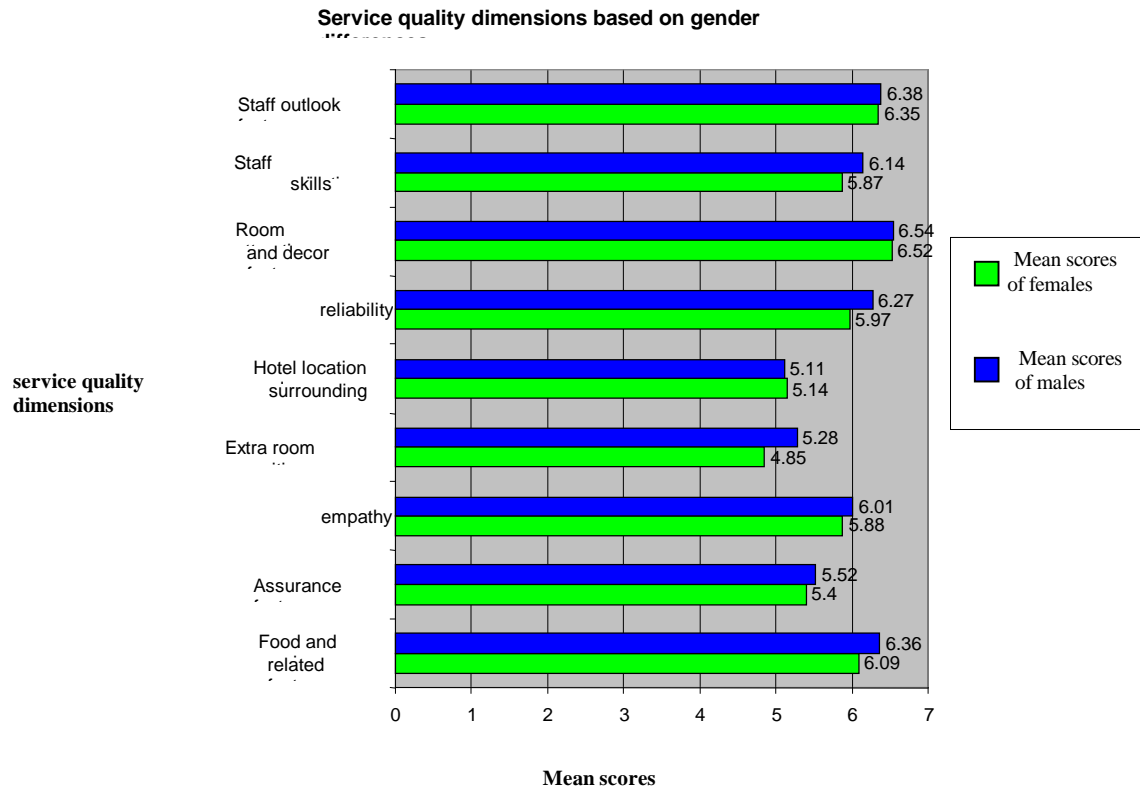means of women are higher than that of males in 8 out of 9 service quality dimensions.

Service quality dimensions based on gender differences

Figure 1: Service quality dimensions based on gender differences (n=401)

Based on the rankings given by hotel guests in general it has been seen that male and female

guests gave 'room attractiveness factors', 'assurance', 'reliability', 'staff outlook and

accuracy' and 'food service and related factors' the same ranking. Female guests had

attributed more emphasis on the dimension of 'staff communication skills' and 'extra room

amenities' than male guests. The lowest ranking for male guests was given to the 'extra room

amenities' whilst for females 'hotel surroundings 'had secured the lowest level of importance

As the nine service quality dimensions were suspected to have an impact on gender status,

MANOVA analysis was employed to test this assumption. In Table 3, both multivariate and

univariate analysis of variances were conducted with the independent service quality

dimensions in relation to the respondents' gender.

Service quality dimensions	F-Value	Signif level
Reliability	5.096	0.025*
Extra room amenities factor	11.446	0.001*
Staff communication skills and additional requirements	6.823	0.010*
Room attractiveness and décor factors	0.170	.0.680
Empathy factors	0.000	0.985
Staff outlook and accuracy factors	1.695	0.194
Food and service related factors	0.451	0.503
Hotel surroundings and environmental factors	0.676	0.412
Assurance factors	0.051	0.822
Wilks' lambda	3.108	0.002

*p<0.05

Table 3: MANOVA table showing the overall effect of service quality dimensions with gender (n=401)

The MANOVA results reveal that there were three service quality dimensions in which

significant differences were found between the two gender groups at $p \leq 0.05$ significance

level namely 'reliability', 'extra- room amenities' and 'staff communication skills'

dimensions. This indicates that gender does have a role in influencing the level of service

quality in hotels of Mauritius.

Discriminating variables

In this study, discriminant analysis was also conducted to distinguish between gender and the nine service quality predictor (independent) variables. To ascertain which dimensions of service quality are potentially more important to the demographic group based on gender, a discriminant analysis was performed. The results of the discriminant analysis are shown in Table 4.

Service quality dimensions (predictor variables)	Gender-male and female)	
	Statistic	Sig level
Extra room amenities sought	0.953	0.001
Staff communication skills and additional requirements	0.924	0.000
Reliability factors	0.903	0.000
Assurance	0.903	ns
Room attractiveness and décor factors	0.902	ns
Empathy factors	0.903	ns
Staff outlook and accuracy	0.896	ns
Food and service related factors	0.901	ns
Hotel surroundings and environmental factors	0.900	ns
Wilks'Lambda 0.903 Chi-square 23.663 df 3		

sig level 0.000

Table 4: Discriminant analysis between gender and service quality dimensions (n=401)

The discriminant analysis conducted in the present study also indicates that gender has discriminated successfully for 3 out of 9 dimensions namely; 'Extra room amenities sought', 'Staff communication skills and additional requirements' and 'Reliability factors'.

Managerial implications of the study and Recommendations

There is still so much of research to be done to address the needs of female travellers in the hospitality industry. Hotel managers and service providers must have the skills and cognitive ability to assess their customers' needs and perceptions. Hotel organisations must seek to understand customers and communicate with them. In this sudy, the question which arises is whether hotel managers in Mauritius are trying to analyse the impact of gender based differences in formulating the service quality dimensions of their organisations or not. By recognising the gender-based differences in service quality dimensions in hotels, a comparison of the service expectations between these two groups of hotel guests namely, male and female guests, has been made.

This can provide useful insights for how hotels should allocate resources across such demographic characteristics. There was some support that some distinctions were apparent in relation to types of gender and service quality dimensions in a hotel. It is imperative for hotel managers to understand the differences so that they can master appropriate marketing strategies better in future. The principal findings of this research offer several implications for practitioners and researchers alike as the results revealed significant differences across 6 out of 9 service quality dimensions based on gender differences namely in 'Food and service

related factors', 'Assurance', 'Extra room amenities', 'Hotel surroundings and environmental norms', 'Reliability' and 'Staff communication and additional benefits sought'.

The findings show that hotel guests, whether male or female have high expectations of service quality in hotels of Mauritius. But these findings also indicate that female guests have attributed higher level of expectations on service quality dimensions than their male counterparts. However there are differences in the service quality dimensions, which were deemed to be more important for males than females and vice-versa. In all the variables, which are statistically significant, ($p<0.05$; $p<0.01$) female guests had higher expectations on all the variables. Across both genders, means for promotional campaigns must emphasise on the need to provide factors such as due completion of tasks promised to guests, safety and security of guests, provision of privacy, effective handling of complaints, friendliness of staff, cleanliness and hygiene of rooms and bathrooms, neatness of staff and provision of healthy menus for guests amongst others.

Hotels who want to attract female travellers might stress security and a good price value relationship in their promotional campaigns. Gender segmentation, in particular, has become more common with the recognition that women represent a lucrative market segment.

Conclusions and Directions for future research

In conclusion, the study has shown that the interpretation of good service quality is partly influenced by the gender of the hotel guests and the analysis of male and female travellers showed obvious differences. Intense competition will continue to exist cyclically within the lodging industry to attract guests. Therefore hotels must study potential or existing markets and offer products and services to satisfy market needs and must aggressively implement business strategies to meet the needs of appealing future markets. Intense competition will

continue to exist cyclically within the lodging industry to attract guests. Therefore hotels must study potential or existing markets and offer products and services to satisfy market needs. More importantly, hotels must aggressively implement marketing and business strategies to meet the needs of appealing future markets.

Based on the evidence provided by the survey results, there are a number of conclusions that can be drawn to help the hotel sector meet the needs of the female business and leisure travellers more effectively. None of the proposed measures involve great financial outlay by hotel companies. Most could be increased by an increased awareness by management and staff of the needs of the businesswomen travellers, which would suggest improved training programmes and possibly a few more standard amenities provided in hotel bedrooms, particularly in the higher category hotels of Mauritius. Regarding security measures, clearly a major concern for women travelling alone, some women would want to be in a room situated near a lift or not on the ground floor. But the most important task is for reception staff to ask for their preferences. Spy holes and security chains should be fitted on all bedroom doors and corridors should be well lit. Staff in public and if possible telephone calls should be identified before callers are put through and they should never mention room numbers. Car parks should be well lit and a car jockey service should be provided especially at night. In hotel bars, staff should endeavour to make female guests feel at ease.

In the present research work, the hotel policies towards promotional programmes for women revealed three distinct responses to female segmentation namely:

1) *Segregation* where female difference is accentuated in the hotels

2*) Equity* where general business personal needs are accentuated in hotels

3*) Indifference* where despite recognition of segmentation no policies or services seem to have been developed in the hotels.

Directions for future research

The present study has examined differences between the needs of male and female hotel guests. Due to the limited scope of this paper, only a small selection of the results could be presented. Therefore the results of the present study open many avenues for future research. Many studies (Howell *et al.,* 1993; Barbaran, 1986) have also revealed that socio-demographic characteristics such as age and education can have a significant impact on the service quality of an organisation. Future research can address the customers' expectations and perceptions, by considering socio-demographic differences in a hotel experience, which may have implications on the assessment of service quality. It will also be possible to study the possibility of applying service quality expectations to the segmentation of the hotel customers, which is an industry that has a decisive influence in the international economy as a whole and also in Mauritius.

As future growth of tourism and competition are likely to emerge from the Indian Ocean islands namely Seychelles and Reunion Island, studies of service quality issues in those islands would appear appropriate. However in examining service quality in the Indian Ocean Region setting, one also needs to take into account whether the understanding of underlying dimensions of service quality e.g. demographic differences remain the same. Other research may also look out whether the perceived quality levels differ by countries in the Indian Ocean region e.g. Seychelles, Comores, Reunion and Rodrigues.

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