ABSTRACT

Hospitality and tourism now rank as the world's number one industry. The World Tourism Organization has predicted that international tourist arrivals will double in two decades. The significant growth of international tourism is simultaneously increasing the demand for accommodation facilities all over the world. Subsequently, a large number of hotels has been constructed in various popular tourist destinations of the world. It is a common belief that the products and services offered by different hotels in the hotel industry of any specific destination are often perceived to be broadly similar. This results in competition among hotels located in a specific destination. In turn, it demands very well organized efforts by service providers in hotels to leave no stone unturned to satisfy customers by providing products and services with added value.

The emerging market trend for the hotel industry clearly suggests that service providers should offer maximum satisfaction to customers for gaining a competitive advantage to survive and grow effectively in a highly volatile business environment. This creates a need for the management of the hotel concerned to systematically understand the level of satisfaction of its customer.s This concept has motivated the researcher to undertake the proposed research.

The primary objective of the hotel business is to understand the tourist's expectation and perception in order to attract new customers and retain repeat international tourists. Service quality is at the heart of retaining loyalty and it is everyone's responsibility (Smith, 1994). The purpose of this study is to assess the perceptions of service quality of the Umaid Bhawan Palace Hotel, from the perspective of international tourists.

The research focused on five dimensions of service quality; tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy including demographic factors and traveling characteristics. This study was conducted for the Umaid Bhawan Palace Hotel with a total of 300 international tourists who participated in this research.

SERVQUAL survey instrument was taken to measure the expectation and perception of international tourist's views. The questionnaire consists of two parts: Part I consist of the SERVQUAL questionnaire which has 22 statements to measure customer expectations and perceptions towards service quality of the Umaid Bhawan Palce Hotel. Part II collects the personal information of respondents used to segment the target customers in demographic and traveling characteristics. Paired Samples Test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) methods were used for hypothesis testing.

Major finding from this study indicates that there is a significant difference between expectation and perceptions of service quality of the Umaid Bhawan Palace Hotel from the perspective of international tourists in every service dimensions including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. However, the results show that there is no significant difference in service quality expectations between demographic factors and traveling characteristics; in contrast, *there are significant differences of service quality perceptions between respondents in* different demographic factors and traveling characteristics, except for different nationalities, gender, education levels, length of stay, past experience and expenditure.

From the findings, the Umaid Bhawan Palace Hotel should close the gap between expectations and perception by improving service quality in the most concerned area, assurance, in order to obtain trust from international tourists and be able to compete further in this business.