

Service Quality Perceptions and Socio-demographic Characteristics of Hotel Guests in the Western Region of Ghana

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Abstract

Service quality of hotels is an important concern for hotel guests. The inflow of the guests depends on the quality of service they get from the hotel. Service quality perceptions of hotel guests may be influenced by socio-demographic characteristics. Perceptions of service in hotels may also vary among the guests based on the differences in nationality, gender, age, education, occupation, etc. Thus, this study investigates the relationship between guests' socio-demographic characteristics and their perception of service quality; and also examines the differences in the perception of service quality dimensions with reference to guests' socio-demographic characteristics. A sample of 358 hotel guests was surveyed through structured questionnaire and the analysis was done in relation to guests' socio-demographic characteristics. The Chi-square test of independence and the independent samples t-test were used to test for the existence of significant relationships and differences. The result revealed significant differences in terms of the components of service quality: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. It was also prevalent that perceptions of service quality varied significantly among the guests in the hotels based on their socio-demographic characteristics. Guests from diversified background patronized the hotels in the Western Region of Ghana. It is possible that guests' perceptions of service quality in hotels are influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics.

Keywords: Service quality, hotel guests, perceptions, demographic characteristics.

1. Introduction

Services industry managers and academic researchers are trying to understand how customers perceive the quality of service, as the service industry has become competitive. The hotel industry is a typical service industry that offers individualized services for guests. Like any other service industry, customer satisfaction and positive revisit intentions are secured through high service quality in this industry. Guests usually form their judgments about hotels based on the evaluation of interactions, the environment and the value that they attach to their stay in the hotel.

This paper takes a first step towards exploring guests' perceptions of service quality in hotels in the Western Region of Ghana. Anecdotal evidence suggests that not much has been documented on research on service quality in hotels in the Western Region. Like other service industries, no research initiative is taken so far to explore the service quality perceptions of hotel guests, vis-à-vis their socio-demographic characteristics. Due to the problem of inadequate support for researches in the country generally, very few service industries are explored in terms of service quality.

Besides, socio-demographic characteristics is one of the major determinants of consumer buying behaviour and it plays a notable role in shaping customer needs (Aksoy, Atilgan & Akinci, 2003). In fact differences in the demographic profile of the consumer can lead to variances in the perception of service quality (Bebko, 2000). Thus, this study assessed the service quality perceptions of hotel guests based on their socio-demographic variations towards the improvement of service quality in hotels in the Western Region to offer them a competitive edge. Specifically, the study sought to: 1) explore the socio-demographic characteristics of hotel guests; 2) explore relationships between class of hotel and guests' characteristics; 3) investigate the relationship between guests' socio-demographic characteristics and their perception of service quality; and 4) examine the extent to which guests' perceptions of service quality dimensions vary with socio-demographic characteristics. In measuring the objectives set in this study, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their gender.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their level of education.

Hypothesis three: There is no significant relationship between guests' overall perceptions of service quality and their occupation.

Hypothesis four: There is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their age.

Hypothesis five: There is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their nationality.

2. Service Quality

Service quality is quite an elusive concept that is difficult to define and measure. As such, several conceptualizations have been introduced from different perspectives. The concept of service quality is not universally agreed upon and is often used as an umbrella term to cover a range of impressions gathered by customers when dealing with vendors (Fogarty, Catts & Forlin, 2000). Service quality has therefore been defined differently by various authors. Among the earlier definitions are 'conformance to requirements' (Crosby, 1984), 'one that satisfies the customer' (Eiglier & Laugeard, 1987) or 'fitness for use' (Juran, 1988). Initial efforts in defining and measuring service quality emanated largely from the goods sector, with little reference to services. However, a solid foundation for research work in the area was laid down in the middle of the 1980s by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985).

An analysis of most definitions of service quality highlights the fact that the customer's perception of service quality has been the primary focus of service quality studies. In other words, service quality is based on the customer's perception of quality. Almost all the definitions place the consumer in the center of affairs, focusing on the consumer's perception, evaluation, judgment and impression of the inferiority or superiority of service. Service quality can therefore be defined as consumers' perceptions or impressions of a service experience, whether good or bad. Thus, this study considers service quality as guests' perceptions, impressions, feelings or judgments about hotels and their services.

Service quality is crucial to the success of any service organization, including hotels. Customers participate in the service delivery process as they interact closely with various aspects of the hotel organization during service delivery. This knowledge gives them the opportunity to critically assess the services provided in hotels (Kandampully, 2000). Markovic and Raspor (2010) observe that customers are likely to view services as a variety of attributes that may, in different ways, contribute to their purchase intentions and perceptions of service quality. Although researchers (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1990) have focused on different aspects of service quality, they all agree that the emphasis should be on the customer.

2.1 Service Quality Dimensions

Suuroja (2003) observes that traditional service quality models considered perceptions of service quality to be based on multiple dimensions or components, and the majority of the later studies have done same. As service comprises a complex set of explicit and implicit attributes (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988), it is logical to assume that the customer's overall evaluation should include evaluations along these attributes. Service quality is not seen as a separate construct, but rather as an aggregate of several dimensions or components.

Furthermore, Parasuraman et al. (1988; 1991; 1993) propose a more specific list of service quality dimensions. According to them, the overall evaluation of service quality is derived from an evaluation along five dimensions:

1. Tangibles – physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel;
2. Reliability – ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;
3. Responsiveness – willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
4. Assurance – knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence; and
5. Empathy – caring and individualized attention that the firm provides to its customers.

2.2 Service Quality and Socio-demographic Characteristics

Indeed, in the consumer behaviour literature, personal characteristics are among the major factors determining consumer decision-making and subsequent behaviours. Therefore, it is logically assumed that customers with different individual characteristics have different reasons for behaving the way they do. For example, demographic variables such as age and education have been found to exert an important influence on the overall perception of service quality (Kim & Lough, 2007). Also, customers with higher income have selected ambience and comfort level as their determinant selection variables (Kivela, 1997).

Hotel guests' satisfaction and their socio-demographic profile is also an important factor in the hotel industry. Abdullah and Hamdan (2012) found out that age, marital status, gender, ethnicity, occupation and monthly income influenced how Malaysians and other foreign guests in Malaysia selected their hotel accommodation. In addition, Raza et. al. (2012) observed that in Romania gender has no significant difference in terms of frequency of visit and overall satisfaction, while satisfaction varies with different income groups. Socio-economic status may also affect customer satisfaction and that of loyalty. In the Iyiade's (2009) study, high socio-economic hotel guests in Nigeria were found to spend more during their stay in the hotel, but they were not easily satisfied and thus have low loyalty level.

Mattila, Grandey and Fisk (2003) and Snipes, Thompson and Oswaild (2006) argue that there can be gender differences in customer perceptions about service quality. To confirm this, Tabassum, Rahman and Jahan (2012) found significant differences between the ranking of male and female guests with the tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy dimensions of service quality in a tourist hotel. Similarly,

Sanchez-Hernandez et al. (2010) found differences between men and women in the association of service quality with customer evaluation. Spathis et al. (2004) also studied the effect of gender on the perception of service quality and on the importance attached to its various dimensions. The outcome of this study shows that male customers perceived service quality higher than female customers. Contrary to the work of Spathis et al. (2004), Butler, Sharon and Turner (1996) show that females perceived a higher level of hospital service quality than males. The literature also explains the differences in consumption behaviour related to gender through differences either biological, attitudinal or personality traits of masculinity and femininity distinguishing male from female (Fisher & Arnold, 1994).

Age is considered a critical factor as it helps the marketer to determine how desires and needs change and evolve when the individual grows (Stafford, 1996). Studies based on the analysis of the effect of age reveal significant differences between various age groups whether it is at the perception level or at the degree of importance given to service quality. Thus, Stafford (1996) observes that, as far as banking quality is concerned, two young groups (18-25 years and 26-35 years) were less concerned with the honesty and reliability dimensions than older groups (36-45, 46-55 and more than 65 years).

Similarly, within the framework of hospital service, Butler et al. (1996) show the existence of a positive relation between age and service quality perception: Precisely, the aged patients perceived a higher level of quality of the tangibles dimension than younger patients. To explain the differences in service quality perceptions among customers of different age groups, Homburg and Giering (2001) conclude that older people have restricted information processing capabilities and that information process decreases with age. In the same way, John and Cole (1986) suggest that the elderly can be expected to exhibit problems with information loads because they process at slower speeds. Thus, the elderly are less consistent in their judgments.

Throwing more emphasis on age, Knutson and Patton (1993) found that older customers are more concerned about their health and the quality of food was identified as important. In another study, Soriano (2002) found food quality not to stand out as the most important reason for young customers; however, customers over 60 years of age indicated food quality as the most important attribute determining their satisfaction. In a similar vein, Siu and Mou (2005) and Lee and Chen (2009) observed that tourists' perceptions of service quality do not vary with age differences. On the contrary, Tabassum et al. (2012) see a significant difference among guests of different age groups regarding the reliability dimension.

In the literature, very few studies have been undertaken on service quality perceptions and occupation. However, observations made by researchers such as Tsang and Qu (2002) in China; Nadiri and Hussain (2005) in Cyprus, and Yilmaz (2009) indicate that hotel guests are mostly professionals. For example, Yilmaz (2009), in a study on service quality in the hotel industry in Cappadocia, found that most of the hotel clients are professionals. Lee and Chen (2009) also found that tourists' perceptions of service quality in hotels do not vary with occupation.

In terms of education, Butler et al. (1996) do not note any significant relationship between the level of education of patients and their perception of hospital service quality. In the same way, no significant differences are recorded on the level of the scores of importance allotted to factors of service quality, provided by the local authority, between people of various levels of education (Scott & Schieff, 1993). However, the study by Webb (1988) on expectations of consumers with respect to service quality shows that respondents that have a lower level of education wished a higher level of performance regarding assurance/reliability and tangibles dimensions, contrary to those that have higher level of education who do not give much importance to these dimensions. In the same vein, Tabassum et al. (2012) found a significant difference between level of education and the reliability dimension, as well as the responsiveness and empathy dimensions of service quality.

3. Methods

Data were collected mainly through the survey method, with the use of a questionnaire. Primary data on service quality perceptions in hotels in the Western Region; as well as data on socio-demographic characteristics were obtained from guests of the sampled hotels. The target population of the study comprised all guests, aged 18 years and above, male or female who stayed in selected registered and licensed hotels in the Western Region for at least one night. For the purpose of this study, a guest is defined as any individual who is a temporary visitor of either Ghanaian or international origin, stays for at least one night in the hotel and spends money for services rendered.

This study employed a multi-stage sampling technique by using a combination of cluster, stratified and simple random sampling techniques to select a sample of hotels (53 hotels) for the study. Convenience sampling was employed to draw the required sample of hotel guests for this study. Thus, guests who were in-house, checking-in and checking-out at the time of visit to the hotels during the period of the fieldwork were sampled. Questionnaires were therefore administered to guests who fell within this category in the selected hotels. The questionnaire was pretested and the appropriate reliability and validity tests were conducted to validate the results empirically. The pre-testing of the instrument enabled the establishment of the internal consistency and

reliability of the instrument. A reliability co-efficient of 0.977 was achieved.

This study employed quantitative methods of analysis, using SPSS for windows version 17.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and simple percentages were calculated for all the variables and used in describing and summarizing the data and other characteristics of the subject matter. Frequencies and percentages were used to explore the socio-demographic and travel characteristics of guests. An inferential statistic method like the Chi-square test of independence was used to explore the relationship between class of hotel and guests' background characteristics and to investigate the relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their background characteristics. The independent sample t-test and the one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were also used to examine the extent to which guests' perceptions of service quality dimensions vary with their socio-demographic and travel characteristics.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Hotel Guests

Demographic variables are the most popular bases for classifying/segmenting customers. Consumer wants, preferences and usage rates are often associated with demographic variables since they are easy to measure (Kotler, 2003). Information on socio-demographic characteristics is essential for the interpretation and understanding of perceptions of service quality though there has been very little attempt to link the socio-demographic characteristics of customers to their perception of service quality (Mensah, 2009). The question of how socio-demographic variables influence consumer behaviour is an important issue that has to be studied (Kim & Chung, 2011). Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics covered in the study and it includes nationality, age, gender, marital status, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation, and monthly income. Generally, the respondents covered in this study were mostly males between the ages 18 and 39 years, Christians, married, and with university/college education. They were mostly professionals who earned more than GH¢2000 per month.

As shown in Table 1, about two thirds (70%) of the respondents were Ghanaians whilst the remaining (30%) were non-Ghanaians from countries such as United Kingdom (6.4%), Norway (3.7%), United States of America (6.4%), China (9.2%), Korea (9.2%), Germany (8.3%), Togo (5.5%), Nigeria (11.9%), India (6.4%), South Africa (10.1%), the Netherlands (5.5%), Australia (9.2%), Spain (3.6%) and Canada (4.6%). This finding contradicts the popular notion that hotels are mostly patronized by foreigners and seems to suggest that hotels in the Western Region are patronized more by Ghanaians. Over half of the respondents (57.3%) were within the 18-39 age brackets and were followed by those aged between 40 and 59 years (39%). This is in contradiction with Karatepe and Avci's (2002) findings where more than half of the respondents fell in the age categories of 28-37 years and 38-47 years, with 18.5 percent belonging to the age category of 18-27 years. This finding is, however, close to Yilmaz's (2009) study which found more than half of guests to be between the ages of 18-44 years.

Table 1 indicates that the sample for the study comprised more males (81%) than females (19%). This also contradicts the observation made by Juwaheer (2004) in Mauritius that about an equal proportion of females (50.4%) and males (49.6%) make use of the existing hotel facilities. On the contrary, it reinforced the finding of Tsang and Qu (2000) in China that more males (65%) utilized hotels than their female counterparts (35%). Traditionally, males are known to travel more than females, and this could be a contributory factor to the low patronage by female guests. The Ghanaian culture also frowns on women patronizing hotel facilities, and therefore, the few female guests could be made up of more non-Ghanaians than Ghanaians. Close to 68 per cent of the respondents were married while 28 per cent were never married. The rest (4%) were divorced, separated, or widowed. This finding is inconsistent with the popular notion that people who are single (never married and previously married) travel more because they may not have any family responsibilities and obligations

As evident from Table 1, a little over half (52%) of the respondents were tertiary/university graduates. They are followed by those who had postgraduate education (24%). This finding conforms to those of Tsang and Qu (2000), Karatepe and Avci (2002) and Juwaheer (2004), who observed that more than half of guests who patronize hotels had a university, college or graduate education. With regard to religious affiliation, the majority of the respondents (82%) were Christians, followed by Muslims (7%). The rest (11%) were Judaists, Atheists and those who practiced other religions. This finding was expected because it is a fact that there are more Christians than Muslims in Ghana. The 2010 population census reported 71.2 per cent Christians and 17.6 per cent Muslims (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of hotel guests

Socio-demographic characteristics	Frequency (N= 358)	Percentage (%)
<i>Nationality</i>		
Ghanaian	249	69.6
Non-Ghanaian	109	30.4
<i>Age (in years)</i>		
18-39	200	57.3
40-59	135	38.6
60 and above	14	4.0
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	289	80.7
Female	69	19.3
<i>Marital status</i>		
Never married	102	28.5
Married	242	67.5
Previously married	14	4.0
<i>Level of education</i>		
Primary/Basic school	11	3.1
Secondary/High school	73	20.4
Tertiary/University	187	52.2
Postgraduate	87	24.3
<i>Religious affiliation</i>		
Christian	294	82.1
Muslim	24	6.8
Judaist	15	4.2
Atheist	17	4.7
Other	8	2.2
<i>Occupation</i>		
Self-employed	80	22.3
Professional	245	68.4
Retired	12	3.4
Student	21	5.9
<i>Monthly income (GH¢)</i>		
Less than 500	43	13.0
500-999	87	26.1
1000-1499	56	16.8
1500-1999	47	14.1
2000 and above	100	30.0

From Table 1, guests were mostly professionals - doctors, nurses, pharmacists, lawyers, accountants, auditors, bankers, teachers, engineers, miners, drivers and managers (68.4%), followed by the self-employed - businessmen/women and entrepreneurs (22.3%). This finding is in line with observations made by researchers such as Tsang and Qu (2002) in China, Nadiri and Hussain (2005) in Cyprus and Yilmaz (2009). For example, Yilmaz (2009) in a study on service quality in the hotel industry in Cappadocia, found out that most of the hotel clients were professionals. With regard to monthly income, respondents who earned GH¢2000 and above were relatively more (30%) while 13 per cent earned less than GH¢500. All the other income groupings were fairly represented. This implies that staying in a hotel does not really require a certain threshold of income. This is because there are different categories and classes of hotels (star rated and non-star rated) that offer different room rates. Usually, the star-rated hotels have higher room rates than the non star-rated ones.

4.2 Class of Hotel and Guests' Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table 2: Class of hotel by guests' socio-demographic characteristics (N=358)

Background characteristics	Number	Hotel category		X ² (p-value)
		Star rated (%)	Non-star rated (%)	
<i>Nationality</i>				
Ghanaian	249	58.6	41.4	34.369 (0.000*)
Non-Ghanaian	109	89.9	10.1	
<i>Age</i>				
18-39	200	67.5	32.5	0.527 (0.760)
49-59	135	68.9	31.1	
60 and above	14	76.9	23.1	
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	289	65.7	34.3	5.321 (0.070)
Female	69	78.3	21.7	
<i>Marital status</i>				
Never married	120	60.8	39.2	14.105 (0.079)
Married	242	70.2	29.8	
Previously married	14	61.1	38.9	
<i>Level of education</i>				
Primary/basic	11	36.4	63.6	19.388 (0.004*)
Secondary/high sch.	73	68.5	31.5	
Tertiary/University	187	64.2	35.8	
Postgraduate	87	80.5	19.5	
<i>Religious affiliation</i>				
Christian	294	66.0	34.0	44.847 (0.000*)
Muslim	24	58.3	41.7	
Judaism	15	86.7	13.3	
Atheist	17	94.1	5.9	
Other	8	91.7	8.3	
<i>Occupation</i>				
Self-employed	80	68.8	31.2	51.922 (0.000*)
Professional	245	65.3	34.7	
Retired	12	66.7	33.3	
Student	21	71.4	28.6	
<i>Monthly income (GH¢)</i>				
Less than 500	43	37.2	62.8	51.922 (0.000*)
500-999	87	56.4	43.6	
1000-1499	56	75.0	25.0	
1500-1999	47	68.1	31.9	
2000 and above	100	86.0	14.0	

*Significance level $p \leq 0.05$

Significant relationships existed between class of hotel and some of the background characteristics (*nationality, monthly income, level of education, occupation and purpose of visit*). A significant relationship was established at $p = 0.000$ between class of hotel and nationality of guests. The majority (89.9 %) of the non-Ghanaian guests stayed in the star-rated hotels whilst guests who utilized the non-star rated hotels comprised more of Ghanaian guests (41.4%).

Similarly, a significant relationship ($p = 0.004$) was established between class of hotel and guests' level of education. Guests with postgraduate education were noted to stay in the star rated hotels (80.5%) more than their other counterparts while those who stayed in the non-star rated hotels were mostly primary and basic school leavers (63.6%). Interestingly, this latter group was also the group with the least representation (36.4%) of guests who stayed in the star rated hotels.

Like educational attainment, a significant relationship ($p = 0.000$) was also found between class of hotel and occupation. Surprisingly, more (71.4%) students were found to stay in the star-rated hotels while about a third (34.7%) of professionals stayed in the non-star rated hotels. Students may not be earning regular incomes to enable them patronize the star-rated hotels which obviously charge higher room rates. However, the reason behind this finding could be that these students might have travelled for educational or research purposes that may have been sponsored by institutions or organizations. It could also mean that these students may not have

been staying alone in the hotel, but at the expense of other guests belonging to the other occupational groups. As expected, a significant relationship was established between class of hotel and income ($p = 0.000$). The result showed that guests who earned the highest monthly income (more than GH¢2000) patronized the star-rated hotels while individuals who earned less than GH¢500 patronized the non-star rated hotels. In contrast, no significant relationships were detected between class of hotel and age ($p = 0.760$), gender ($p = 0.070$), marital status ($p = 0.079$) and religious affiliation ($p = 0.358$).

4.3 Perceptions of Service Quality and Guests' Socio-demographic Characteristics

To investigate how guests' characteristics relate to their perception of service quality, a Chi-square test of independence (X^2) was used. Table 3 presents the results of the test of relationship between overall perception and guests' characteristics. Overall perception was the dependent variable while guests' characteristics formed the independent variables.

Table 3 shows significant relationships between overall perception of service quality and some socio-demographic variables of guests: gender, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation and monthly income. A significant relationship was established at $p = 0.054$ between overall perception of service quality and the gender of guests. Based on this result, the hypothesis that, there is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their gender was rejected. The majority of female guests (81.4%) rated service quality as high, while those who rated service quality to be moderate comprised more males (21%). This observation suggests that guests' perceptions of service quality in hotels in the Western Region can be influenced by their gender. In a similar study in hospitals, Butler, Sharon and Turner (1996) showed that women perceived a higher level of hospital service quality than men.

On the contrary, Spathis et al. (2004) who studied the effect of gender on the perception of service quality found that male customers perceived a higher level of quality than females. Highlighting the influence of gender on behaviour, Fisher and Arnold (1994) argued that consumption behaviour related to gender could be either biological, attitudinal or the personality traits of masculinity and femininity distinguishing man from woman.

Similarly, a significant relationship ($p = 0.050$) was established between overall perception of service quality and guests' level of education. Based on this result, the hypothesis that, there is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their level of education was rejected. Guests with primary/basic education were noted to have a higher perception of service quality (80%) than their other counterparts while those who perceived overall service quality to be moderate were mostly postgraduates (24%).

Table 3: Overall perception of service quality and socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographics	F	Overall perception			X ² (P-value)
		Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)	
<i>Gender</i>					
Male	289	9.7	20.9	69.4	9.279*
Female	69	11.4	7.2	81.4	(0.054)
<i>Age (in years)</i>					
18-39	200	11.0	14.0	74.0	
40-59	135	8.2	24.4	67.4	9.769
60 and above	14	0.0	15.4	84.6	(0.282)
<i>Marital status</i>					
Unmarried	116	11.7	16.2	72.1	1.320
Married	242	9.3	19.0	71.7	(0.858)
<i>Level of education</i>					
Primary/Basic school	11	10.0	10.0	80.0	
Secondary/High Sch.	73	14.2	7.9	77.9	
Tertiary/University	187	11.6	19.3	69.1	26.293*
Postgraduate	87	4.6	24.1	71.3	(0.050)
<i>Religious affiliation</i>					
Christian	294	11.7	18.2	70.1	
Muslim	24	10.5	11.0	78.9	
Judaist	15	0.0	25.5	74.5	
Atheist	17	0.0	37.5	62.5	24.369*
Other	8	2.6	12.8	84.6	(0.018)
<i>Occupation</i>					
Self-employed	80	19.1	11.8	69.1	
Professional	245	8.8	23.7	67.5	
Retired	12	0.0	4.3	95.7	36.406**
Students	21	16.7	11.1	72.2	(0.000)
<i>Nationality</i>					
Ghanaian	249	11.7	17.8	70.5	7.820
Non-Ghanaian	109	6.5	18.7	74.8	(0.098)
<i>Monthly income(GH¢)</i>					
Less than 500	43	2.0	16.0	82.0	
500-999	87	20.0	20.3	59.7	
1000-1499	56	14.2	18.4	67.4	
1500-1999	47	13.3	31.0	54.7	31.675**
2000 and above	100	2.1	20.6	77.3	(0.011)

Significance level $p \leq 0.051$

This finding is consistent with the research done by Webb (1998) which is related to the study of expectations of consumers with respect to service quality. Webb's study showed that the respondents with a lower level of education had a higher perception level regarding service quality. The reason for this could be that, traditionally, people with low levels of education are not exposed to much information on service quality in hotels and may therefore find little or no problem with service quality in the hotels.

Like educational attainment, a significant relationship ($p = 0.018$) was detected between overall perception of service quality and guests' religious affiliation. Relatively more Muslim guests (79%) than guests belonging to the other religious groups were found to perceive overall service quality to be high while those who perceived overall service quality to be moderate were mostly Atheists (36%). A significant relationship ($p = 0.000$) was also established between guests' overall perception of service quality and their occupation. Based on this result, the hypothesis that, there is no significant relationship between guests' overall perceptions of service quality and their occupation was rejected. Relatively more (96%) guests who were retirees were found to perceive overall service quality as high while more guests (24%) who were professionals perceived service quality as moderate. This finding confirms that of Venn and Fone (2005) who found that a higher perception of service quality was significantly associated with the retired whereas lower levels were associated with those working or students.

As shown in Table 3, a significant relationship ($p = 0.011$) was detected between overall perception of service quality and the monthly income of guests. Interestingly, the majority (82%) of guests who perceived service quality to be high were those who earned less than GH¢500. This was followed by guests who earned

GH¢2000 and more (77.3%). Traditionally, it is expected that the more you pay the better service you receive. This might be the reason for the high perception of guests earning more than GH¢2000. On the other hand, those who perceived service quality in the hotels to be moderate comprised relatively more (31%) of guests who earned 1500-1999 Ghana cedis.

In contrast, no significant relationship ($p = 0.282$) was established between overall perception of service quality and guests' ages. Based on this result, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service and their age failed to be rejected. However, Table 3 shows that guests who were aged 60 years and above had relatively high (84.6%) perceptions than guests who were younger. Age has largely been considered a critical factor in services marketing, in that it makes it possible for the marketer to determine how desires and needs change and evolve when the individual grows (Stafford, 1996).

Similarly, there was no significant relationship ($p = 0.098$) between overall perception of service quality and the nationality of guests. Based on this result, the hypothesis that, there is no significant relationship between guests' overall perception of service quality and their nationality failed to be rejected. More than half of both Ghanaian guests (71%) and non-Ghanaian guests (75%) perceived service quality to be high. This observation implies that guests' overall perceptions of service quality in hotels in the Western Region were not influenced by their nationality even though there could be variations in perceptions regarding the various dimensions and specific attributes of service quality as discussed in the subsequent sections.

Among the eight socio-demographic variables used, five variables including gender, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation and income were found to be significantly related to the overall perception of service quality. This implies that the demographic variables which showed statistically significant relationships in the levels of perceptions of service quality are influential factors on the overall service quality. It may therefore be beneficial for managers in hotels to develop new strategies based on these findings. In other words, segmenting guests on the basis of their gender, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation and income could be considered for marketing efforts to be targeted appropriately. Mullin et al. (2000) acknowledged that market segmentation is one of the key strategies that create a bridge between managerial analysis and managerial action. Knowing guests from their demographic data can assist hotel managers to identify areas that need improvement regarding service quality.

4.4 Service Quality Dimensions and Socio-demographic Characteristics

The independent sample *t*-test and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics were used to examine the extent to which perceptions of service quality dimensions vary with background characteristics. To facilitate the interpretation of results, the 5-point Likert scale originally used to collect data was collapsed to 3 points (1 – 1.49 = disagreed, 1.50 – 2.49 = neutral, 2.50 – 3 = agreed). The independent sample *t*-test statistics was used on variables that were measured along dichotomous scale (nationality, gender), whilst analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique was employed on variables with three or more categories (age, level of education, occupation). The existence of significant differences was determined by comparing the *p*-value with the level of significance set (0.05). Table 4 presents the mean responses of service quality dimensions by socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 4: Service quality dimensions by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic characteristic	F	TAN	REL	RES	ASS	EMP
<i>Nationality</i>						
Ghanaian	249	2.52	2.38	2.48	2.61	2.56
Non-Ghanaian	109	2.40	1.97	2.15	2.57	2.43
		<i>P</i> = .050	<i>P</i> =.000	<i>P</i> = .000	<i>P</i> =.543	<i>P</i> =.040
<i>Gender</i>						
Male	289	2.47	2.22	2.37	2.59	2.53
Female	69	2.54	2.38	2.46	2.62	2.48
		<i>P</i> =.313	<i>P</i> =.025	<i>P</i> =.298	<i>P</i> =.640	<i>P</i> =.539
<i>Age</i>						
18 – 39	206	2.50	2.28	2.39	2.65	2.54
40 – 59	139	2.47	2.23	2.41	2.62	2.51
60 and above	13	2.50	2.14	2.24	2.70	2.51
		<i>P</i> =.755	<i>P</i> =.524	<i>P</i> =.688	<i>P</i> =.183	<i>P</i> =.927
<i>Level of education</i>						
Primary/basic	11	2.55	2.42	2.69	2.72	2.65
Sec./High Sch.	73	2.71	2.52	2.63	2.78	2.71
Tertiary/University	187	2.45	2.19	2.35	2.56	2.48
Postgraduate	87	2.48	2.21	2.32	2.60	2.53
		<i>P</i> =.213	<i>P</i> =.005	<i>P</i> =.078	<i>P</i> =.204	<i>P</i> =.343
<i>Occupation</i>						
Self-employed	80	2.44	2.30	2.40	2.58	2.50
Professionals	245	2.49	2.25	2.40	2.58	2.51
Retired	12	2.54	2.17	2.25	2.73	2.53
Students	21	2.52	2.22	2.30	2.63	2.56
		<i>P</i> =.755	<i>P</i> =.327	<i>P</i> =.893	<i>P</i> =.979	<i>P</i> =.984

Note: scale 1 – 1.49 = disagreed, 1.50 – 2.49 = neutral, 2.50 – 3 = agreed. The mean difference is significant

at the 0.05 level. TAN = Tangibles, REL = Reliability, RES = Responsiveness, ASS = Assurance, EMP = Empathy

With respect to nationality, the *t*-test analysis revealed that there were significant differences in guests' perceptions of service quality in hotels in the areas of tangibles ($p = 0.05$), reliability ($p = 0.00$), responsiveness ($p = 0.00$) and empathy ($p = 0.04$) dimensions. It was established that whereas the Ghanaians agreed (mean = 2.52) that physical facilities, equipment and staff appearance (tangibles) were adequate, their non-Ghanaian counterparts were divided (mean = 2.40) on this dimension. A similar pattern of reasoning was registered in respect of customers being offered caring and individualized attention by the hotels (empathy). However, Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians both agreed (Ghanaians: mean = 2.61, non-Ghanaians: mean = 2.57) that the hotels provide friendly service and were able to inspire trust and confidence (assurance). Both Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians were also noted to express doubt as to whether or not a promised service is performed dependably and accurately (reliability) (Ghanaians: mean = 2.38, non-Ghanaians: means = 1.97); and the willingness of staff to help and the provision of prompt service (responsiveness) (Ghanaians: mean = 2.48, non-Ghanaians: mean = 2.15). For both dimensions, the Ghanaians were found to express more doubt than their non-Ghanaian counterparts (see Table 4).

This observation suggests that the non-Ghanaian guests were more critical in their perceptions of service quality than their Ghanaian counterparts. In Nadiri and Hussain's (2005) study on service quality in Cyprus hotels European customers were found to be very demanding regarding improvement in the quality of service. However, the non-Ghanaians in this study comprised of both Europeans and other foreigners who were not Europeans.

Mattila, Grandey and Fisk (2003) and Snipes, Thompson and Oswaild (2006) argue that gender differences existed in customers' perceptions about service quality. With the exception of reliability, no significant differences were detected in the other areas of assessment by the guests. A significant ($p = 0.02$) difference was observed in relation to how male (mean = 2.22) and female (mean = 2.38) guests perceived the reliability of hotel services. This finding is consistent with Tabassum, Rahman and Jahan (2012) who found a significant difference between the ranking of male and female guests regarding the reliability dimension of service quality in a tourist hotel. However, in the present study, the female guests expressed more ambivalence than the males with regard to the reliability of hotel services (Table 4). A pattern similar to the above was observed with the responsiveness dimension. With that, both males and females agreed that the hotel staff gave

them a sense of assurance. The female guests agreed (mean = 2.54) that the hotels had adequate tangible evidence while the male guests were undecided on this issue (mean = 2.47).

Conversely, the males were in agreement (mean = 2.53) whereas the females were doubtful (mean = 2.48) as to whether the hotels empathized with them. Gender differences in agreement regarding service quality dimensions have been identified by various studies. For example, in a study on the effect of gender on the perception of service quality and on the importance attached to its various dimensions, Spathis et al. (2004) found that male customers tended to rate the quality of hotel services higher than their female counterparts. On the contrary, Djaziri and Gam (2013) in a study on service quality perception measurement scale in hotel management found out that all the five dimensions were favourably evaluated by female guests.

Age has been identified as a critical factor in marketing as it makes it possible for the marketer to determine how desires and needs change and evolve when the individual grows (Stafford, 1996). Studies have revealed significant differences between the various age groups whether the differences are at the perception level or at the degree of importance given to service quality. With specific reference to this study, no statistically significant differences were established between age and all the five service quality dimensions (Table 4). This observation suggests that the ages of guests did not affect their perceptions of service quality. As evident from Table 4, the youth (18-39 years) were in agreement that tangibles (mean = 2.50), responsiveness (mean = 2.65) and empathy issues (mean = 2.54) contributed to their perception of service quality in hotels in the Western Region. A similar pattern was observed with their counterparts in the other age groups, except for the 40-59 years group who were divided on the tangibles dimension (mean = 2.47).

All the age groups, however, expressed uncertainty regarding the reliability and assurance dimensions. The findings reinforced the observation made by Siu and Mou (2005) and Lee and Chen (2009) that tourists' perceptions of service quality do not vary with age differences. However, this finding does not agree with that of Tabassum et al. (2012) who found that a significant difference existed among guests of different age groups regarding the reliability dimension.

Furthermore, Table 4 suggests that, with the exception of the reliability dimension, no significant differences existed across the education groupings with respect to tangibles, assurance, responsiveness and empathy concerns expressed on service quality perceptions in hotels in the Western Region. The results show that guests with secondary/high school education were in agreement with all the dimensions. This implies that they had a high perception of service quality with regard to the tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy dimensions. A similar observation was made with guests who were primary/basic school leavers, except for the reliability dimension to which they were neutral (mean = 2.42), implying a moderate perception of service quality.

With the exception of the assurance dimension to which they agreed (mean = 2.56), guests with tertiary education were uncertain about their perception of service quality regarding the other dimensions. The implication is that those with tertiary education had a high perception of service quality for only the assurance dimension while their perception for the other dimensions could be described as moderate. A similar trend was also observed with the postgraduates even though they agreed on two dimensions (assurance: mean = 2.60 and empathy: mean = 2.53). These observations suggest that guests who were highly educated and, obviously, well informed had different perceptions from those who were less educated. This finding is consistent with Tabassum et al. (2012) who found a significant difference between the level of education and the reliability dimension.

From Table 4, no significant differences were observed for all the service quality dimensions across the various occupational groups. This finding supports that of Lee and Chen (2009) who found no significant difference between tourists' perceptions of service quality in hotels and their occupation. However, some interesting patterns that are worth noting emerged. Guests who were self-employed and the professionals were divided on issues pertaining to tangibles (means = 2.44 and 2.49 respectively) while the retirees and the students agreed (means = 2.54 and 2.52 respectively). On issues relating to the reliability and responsiveness aspects of service quality, there was an express ambivalence among all the occupational groups. In spite of this, all the groups were in favour of issues concerning the assurance and empathy dimensions of service quality.

5. Conclusion

The study assessed service quality in terms of demographic differences of the hotel guests. The class of hotel that guests stayed in may be influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics. Guests' overall perception of service quality in hotels may also be influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics. The study revealed considerable differences in the perceptions of service quality in hotels in the areas of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness and empathy dimensions vis-à-vis guests' socio-demographic characteristics. So the hotel management should try to improve these aspects of service quality, taking consideration of guests' characteristics and the corresponding areas that need to be enhanced. Besides, it is also apparent that the guests' evaluation about service quality varies based on the differences in gender and education for the reliability dimension. So the hotels should formulate their strategies in such a way that each and every group of guests is satisfied about the

service quality. Many organizations in the world have focused on the differences among the customer groups and become successful by meeting the needs and requirements of different customer groups (Tabassum, Rahman & Jahan, 2012). The hotels will then be able to attract more guests of different demographic profiles and be able to meet their needs.

The overall guest perception of service quality in hotels is influenced by guest characteristics such as, gender, occupation and level of education. The majority of female guests perceived service quality to be high; guests with lower levels of education were noted to have good perceptions of service quality; and the retired were also found to perceive service quality as high.

6. Managerial Implications

The results of this study provide several implications for hotel managers. Overall, the results suggest that managers in the hotel industry need to take the views of certain demographic segments into account if they want to maximize perceived service quality. Socio-demographic characteristics can provide hotel managers with a means of determining market segments that are feasible in terms of achieving greater market penetration. Moreover, to remain competitive, organizations must be able to develop and refine their services to meet the needs and preferences of different consumer segments (Pennington-Gray, Fridgen, & Stynes, 2003).

Overall, the findings suggest that service quality should be related to some demographic characteristics. For instance, failing to establish gender differences in perceptions of service quality may have implications for the treatment of guests. The finding that retired guests had higher perceptions of service quality has several important implications. Specifically, managers should not only ensure that this lucrative segment receives highly interactive, customized and efficient service, but also ensure that the quality of their service experience and the physical service environment is of the highest standard.

The significant relationships established between gender, level of education, religious affiliation, occupation and income on one hand and guests, perceived service quality can be used to segment the market for hotels.

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