

Guest Orientation of Front Office Employees' Service Quality and Rapport: Influences on Satisfaction in Egyptian Five and Four star Hotels

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Abstract

This research aims to assess the guests' perceptions of service quality of employees in front office department of five and four star hotels at Cairo and Giza in Egypt. The assessment also includes the influence of service quality on the rapport between front office employees and guests. The study also assesses the influence of service quality and rapport on guest satisfaction. The study developed a conceptual model of the constructs involved. The hypotheses were proposed regarding the relationships within the model. The conceptual model and hypotheses were then tested in a sample of hotel guests. The study found that service quality dimensions contribute to predict enjoyable interaction personal connection between front office employees and guests. Moreover, enjoyable interaction and personal connection mediates the impact of front office employees' service quality on guest satisfaction. Furthermore, service quality dimensions of front office employees contribute to predict guest satisfaction. There are significant differences between four and five star hotels in perceived service quality and guest satisfaction, but not for rapport dimension. There are no significant differences between foreigner and Arab tourists in these dimensions.

Keywords: Front office, Hotels, Service Quality, Rapport, Guest Satisfaction

Introduction

The consensus among marketing scholars is that firms that practice a customer-oriented business philosophy outperform those that do not (Donavan et al., 2004). The implication of practicing customer orientation is that a firm focuses its activities on the fulfillment of the needs and wishes of actual and potential customers (Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003).

Understanding how to create and maintain relationships with customers is one of the most important fields of academic and practitioner endeavor in marketing (Palmatier et al., 2006). The advantages firms derive from customer relationships as being able to retrieve acquisition costs, cross- and up-selling products and services, and the likely dissemination of positive word of mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). The firms expect to realize a 10% increase in revenue resulting from their relationship-building efforts, such as customer relationship management (CRM) programs (Mitchell, 2002). Consequently, organizations spend millions of dollars annually on CRM schemes (Johnson and Selnes, 2004; Mitchell, 2002) to reap benefits in the long term.

The perceived service quality is consumer's judgment about the performance of product or service. It depends on reliability; responsiveness; assurance; empathy; tangibles dimensions. The customer satisfaction depends on these factors and on price; personal; situational factors that can occur during service supply (Toulon- Verona Conference, 2008). The customer satisfaction is a customer's overall evaluation of his or her purchase and consumption experience of a good or service. A more cognitive service quality evaluation leads to an emotive satisfaction assessment, supporting the role of service quality as an antecedent of satisfaction (Namkung and Jang, 2008). Service quality and customer satisfaction have increasingly been identified as key factors in the battle for competitive differentiation and customer retention (Holjevac et al., 2009). When a hospitality establishment is able to provide hospitable service by front line staff, it can be considered strategic competitive advantage. The identifying a distinguishing way to strategically position the service offerings based on the hospitality attributes is a challenge here (Ariffin et al., 2013a).

Literature Review

Service Quality Measurements

The most common model of service quality has five dimensions. (1) Reliability means “the degree to which a promised service is performed dependably and accurately”. (2) Responsiveness refers to “the degree to which service providers are willing to help customers and provide prompt service”. (3) Assurance is “the extent to which service providers are knowledgeable, courteous, and able to inspire trust and confidence”. (4) Empathy means “the degree to which the customers are offered caring and individualized attention”. (5) Tangibles refer to “the degree to which physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel are adequate (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The managers in hotel industry must apply the SERVQUAL model. It can provide managers with useful information for the assessment of expectations and perception of hotel guests, with the aim of learning about gaps in individual service quality dimensions (Gržinić, 2007). Many measurements have been developed in the tourism industry for evaluating service quality. DINESERV is used in restaurants; CASERV is used in the casino sector; while LODGSERV and HOLSERV are used in the accommodation sector. Due to the specificities of services in the hospitality industry (i.e. impossibility of storage, inseparability, and impalpability), thus a specific Model called SERVQUAL was introduced for measuring service quality. Each dimension of SERVQUAL has different features for evaluating customer perceptions and expectations regarding service quality in the hospitality industry.

Service Quality of Front Line Employees and Guest Satisfaction

The hotel image and customer satisfaction with the performance of housekeeping, reception, food and beverage and price are positively correlated to customer loyalty (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000). Both technical service quality (TSQ) and functional service quality (FSQ) are positively correlated to customer loyalty (Bell et al., 2005). Furthermore, attractive food displaying, tasty food, reliable service, responsive service, and competent employees have an important contribution to the high satisfaction of diners (Namkung and Jang, 2008). Furthermore, the customer orientation in service employees (COSE) supports customer satisfaction and affective commitment, and that rapport mediates the impact of COSE on these dimensions. COSE promotes repurchase intention via these variables in the full service restaurants. Future researchers may want to test the effects of COSE on service-outcome constructs, with considering rapport, in quick service restaurants and hotel banquets (Kim and Ok, 2010).

Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, confidence and communication directly influence the customer expectations and perceptions about service quality. Women's demands on service quality; hotel facilities are more than men's. Men are less satisfied than women about the service quality provided now. Therefore, they expect more services to be improved. Furthermore, Asian feel less satisfied about the current hotel services provided compared to the European (Na, 2010). The most important customer expectations of service quality items in Croatian city restaurants are “clean, neat and appropriately dressed staff”; “clean rest rooms”; “accurate bill”, which fall under the dimensions tangibles and reliability. The most important perceptions item is “accurate bill” from the reliability dimension. Most of the gaps are negative, including the overall gap (-0.02), implying that the overall restaurant service quality fell below customers' expectations (Markovic et al., 2011).

The reliability, accessibility and tangibles have a significant and positive impact on overall customer satisfaction. The empathy and competence of staff have a positive impact on hotel guests' satisfaction (Marković and Janković, 2013). There is a positive impact of hotel

hospitality on guest satisfaction; a positive moderating influence of servicescape on the relationship between hospitality and satisfaction (Ariffin et al., 2013a). The assurance dimension raises the highest level of expectation, whereas the tangibility dimension fulfills the highest level of perception of customers towards the service quality of front office staff. Furthermore, the overall mean score of perception was higher than expectation in all dimensions, yielding a positive SERVQUAL gap. The most respondents identified tangibility as the most important factor in determining satisfaction (Rao and Sahu; 2013).

The employees' perception of service performance is high, while guests' perception of it is low level. Managers perceive service quality performance to be lower than that of employees, there is no significant difference between them. Furthermore, the lowest explanation ratio in the service performance is found in the tangible dimension in SERVQUAL (Dedeoğlu and Demirer, 2015). Customers' perceptions of hotel brand quality dimensions such as "responsiveness", "reliability" and "empathy" contribute to build their satisfaction instead of "empathy" and "assurance". Interestingly, favorable perceptions on hotel responsiveness predicted relatively stronger satisfaction than did reliability and empathy perceptions (El Saghier, 2015). The service atmosphere moderates the effect on service-oriented behaviors of frontline staff in the hospitality industry, but in a reverse direction (Ling et al., 2016). Reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance were ranked first, second, third, fourth, and fifth, respectively, in terms of the size of the quality gap in Pakistan hospitals. The gaps were statistically significant, with values $\leq .05$. By focusing on the identified areas of improvement, health care authorities; administrators can make improvements in hospitals (Shafiq et al. 2017).

Customer-Front Line Employees' Rapport in Service Industry

There are five different factors comprising a higher order factor they call interpersonal bonds: familiarity, care, friendship, rapport, and trust. The researcher chooses to examine the rapport construct for three reasons. First, although the marketing literature suggests that personal relationships can be important to service firms, little specificity has been supplied as to which relational aspects should receive attention. The researcher limit the scope of the broad construct of relationship marketing by focusing on rapport aspect of this construct. Second, service exchanges can take many forms (Gremler and Brown, 1998). Rapport has the potential to be applicable across a variety of service interactions regardless of whether the customer has repeated interactions with the same provider. Third, the researcher focuses on rapport because of its understudied nature in hotel marketing and its potentially large impact for hotel service improvement. Although rapport is likely to be applicable to a variety of settings (e.g., business-to-business, personal selling), the researcher specifically considers rapport in the context of service exchanges because the intangible nature of many service encounters makes the customer-employee interface particularly salient in customers' evaluations of the service (Guttek et al., 1999).

During service encounters, customers expect certain social outcomes such as a pleasant encounter with the service provider (Giebelhausen et al., 2014). Such pleasing encounters are called customer rapport, which refer to a customer's perception of having pleasant interactions with a service employee. Customer-employee rapport is important because rapport has a strong influence on customer perceptions of the service delivery. Rapport involves two dimensions: an enjoyable interaction and a personal connection. An enjoyable interaction is an evaluative aspect of enjoyment perceived in the encounter, while personal connection is the consumer's perception of a strong bond with the employees based on ties (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000; Gremler and Gwinner, 2008).

Customer-Front Line Employees' Rapport and Customer Satisfaction

A positive relationship between patron-server rapport dimensions and satisfaction, loyalty intent, and word-of-mouth communication is found in bank customers and dental patients (Gremier and Gwinner, 2000). The excellent personal banker can raise overall customer satisfaction and loyalty contrast to customers who do not have a personal banker and vice versa. Furthermore, the influences seem to be asymmetric, with the negative influences of a poor relationship strategy exceeding the positive advantages of an excellent strategy (Colgate and Danaher, 2000). More than 90% of all respondents accept that service sabotage is an everyday occurrence in their organization. Frontline service sabotage behavior influences performance and also has a number of psychological and emotional consequences for the employee (Harris, 2002).

The existing rapport between the customer and service employee results in increased postfailure customer satisfaction; increased revisit intentions; decreased negative word of mouth. The rapport does not increase the propensity for customers to complain about poor service (Brady, 2003). The firms with low economies of scale, such as personal services, must create closer relationships to achieve value (Johnson and Selnes, 2004). Through the two-way communication between patron and server, patron needs can be satisfied, which helps to create strong relationship quality. The communication between them is referred to as mutual disclosure, which is composed of server disclosure and customer disclosure (Huang and Chang, 2008). Consumers may differ in the degree to which they hope to engage in a relationship with their service providers. There are two or three segments emerge, ranging from consumers who are keen to have a relationship to those who are indifferent about relationships, down to those who are unwilling to forming relationships with service providers. There is no "hard core" group of consumers keen on relationships with all service providers (Danaher et al., 2008).

The generic facets of hotel hospitality were identified as personalization, comfort, and warm welcoming. Personalization and warm welcoming only contributed significantly to predicting guest satisfaction (Ariffin, 2013b). Employee interaction quality exerts a stronger influence on customer satisfaction than corporate image. Rendering the effect of employee interaction quality upon customer evaluations is less critical for service providers with stronger corporate images (Jha et al., 2013). The frequency of a restaurant server's visits to the guests during taking meals has a positive impact on assessment of service efficiency. It also has a positive impact on emotional response and intent to revisit for the Americans, but not for the Japanese (Lee et al., 2015). The positive employees' behaviors have great effect on overall customer satisfaction in five star hotels in Egypt regardless of customers' gender, nationality, and purpose of visit, number of visits and length of stay (Kattara et al., 2015). Front office Employees' eye contact and courtesy are critical components of building customer–employee rapport, and subsequently customer satisfaction, while appearance did not affect customer–employee rapport. A significant interaction effect between employee eye contact and courtesy was found (Kim and Baker, 2017).

Importance of the Research

In the service industry, interactions between Front Line employees (FLEs) and customers are a critical part of every transaction (Arthur and Bennett, 1995). Customer service competencies are important for FLEs to deliver high-value service (Kandampully, 1998). Employees who lack the required workplace competencies may fail to meet customers' needs or provide satisfactory service quality (Boshoff and Allen, 2000). The consumer of service participates in a subtle and complex experience which is personal and psychological, unlike the consuming a product. Therefore, our understanding of the relationship between Human Resources

Management policies and practices and service quality of front line employees remains incomplete (Hayens and Fryer, 2000). Organizations require employees who have much more adaptive ability and can contribute their mental capital to maintain organizational competitiveness (Beheshtifar, 2011). There is a lack of research on the relationship between FLE service competencies and customer perceptions of service quality (Wu et al., 2015). The significance of current research emerges of the necessity of maintaining; improving service quality; guest-front office employees' relationship; guest satisfaction in five and four star hotels in Egypt.

Problem of the Research

The front office "service" and "staff" of five star Egyptian historic hotels are the 7th and 8th most frequently appearing words from reviewers in TripAdvisor. Furthermore, "Room" is the 4th and "check" is the 7th most frequently used words in the reviews about room related service. "Check" is used in 58 negative comments on the check in and check out process. Examples of these negative comments are: check in and check out seems always slow with too few staff available (Cairo Marriott Hotel and Omar Khayyam Casino). Guests took 30 minutes to check out which leads them to be frustrated (Mena House Hotel). Arrival and check in was confusing and uncomfortable (Sofitel Winter Palace Luxor Hotel). Guests called the desk to ask for late check-out. They waited over an hour for their room and bags hours after check in time). They could not check out late and had to check out at 3am before their trip (Sofitel Legend Old Cataract Aswan Hotel). It took another hour to complete all the check-out bureaucracies (Helnan Palestine Hotel). The reason of this problem is the front office employees of five star Egyptian historic hotels clearly didn't have efficient training in front office responsibilities to perform effectively (Ahmed, 2016).

As mentioned above, the researcher deduces that there is inefficient performance of front office employees in these hotels. It represents to confusing; uncomfortable; slow; frustrating check in and check out procedures; shortage of staff. Consequently, the hotel guests perceived low front office service quality during stay. They will be unsatisfied and not intend to revisit these hotels another time.

Aims and Objectives of the Research

The main aim of this study is to assess the service quality of front office employees and its influence on guest satisfaction with a rapport between them as a mediator variable. This aim is divided into objectives. (1) Assessing the influence of service quality of front office employees on the rapport between them and the guests. (2) Assessing the influence of rapport between front office employees and guests on guest satisfaction. (3) Evaluating the impact of service quality of front office employees on guest satisfaction. (4) Identify the differences between foreigner and Arab tourists in perception of service quality; rapport; satisfaction.

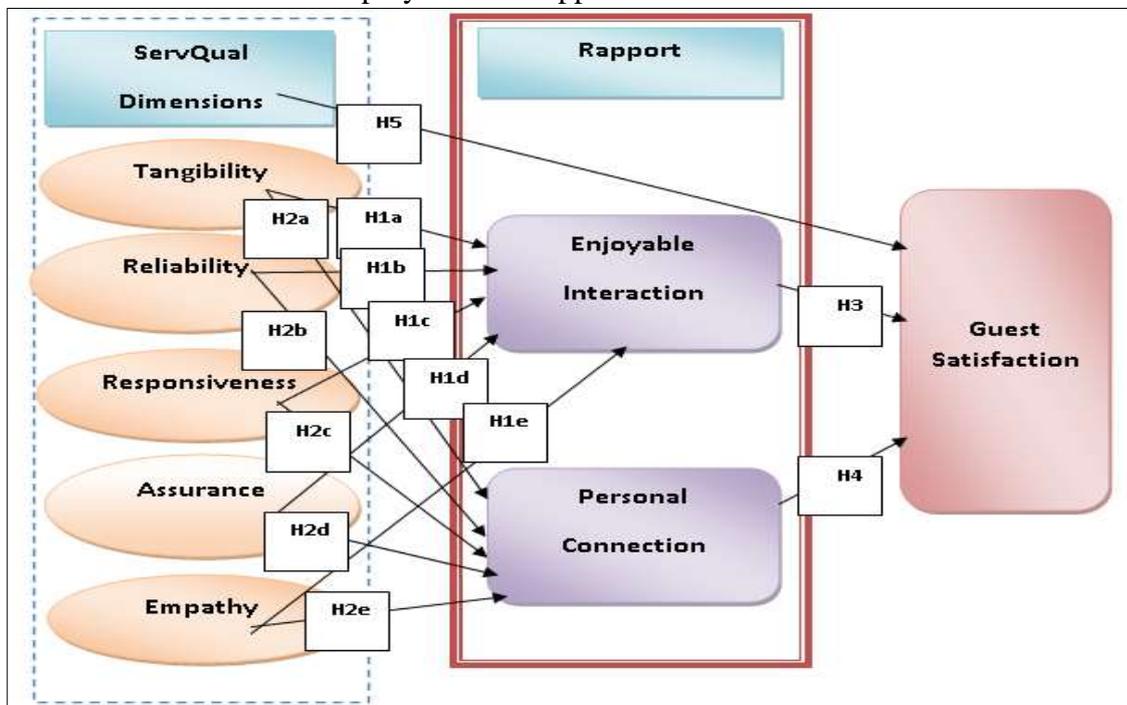
Conceptual Framework

Based on the empirical literature review, the present study posits service quality of front office employees as a crucial variable. This variable enables hotels to provide high-quality service, thus increasing the positive rapport between front office employees and guests. Therefore, the positive rapport among them leads to guest satisfaction. This theoretical model integrates the simultaneously direct and indirect (mediated) interrelationships among service quality dimensions; rapport variables as mediator variables; satisfaction. Therefore, the researcher deduced the following conceptual model. Underlying the depicted relationships are combined theoretical perspectives of service quality dimensions and its relation with rapport (Kim and

Ok, 2010; Hwang et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2015), rapport variables and its influence on guest satisfaction (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000; Kim and Ok, 2010; Hwang et al., 2013; Jha et al., 2013), service quality dimensions and its impact on guest satisfaction (Fowdar, 2007; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Marković and Janković, 2013; Ariffin et al., 2013a; Dedeoğlu and Demirer; 2015; Ling et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2017).

Service quality dimensions refers to variables that their utilization in developing the rapport variables are critical in achieving guest satisfaction. The researcher adopts the term "mediator(s)" to accommodate the variables that have important mediational roles in predicting the variability in the intermediate and ultimate outcome(s). Service quality dimensions are independent variables for rapport variables (dependent variable). A mediator is the rapport variables between front office employees and hotel guests. Rapport variables are independent variables for guest satisfaction.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model: The Influence of Service Quality Dimensions of Front Office Employees and Rapport on Guest Satisfaction.



Hypotheses

According to the findings of Kim and Ok (2010); Lee et al. (2015) mentioned above, the hypotheses one and two were proposed as follows:

H1. Service quality dimensions have a positive influence on enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests.

H1a: Tangibility has a positive influence on enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests.

H1b: Reliability has a positive influence on enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests.

H1c: Responsiveness has a positive influence on enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests.

H1d: Assurance has a positive influence on enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests.

H1e: Empathy has a positive influence on enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests.

H2. Service quality dimensions have a positive influence on personal connection between front office employees and guests.

H2a: Tangibility has a positive influence on personal connection between front office employees and guests.

H2b: Reliability has a positive influence on personal connection between front office employees and guests.

H2c: Responsiveness has a positive influence on personal connection between front office employees and guests.

H2d: Assurance has a positive influence on personal connection between front office employees and guests.

H2e: Empathy has a positive influence on personal connection between front office employees and guests.

Based on findings of Gremler and Gwinner (2000) mentioned above, the hypotheses three and four were proposed as follows:

H3. Enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests has a positive influence on guest satisfaction.

H4. Personal connection between front office employees and guests has a positive influence on guest satisfaction.

According to results of Marković and Janković (2013); Ariffin et al. (2013a); Jha et al. (2013), the hypothesis five was proposed as follows:

H5. Service quality dimensions of front office employees have a positive influence on guest satisfaction.

Based on results of Na (2010); Hwang et al. (2013) mentioned above, the hypothesis six was proposed as follows:

H6. There are significant differences between foreigner and Arab guests in perceiving service quality, employees-guests' rapport, satisfaction.

H7. There are significant differences between four and five star hotels in perceiving service quality, employees-guests' rapport, guest satisfaction.

Research Methodology

Determining the Population and Sample

Population of the study represented of tourists who stayed in five and four star hotels at Cairo and Giza in Egypt. These hotels were 51 hotels. They were divided to 31 five star; 20 four star hotels. Five star hotels had 14376 rooms, whereas four star hotels had 4961 rooms. The average occupancy rates for five and four star hotels in Cairo were 44 %; 47 % respectively. Furthermore, the average occupancy rates for five and four star hotels in Giza were 42 %; 23 % respectively in 2016 (General Department for Information and statistics, Ministry of Tourism in Egypt, 2016).

The sample of the study was conducted to tourists who stayed in five and four star hotels at Cairo and Giza in Egypt. The five and four star hotels' management refused to conduct a questionnaire to their guests. Therefore, the researcher gained an agreement from Egyptian Museum Manager to conduct a questionnaire to tourists who visit it daily. From all categories of tourists who visit the museum, the researcher selected only tourists who stayed in five and four star hotels in Cairo or Giza for many days and perceived complete experience of front office employees' service to answer a self-administered questionnaire. A pilot study was first conducted to 18 tourists who stayed in five and 12 in four star hotels. Some wordings were

slightly modified based on respondent feedback. The study considered the variety of demographic characteristics of the selected tourists sample to be representative of the population. Of the 400 distributed questionnaires, 324 valid questionnaires were returned and used in this study.

Designing the Instrument of the Study

Drawing from a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, the operationalization of the measurement indices of the current study's main constructs were based on: (1) existing, well-validated measurement scales from relevant empirical studies adapted to the hotels context; (2) seven-point Likert scale, multiple-item, subjective, first order, and formative measurement indices. In an attempt to maximize their potential validity and comparability with relevant previous studies, all the research constructs and their measures were drawn and adapted from existing, well validated measurement scales that will be mentioned later for each construct. A survey questionnaire was then reviewed by three Front Office Managers in five and four star hotels and three academic professionals in the hospitality industry to assure the content validity. The questionnaire included eight constructs. These constructs were divided to five variables of service quality of front office employees. The rapport construct consisted of two variables. Guest satisfaction dimension was also involved. The questionnaire constructs is explained as follows:

Service Quality

It contained five quality factors; Tangibility; Reliability; responsiveness; Assurance; Empathy. To measure perceived quality for each factor, multi-item scales, validated in previous studies, were identified and modified to fit the study setting (Fowdar, 2007; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Marković and Janković, 2013; Ariffin et al., 2013a; Dedeoğlu and Demirer; 2015). (1) Tangibility included "the equipment looks modern," "the facilities are visually appealing," "the materials are visually appealing," "the employees' appearance is neat". (2) Reliability involved front office employees are: "honor their promises with guests," "handle guests' problems reliably." It also encompassed of employees "perform services for the first time correctly," "maintain error-free records," deliver services within the promised time." (3) Responsiveness consisted of employees "inform guests about when the service will be performed," "provide prompt service to guests," "are willing to help guests", and "respond to guests' requests." (4) Assurance encompassed of employees "are courteous," "are able to instill confidence in guests," "make guests feel safe in their transactions," and "are knowledgeable to answer guests' questions." (4) Empathy included "the employees understand guests' requirements," "attend to guests individually," "spend convenient operating hours." It also involved "employees deal with guests in a caring fashion," "they have guests' best interest at heart."

Rapport

It was measured with 11 items borrowed from Hwang et al. (2013); Kim and Ok (2010). It involves "enjoyable interaction" and "personal connection" factors. (1) Enjoyable interaction contained there is a particular employee(s) whom "I enjoy interacting with," "create(s) a warm feeling in our relationship," "relate(s) well to me." It also included there is a particular employee(s) whom "I have a harmonious relationship with," "has/have a good sense of humor," and "I am comfortable interacting with." (2) Personal connection encompassed "I feel has/have a bond with me," "I look forward to seeing when I visit this hotel," "I care about," "is personally concerned with me," and "I have a close relationship with."

Customer Satisfaction

It was measured with three items drawn from Gremler and Gwinner (2000); Ling et al., (2016); Wang et al., (2017). It contained of "my choice to stay at this hotel has been a wise one," "I am delighted with the hotels' services in this hotel", and "I am generally satisfied with the front office services in this hotel". The previous factors were measured using a seven-point Likert scale: "How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?" (1 = extremely disagree and 7 = extremely agree).

Data Collection

The data were collected via questionnaire from randomly selected guests who stayed in 15 five star hotels (eight hotels in Cairo; seven hotels in Giza). The five star hotels' sample represents 48.4 % of the population. Data were also collected from ten four star hotels (five hotels in Cairo; five hotels in Giza). The four star hotels' sample represents 50 % of the population. The questionnaires were distributed from March to May 2017. Of the 400 distributed questionnaires, 324 valid questionnaires were returned and used in this study. There are 16 non valid questionnaires and 60 questionnaires distributed to tourists by Tour Leaders in the travel agencies but they are not received. Of the 324 valid questionnaires, 232 questionnaires were applied to tourists who stayed in five star hotels (Almost 15 questionnaires for each hotel). The researcher distributed 92 questionnaires to tourists who stayed in four star hotels (nine questionnaires for each hotel). There were also 256 valid questionnaire were conducted to foreigners tourists, and 68 to Arab tourists.

Data Processing and Analyzing

The questionnaire analysis was conducted by SPSS program (version 22) from June to August 2017; the collected data were processed and analyzed. Descriptive statistics were first conducted to profile respondents' demographic characteristics. Simple linear regression analyses were conducted to identify the contribution of service quality of front office employees on rapport; guest satisfaction. Independent sample T-test was applied to compare between foreigners and Arab tourists in perceived service quality; rapport; guest satisfaction. The reliability of the constructs scale was conducted by Cronbach's Alpha. It is useful for identifying the internal consistency of the scale constructs.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Reliability of Questionnaire Variables by Cronbach's Alpha

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
ServQual dimensions		
Tangibility	4	0.89
Reliability	5	0.94
Responsiveness	4	0.94
Assurance	4	0.95
Empathy	5	0.76
Rapport dimensions		
Enjoyable interaction	6	0.97
Personal connection	5	0.98
Guest satisfaction dimension	3	0.95

The results in table 1 show that the reliability of the eight dimensions of the scale are well above the suggested cutoff of 0.70, indicating internal consistency of the scale constructs (Nunnally, 1978).

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participants' demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percent %
Nationality	Foreigners	256	79
	Arab	68	21
	Total	324	100 %
Gender	Male	154	47.5
	Female	170	52.5
Total		324	100 %
Age	below 20	14	4.3
	between 20 and 29	70	21.6
	Between 30 and 39	76	23.5
	Between 40 and 49	58	17.9
	Between 50 and 59 years	43	13.3
	60 and over	63	19.4
	Total	324	100 %
Income	Under \$10000	66	20.4
	\$10000–\$19,999	36	11.1
	\$20,000–\$39,999	57	17.6
	\$40,000–\$49,999	50	15.4
	\$50,000–\$59,999	35	10.8
	\$60,000 and over	80	24.7
	Total	324	100 %
Marital status	Married	201	62
	Single	105	32.4
	Divorced	12	3.7
	Widow(er)	6	1.9
	Total	324	100 %
Education	Below high school	12	3.7
	High school	34	10.5
	College/university	200	61.8
	Master "MA/MSc"	57	17.6
	PhD	21	6.5
	Total	324	100 %

In table 2, the results show that there are various participants according to nationality and gender. Foreigners; Arabs represent 256 (79%), 68 (21%) of the respondents respectively. The foreigner tourists come from Europe; South East Asia; India; America; Latin America; Australia; New Zealand. Arab tourists come from Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates; Iraq; Yemen; Algeria; Palestine; Jordan. It reflects the different nationalities of the respondents. Furthermore, males; females represent 154 (47.5 %) and 170 (52.5%) of the respondents respectively.

Youth are "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years" (UNESCO, 2017). Thus, almost 50 % of the respondents belong to youth age category. Other 50 % of the respondents range

from 40 to over 60 years. It reflects the different respondents' age categories. In 2018 fiscal year, low-income economies are those with a gross national income (GNI) per capita, of \$1,005 or less; lower middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$1,006 and \$3,955; upper middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$3,956 and \$12,235; high-income economies are those with a GNI per capita of \$12,236 or more (World Bank Group, 2017). Therefore, the income of 66 (20.4%) of the respondents ranges from low to upper middle economies. Income of other respondents 258 (79.6 %) belongs to high income economies. The diverse of respondents' income agrees with different nationalities mentioned above.

There is also a variety of respondents' marital status. Married; single; divorced; widow(er) respondents represent 62 %; 32.4 %; 3.7 %; 1.9 % respectively. Furthermore, there are 46 (14.2 %) of the respondents get high school or below. The respondents graduated of college/university; had Master; PhD represent 278 (85.9 %) of the respondents. Therefore, front office employees should assume active, confident, and enthusiastic communication styles when they serve highly educated guests. In contrast, when serving guests with low educational levels, employees with good listening skills should be allocated to serve them in order to induce customer disclosure. Such communicators use various nonverbal signals, such as smiling, nodding, friendly body posture, and eye contact to ensure that the other person in the communication interaction is carefully heard. This agreed with Hwang et al. (2013).

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression of Service Quality Dimensions on Enjoyable Interaction between Front Office Employees and Guests

ServQual Variables	Enjoyable Interaction											
	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	T	Sig.	Beta	Unstandardized coefficients			
									B	Std. Error	Constant	Std. Error
Tangibility	.54	.29	.29	129.8	.000	11.4	.000	.54	.87	.08	13.5	1.7
Reliability	.66	.44	.44	247.4	.000	15.7	.000	.66	.81	.05	9.6	1.5
Responsiveness	.66	.44	.44	249.6	.000	15.8	.000	.66	.99	.06	9.8	1.5
Assurance	.71	.50	.50	321.6	.000	17.9	.000	.71	1.2	.07	4.1	1.6
Empathy	.69	.48	.48	294.5	.000	17.2	.000	.96	.76	.04	10.8	1.3

In table 3, the results display that the capability of predicting of enjoyable interaction by service quality dimensions. The extent to which service providers are knowledgeable, courteous, and able to inspire trust and confidence means assurance. It is the first variable that interprets 50 % of guest enjoyable interaction with front office employees in five and four star hotels. Empathy is the second variable which predict of guest enjoyable interaction with by 48 %. It refers to the degree to which the customers are offered caring and individualized attention. Reliability and responsiveness are the third variables that interpret 44 % for each one of guest enjoyable interaction. Reliability refers to the degree to which a promised service is performed dependably and accurately, while the degree to which service providers are willing to help guests and provide prompt service that means responsiveness. Tangibility is the fourth variable that interprets 29 % of enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests. It refers to the degree to which physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel are adequate. T value is statistically significant, with values $\leq .05$.

The first four variables influence on evaluative aspect of enjoyment perceived in the encounter by guest more than tangibility. These variables focus on offering front office employees of enjoyable interaction talents and skills with guests, but tangibility focus on physical facilities; equipment; appearance of personnel. The current study explores and identifies the contribution of each service quality dimension of front office employees on guest enjoyable interaction with them. Thus, the hypothesis 1; 1a; 1b; 1c; 1d; 1e are proved positively. This result disagreed with Kim and Ok (2010) who mentioned that rapport mediates the impact of employees' competencies variables on restaurant customer satisfaction. This result disagreed with Lee et al. (2015) who found that service efficiency of restaurant servers has a positive impact on emotional response and intent to revisit for the Americans. The main and new finding of the current research is identifying the contribution of each service quality dimension of front office employees on enjoyable interaction.

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression of Service Quality Dimensions on Personal Connection between Front Office Employees and Guests

ServQual Variables	Personal Connection											
	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	T	Sig.	Beta	Unstandardized coefficients			
									B	Std. Error	Constant	Std. Error
Tangibility	.52	.27	.27	121.8	.000	11.0	.000	.52	.84	.08	7.2	1.7
Reliability	.63	.40	.40	214.9	.000	14.7	.000	.63	.77	.05	3.8	1.5
Responsiveness	.63	.40	.40	215.1	.000	14.7	.000	.63	.94	.06	4.1	1.5
Assurance	.62	.38	.38	200.9	.000	14.2	.000	.62	1.0	.07	.9	1.8
Empathy	.60	.36	.36	177.6	.000	13.3	.000	.60	.65	.05	7.1	1.4

The results in table 4 show that the capability of predicting of guest personal connection by service quality dimensions of front office employees. Responsiveness; reliability are the first variables that predict to 40 % of guest personal connection with front office employees. Assurance is the second variable that interprets 38 % of guest personal connection with front office employees. Empathy; tangibility are the third; fourth variables which influence on the personal connection between guests and front office employees by 36%; 27% respectively. T value is statistically significant, with values $\leq .05$.

The first four variables influence on the guest's perception of a strong bond with the employees based on ties more than tangibility. These variables focus on performing front office employees of personal connection talents and skills with guests, but tangibility focus on physical facilities; equipment; appearance of personnel. Therefore, the hypotheses 2; 2a; 2b; 2c; 2d; 2e are proved positively. The main and new finding of the current research is identifying the contribution of each service quality dimension of front office employees on guest personal connection with them as a mediator. This result disagree with Kattara et al. (2015) who found the employees' behaviors have great effect on overall customer satisfaction regardless of customers' gender, nationality, and purpose of visit, number of visits and length of stay. It also disagreed with Lee et al. (2015) who stated that the frequency of a restaurant server's visits to the guests during taking meals has a positive impact on emotional response and intent to revisit for the Americans.

Table 5: Simple Linear Regression of Rapport Dimensions between Front Office Employees and Guests on Guest Satisfaction

Rapport Variables	Guest Satisfaction											
	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	T	Sig.	Beta	Unstandardized coefficients			
									B	Std. Error	Constant	Std. Error
Enjoyable Interaction	.64	.41	.41	225.3	.000	15	.000	.64	.33	.02	6.35	.72
Personal Connection	.66	.44	.43	248.4	.000	15.8	.000	.66	.34	.02	8.28	.57

In table 5, the results indicate that the capability of predicting of guest satisfaction by rapport dimensions between front office employees and guests. Enjoyable interaction and personal connection interpret 41% and 44 % respectively of guest satisfaction variance. T value is statistically significant, with values $\leq .05$. It reflects that rapport mediates the impact of service quality dimensions on guest satisfaction. It can be noted that rapport dimensions have high contribution in predicting the guest satisfaction. The personal connection has a higher role than enjoyable interaction in predicting guest satisfaction. It means that front office employees are keen to create a positive guest-front office employees' rapport. It is deduced from high guest perception of rapport dimensions in table 7. It refers to the guests are interested in personal connection more than enjoyable interaction. This is the first research approach to hypothesize the mediating roles of rapport variables between service quality of front office and guest satisfaction in hotels.

Therefore, this result disagreed with Kim and Ok (2010) who mentioned that rapport mediates the impact of employees' competencies variables on restaurant customer satisfaction. The current research found that rapport mediates service quality dimensions and guest satisfaction. This result also disagreed with Colgate and Danaher (2000) who mentioned that the influences seem to be asymmetric, with the negative influences of a poor relationship strategy exceeding the positive advantages of an excellent strategy. This result also disagreed with Harris (2002) who mentioned that frontline service sabotage behavior influences performance and also has a number of psychological and emotional consequences for the employee. The result also agreed with Gremler and Gwinner (2000); Brady (2003); Johnson and Selnes (2004); Ariffin (2013b); Jha et al. (2013); Kim and Baker (2017).

Table 6: Simple Linear Regression of Service Quality Dimensions of Front Office Employees on Guest Satisfaction

ServQual Variables	Guest satisfaction											
	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	T	Sig.	Beta	Unstandardized coefficients			
									B	Std. Error	Constant	Std. Error
Tangibility	.70	.49	.49	314.3	.000	17.73	.000	.70	.58	.03	4.33	.73
Reliability	.69	.47	.47	284.8	.000	16.88	.000	.69	.43	.03	4.89	.73
Responsiveness	.69	.47	.47	290.6	.000	17.05	.000	.69	.53	.03	4.98	.72
Assurance	.73	.53	.53	359.4	.000	18.96	.000	.73	.62	.03	2.17	.79
Empathy	.62	.39	.39	203.3	.000	14.26	.000	.62	.35	.02	7.07	.71

Table 6 reveals that the capability of predicting of guest satisfaction by service quality dimensions of front office employees. Assurance; tangibility; reliability; responsiveness; empathy dimensions are ranked first; second; third; fourth in terms of interpreting guest satisfaction variance. They interpret 53 %; 49%; 47%; 47%; 39% respectively of guest satisfaction variance, T value is statistically significant, with values $\leq .05$. Firstly, the results revealed that the guests of five and four star hotels require front office employees to be knowledgeable, courteous, and able to inspire trust and confidence to provide assured service for them to be satisfied. Secondly, the guests need physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel to be adequate for obtaining tangible service to be satisfied. Thirdly, front office employees must perform a promised service dependably and accurately to provide reliable service to the guests; Furthermore, the guests require front office employees are willing to help them; providing prompt service for perceiving responsive service to be satisfied. Fourthly, the hotel guests need front office employees obtain caring and individualized attentions for obtaining sympathetic service to be satisfied. The results differentiate with previous studies in identifying the contribution degree of each SERVQUAL dimension of front office employees in predicting of hotel guest satisfaction.

The results disagreed with Kim and Ok (2010) who indicated that customer orientation in service employees' competencies supports customer satisfaction. These results disagreed with Rao and Sahu (2013) who found that the tangibility dimension fulfills the highest level of perception towards the service quality of front office staff. Whereas, in the current study it is the second dimension that contribute to guest satisfaction. This result also disagreed with Dedeoğlu and Demirer (2015) who mentioned that the lowest explanation ratio in the service performance is found in the tangible dimension. In the current study, tangible service is the second important dimension that influence on guest satisfaction of front office employees. This result disagreed with El Saghier (2015) who revealed that customers' perceptions of hotel brand quality dimensions such as "responsiveness", "reliability" and "empathy" contribute to build their satisfaction instead of "empathy" and "assurance". Whereas, in the current study, assured and tangible services of front office employees lead to guest satisfaction higher than reliable; responsive; empathy service.

This result agreed with Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000); Bell et al. (2005); Namkung and Jang (2008); Na (2010); Marković and Janković (2013); Ariffin et al., (2013a) therefore the hypothesis five is proved positively.

Table 7: The Independent Samples T-Tests between Arab and Foreigner Tourists

Dimensions	Foreigners (N=256)		Arabs (N= 68)		T (df=322)	Sig.
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Service quality	5.63	1.17	5.66	1.09	-0.221-	0.825
Rapport	5.19	1.40	5.39	1.36	-1.038-	0.300
Satisfaction	5.58	1.40	5.75	1.31	-0.853-	0.394

* Significant level is 0.05

In table 7, the results indicate that there are no significant differences between foreigner and Arab tourists in perceived service quality from front office employees; Rapport between them and front office employees; guest satisfaction. The significant level of T value is 0.83; 0.30; 0.39 for these dimensions respectively. Furthermore, it can be noted that the perception of foreigner tourists is high similar to Arab tourists for service quality; rapport; satisfaction. It means front office employees in five and four star hotels meet guests' expectations during the

stay. They have much more adaptive ability and can contribute their mental capital to maintain hotel competitiveness.

This result agreed with Beheshtifar (2011) and disagreed with Ahmed (2016) who found that the front office employees clearly need more training in check in and check out procedures so as to perform effectively. "Check" is used in 58 negative comments on the check in and check out process. This result also disagreed with Na (2010) who indicated that Asian feel less satisfied about the current hotel services provided compared to the European. It may be due to Na (2010) study compared with two nationalities only. Asian guests require and expect more than European ones. The current study compares with multiple nationalities that have no differences between them in previous variables. This result also disagreed with Markovic et al. (2011) who found the overall restaurant service quality fell below customers' expectations. The current study disagreed with Boon-itt and Rompho (2012) who indicated that the service quality of hotels in Thailand was moderately low. Hotels were not able to deliver services as expected. Therefore, the hypothesis six is not proved positively.

Table 8: The Independent Samples T-Tests between Four and Five Star Hotels

Dimensions	Five Star Hotels (N=232)		Four Star Hotels (N=92)		T (df=322)	Sig.
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation		
Service quality	5.77	1.11	5.30	1.18	3.31	0.001*
Rapport	5.32	1.36	5.00	1.44	1.87	0.06
Satisfaction	5.77	1.34	5.24	1.40	3.19	0.002*

* Significant level is 0.05

In table 8, the results show that there are significant differences between four and five star hotels in perceived service quality; guest satisfaction from front office employees' performance. The means of these dimensions are higher in five star hotels than four star hotels at 0.001; 0.002 significant levels respectively. There are no significant differences between five and four star hotels in rapport dimension, whereas the significant level of T value is 0.06. It means that the front office employees in five star hotels provide service quality better than four star hotels, thus the guests in five star hotels are highly satisfied than four star hotels. Furthermore, the rapport between front office employees and guests in five star hotels is similar to four star hotels. Therefore, the hypothesis seven is partially proved. There are significant differences between four and five star hotels in perceived service quality and guest satisfaction but not for rapport dimension. This result is a new contribution in this research.

Conclusion

There is a lack of research on the relationship between Front office employee service competencies and customer perceptions of service quality. The study aims to assess the service quality of front office employees and its influence on guest satisfaction with a rapport between them as a mediator variable. The study developed a conceptual model of the constructs involved. The conceptual model and hypotheses were then tested in a sample of hotel guests. The study found that Assurance; empathy; are ranked first and second, then "reliability; responsiveness" are the third; while tangibility is the fourth variable in predicting enjoyable interaction between front office employees and guests. Furthermore, "Responsiveness; reliability" are the first variables; then assurance; Empathy; Tangibility are ranked second, third; fourth dimensions respectively in predicting personal connection between front office employees and guest. Moreover, Enjoyable interaction and personal connection affect positively on guest satisfaction. Therefore, rapport variables mediate the impact of front office

employees' service quality on guest satisfaction. Furthermore, Assurance; tangibility are ranked first and second, while reliability; responsiveness are third variables; followed by empathy in predicting guest satisfaction. There are no significant differences between foreigner and Arab tourists in perceived service quality; Rapport; guest satisfaction of front office employees. There are significant differences between four and five star hotels in perceived service quality and guest satisfaction but not for rapport dimension.

The main contribution of the current research is identifying the impact of service quality dimensions on enjoyable interaction; personal connection (rapport variables) between front office employees and guests. The current research also enables to measure the influence of rapport variables as a mediator between front office employees' service quality and guest satisfaction. It also determines the differences between foreigners and Arab tourists; four and five star hotels in service quality; rapport, guest satisfaction of front office employees.

Recommendations

Academics should develop the technical and social skills; decision-making ability of the students in hospitality management departments. They should educate students how to interact with guests enjoyably and connect with them personally. These skills will enable them to be more competent when providing service quality to the guests. Academics should apply simulation models to acquire these skills to the students practically. Hospitality managers could utilize from these findings by adapting strategies to employ and hold highly efficient; faithful front office employees to delight their guests. The managers should allocate resources to develop front office employees' performance to achieve the higher probability of the hotel success. Consequently, front office employees can promote the hotel image and the level of actual service quality, when providing extraordinary services.

Limitations and Further researches

The study was applied on front office employees in five and four star hotels at Cairo and Giza in Egypt. The current study compared between foreigner and Arab tourists, while the future research can compare between five and four star hotels in perceived service quality; guest-frontline employees; satisfaction. Moreover, the results may be varied when applying the conceptual model in other tourism destinations such as Red Sea; Sharm El Sheikh; Luxor.

The influence of service quality of housekeeping employees on guest-employees' rapport and satisfaction can be tested in the future research. The front line employees' service quality; rapport; satisfaction can also be investigated in budget hotels in restaurants, front office, housekeeping departments.

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