Normative Versus Perceptual Gap Analysis of Hotel Product Quality as a Service to Tourism in Kenya

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Kenya's tourism business stagnated from 1991 to 2003 and only registered small but steady grew from 2004. One of the sectors that recorded poor performance as a result of the slow growth of tourism is the hotel business. Despite this slack, stakeholders in Kenya have not tried to assess the extent to which the quality of this sector may impact on destination preference. The ultimate purpose of this research was to establish the quality gap between the expected and the perceived hotel product/service quality from both the perspective of the tourists and the hotel operators in Kenya. It was motivated by the need to create parameters that can elavate the competitiveness of Kenya's tourism using the hotel product/service quality offer. Descriptive quantitative research design was used to establish the secondary objectives and to assess two propositions set for the study. A sample of 211 tourists and 19 hotel operators in two major tourist provinces of Kenya was used to obtain information regarding normative and perceptive hotel product/service quality. Kenya's only destination marketing organisation, Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) marketers were also surveyed to provide insight on Kenya's destination position with regard to the motivation of tourists to visit Kenya. The study established that although the attractions which make tourists come to Kenya are the unique wildlife safari, beach tourism and the natural scenery, hotel product quality and hospitality plays a vital role in motivating tourists to choose Kenya as the destination to visit. However, this study found out that while the tourists and hotel operators agree on the normative hotel product quality level, there is a significant gap between the normative quality and the perceptual quality registered by tourists who used hotel services. The study established that hotel operators only recognize quality regulatory institutions with statutory and legal authority to incriminate facilities that do not comply with laid down operational requirements such as Hotels and Restaurants Authority and the Local Authority Public Health Department. The study has proposed an integrated framework that may be utilized to build a superior national hotel product/service quality so that the economic potential of tourism is maximized in Kenya.

Keywords: destination marketing, tourism, competitiveness, Kenya tourism, hotel product/service quality

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Introduction

Kenya is arguably one of the major tourist destinations in Africa and prides itself on the abundance of its wildlife especially the "Big Five". The beautiful scenery such as of beaches, snowy tropical mountain peaks and the Great Rift Valley also contribute to the influx of world leisure travelers. Kenya's National Tourism Draft Policy (Republic of Kenya, 2003, p. 15) states that Kenya's first statement of national tourism policy was set out in Sessional Paper No. 8 of 1969. It established growth targets for the industry and spelt out strategies both on how government would themselves participate, and encourage participation by the private sector in tourism development so as to achieve the desired growth targets. In Africa, a number of countries have emerged as major competitors in the pursuit of the tourist dollar. These countries include Angola, Egypt, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Morocco, Namibia, the Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. As competition heightens in these African countries, a number of factors start to emerge as possible strategic advantages for some.

To ensure the success of a destination, Holloway (2002, p. 15) stresses three important points that must be considered. These include uniqueness of the benefits at the destination, variety of benefits and continuous product improvement to attract repeat visits. According to Mill and Morrison (1998, p. 184), an attraction draws a visitor to a destination while facilities serve the visitors while away from home. They refer to attractions and facilities put together as the destination mix and include attractions, accommodation and food facilities, infrastructure, transportation and hospitality. It would therefore, be necessary to establish the extent to which these tourist support services impact on satisfaction of tourists so as to influence tourists' loyalty or competitiveness of a destination. In this regard, hotel product/service quality comes to the picture as an important component of the tour package.

Problems Motivating This Study

Kenya's tourist development has stagnated for the last 25 years managing to attract only 885,600 tourists in 2004 after anticipating one million tourist arrivals for over 15 years (Republic of Kenya, 2005, p. 195). Other competing destinations such as Egypt, Morocco and South Africa, each hosts well over 4 million international tourists per annum. Poor security and dilapidated road networks have remained a challenge to Kenya's tourism (Republic of Kenya, 2004, p. 202). The human and wildlife, as well as ecological challenges resulting from trampling by tourists and animal behavior modification, remain a threat to the "Big Five" tourism (Mason, 2003, p. 55), and even so, very little effort is being put on diversification of the basic tourist product.

Hotel businesses have suffered most because of the lack lustre performance of Kenya's tourism. Although development of the hotel sector has stagnated for a considerable time (Republic of Kenya, 2004), stakeholders have not tried to assess the extent to which the quality of this sector may impact on destination preference. In a personal interview with the Director of Studies at Kenya Utalii College, the country's leading hotel school, on the June 3, 2005 it was mooted that hotels may have forgotten that the quality of their facilities also act as an impetus for growth in tourism (Osoro, 2005). There is a need for Kenya to take a leaf from Egypt's book, where there is considerable developments being registered in the hotel sector and which is believed to be impacting positively on the number of tourist arrivals (Muchiri, 2005, p. 9).

Hotel service level (HSL) classification popularly known in Kenya as "Star Rating" has been done in the past using average industry service levels (ISL) and customer service usage preference, but without any particular

reference to international hotel standard service benchmarks. A need to mount a study that could spell out a balanced and integrated customer centred quality model for hotels in the country is heightened by the rating controversy that was raised by hotelkeepers and reported in a newspaper in May 2005 (Anon, 2005, p. 12). An assessment study on destination positioning carried out by Ibrahim and Gill (2005, pp. 172-188) acknowledges that a destination may be affected by the total service given by the various organizations at the destination. They listed "satisfaction variables of a tourist" and these included "good quality hotels and restaurants".

This research investigated how tourist hotels in Kenya emphasize quality in their operations, marketing and management orientations against established hotel quality benchmarks proposed in the study by Hokey, Hyesung and Chung (2002, pp. 302-321) and what position quality occupies in the strategies employed by the hotels. The ultimate purpose of this research is to establish the quality gap between the expected and the perceived hotel product/service quality from both the perspective of the tourists and the hotel operators in Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to:

• Establish if the hotel product/service quality plays an important in tourists' choice to visit Kenya;

• Describe the normative and perceptive hotel quality level according to tourists and hotel operators;

• Propose a framework that can be appropriated to positively influence national hotel product/service quality culture.

The following propositions were evaluated in this research:

P_1: The perceptive quality of the hotel product/service falls below the normative product/service quality level expectations of tourists visiting Kenya.

P_2: Policies and regulatory mechanisms that govern hotel product/service quality are not appropriately shared and enforced.

Literature Review

Introduction

According to a report by KTB (2003, p. 21) Kenya registered 506,364 international tourist arrivals in 2000. This declined to 492,731 in 2001 and waned even further to 444,443 in 2002. While the WTO's prediction for world's international tourist arrivals by 2020 is estimated at 1.6 billion trips (WTO, 2001), Kenya predicts that it will increase its overseas arrivals from the average of 500,000 tourists in 2002 to one million tourists by 2020 (Republic of Kenya, 2003). According to MagicalKenya, a website sponsored by the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB, 2006), to market Kenya's tourism, the country has seven major tourist activities on offer. It lists the activities as wildlife safari, scenic safari, cultural safari, beach safari, sports safari, specialist safari, and adventure safari. The usage of the word safari in this context simply means tourism or travel.

Tourists Profile

Profiling tourists and their interests is best done when they are analyzed as consumers. It is believed that consumers will continue to return and use goods or services as long as their needs are met (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2002, p. 35). Marketers have developed a theoretical form of consumer decision model otherwise known as the "black box" (Kotler & Keller, 2007, p. 184). This model postulates that the black box is an internal communication or thought process that incorporates the central nervous system as influenced by exogenous

variables in the individual. Although the buying behavior models have been criticized, other empirical studies have created a clear definition of model boundaries, identifying the relationship between the variables and determining the best proxies by which the variables can be operationalised (Lye, Shao, Rundle-Thiele, & Fausnaugh, 2005, p. 218). With this reason, it is assumed that various consumer behavior models work and their results are applicable to this research.

From the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Lewis & Chambers, 2000, p. 215), it should be understood that the motivation of a tourist to travel and the choice of destination will be influenced partly by his needs, aside from the individual tourist typologies. An adaptation of this theory has been used to develop a leisure ladder model in a theme park setting (Cook, Yale, & Marqua, 2002, p. 38). This model uses the various levels of needs postulated by Maslow to map out the need and service preference levels for the theme park. It takes and positions each level of need in the original theory and gives it a reference that reflects the various levels of needs that may arise in a theme park. It then explains in detail the needs that may arise from the perspective of a tourist visiting the park and how service providers can possibly view them.

A study of hotel guests that was carried out in Mauritius revealed that about 67 percent of tourists visiting the country were leisure tourists (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003, p. 110). Goeldner and Ritchie (2003, p. 205) have developed details of attractions that normally appeal to tourists and list them as cultural attractions, natural attractions, events, recreation and entertainment attraction. The European Travel Commission and the tourism industry carried out research to establish activities that tourists enjoy most when visiting European countries (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003, p. 349). It was established that dining at restaurants, shopping and visiting historical sites took the first three positions of activity popularity. In another study carried out in Hong Kong, an attempt was made to profile the activities of the tourist while at the destination (Law, Cheung, & Lo, 2004, p. 360). The authors established five activities that qualified as very important to tourist visitors namely, sample local food, city sightseeing, visit scenic landmarks, shopping, and restaurant dining out in that order.

There is a remarkable difference between the Asian travelers and their Western counterparts when it comes to measuring traveler satisfaction (Poon & Low, 2005, p. 223). In this study that was carried out in selected hotels in Malaysia, these authors argue that the most important criterion by which an Asian traveler measures satisfaction is the price charged for services, while the Western traveler measures the same on the basis of security and safety (Poon & Low, 2005, p. 223). Kenya's SWOT analysis (KTB, 2003) reveals a fundamental weakness that is the subject of this research. This is the fact that hotel or accommodation infrastructure is old and out dated, which may compromise the quality offering of these facilities, thus impacting negatively on tourists' service experience in Kenya.

Defining Hospitality and Its Hotel Component

Hospitality has been defined as the cordial and generous reception of guests (Angelo & Vladimir, 1994, p. 479). It has also been defined as those commercial activities which offer consumers accommodation, meals and drinks when they are away from home while promoting a warm friendly experience that benefits travelers (George, 2001, p. 18). Today, the hotel and food service industry has become widely known as the hospitality industry (Lillicrap & Cousins, 1990, p. 2) and it is explained that the industry is defined by its output of products, which satisfies the demand for food, drink, entertainment and accommodation. Hotels are presented to customers

in varied forms depending on need, type of travel activity, and physical location of the hotel. Abbott and Lewry (2002, pp. 4-5) outline the various types of hotels and other accommodation providers such as cruise liners, camp sites, timeshare complexes, convention centres, hospitals, lodges, city and town hotels and beach resorts.

The main purpose of hotels to provide a hospitality service that is basically composed of accommodation, food and drink but in a warm friendly environment (Lillicrap & Cousins, 1990, p. 4; George, 2001, p. 18). However, this is usually extended to cover the aspect that people need a clean, comfortable place to rest and sleep, to have quality food service, to socialize and meet others and to access to stores and shops within a secure surrounding while travelling (Martin, 1998, p. 4). According to Baker, Bradley and Huyton (2000, p. 44), a typical hotel stay for a guest can be divided into four distinct phases namely pre-arrival, arrival, occupancy, and departure which is referred to as the guest cycle.

Measuring Quality and Satisfaction in Hotels

Quality has been defined as "excellence, value, conformance to specification and meeting or exceeding customers' expectation" (Lee, Yang, & Yu, 2001, pp. 691-704) and also as "conformance to requirement" or "fitness for purpose" and "fitness for use" (Crosby, 1991, pp. 32-36; Juran, 1988, pp. 8-13). Quality experts have thus developed several approaches to improving performance and these are embodied in a set of quality management practices known as total quality management (TQM) (Lakhal, Pasin, & Limam, 2006, p. 625). Srdoc, Sluga and Bratko (2005, p. 280) assert that there are several other quality management models such as the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria, ISO 9001 and the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Excellence Model. These models may be used by various types of organizations with an attempt to improve the process, the product and the service quality.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, pp. 41-50) defined service quality as "the gap between the customer's expectation of a service and the customers' perception of the service received". In a later study by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988, pp. 12-40), service quality was redefined as "a global judgment or attitude related to the overall excellence or superiority of the service". The global judgment referred to in this definition is the perception of the customer versus his or her expectation (Nadiri & Hussain, 2005, p. 472). Customer service is a critical aspect of what is meant by the term "service" according to Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006, p. 5). These authors define customer service as "the service provided in support of the company's core product". Typically, customer service is never charged and has traditionally been seen as the augmented product offering to the customer. Customer service is a very important determinant of service quality and is essential in building customer relationships (Zeithaml et al., 2006, p. 5). The concept "customer service" has been a generic term used in the industry and by academia to describe a set of activities in which a firm engages to win and keep customers (Kyj, S. L., & Kyj, J. M., 1994, p. 41).

Buttle (1996, pp. 8-9) says that one of the most popular models for the management of service quality today is the SERVQUAL model, which provides a technology for measuring and managing service quality. SERVQUAL is a shortened form of "service quality" and was originated by Parasuraman and his team (Parasuraman et al., 1985, pp. 41-50). It uses five dimensional instruments to measure customers' expectations and perceptions along a variety of service attributes (Parasuraman, 2004, p. 46). These dimensions include reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. Despite the credit that the SERVQUAL model has

received over the years, it has generated criticisms which relate to the application of the expectation and gap scoring, as well as the nature of its reliability, validity and generic factor structure (Buttle, 1996, pp. 8-32; Carman, 1990, pp. 33-55; Babakus & Boller, 1992, pp. 253-268; Brown, Churchill, & Peter, 1993, pp. 127-139).

These criticisms led hospitality researchers to propose models with more specific quality scales for the lodging industry. One is referred to as LODGQUAL (Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, & Yokoyoma, 1990, pp. 277-284), designed for hotels and another one is called DINESERV, which was proposed for the assessment of restaurant service quality (Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995, p. 560). However, the superiority of LODGQUAL or even DINESERV over SERVQUAL has been much debated in hospitality circles (Ekinci, Riley, & Fife-Shaw, 1998, pp. 63-67). Some hospitality and tourism researchers prefer to use SERVQUAL and its application to evaluate service quality (Juwaheer & Ross, 2003, p. 106).

Gaps Model Approach to Hotel Quality Management

Quality concerns have evolved over the years, utilizing quality management systems such as quality control, quality assurance, total quality control and most recently total quality management (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 279). Since the hotel product's intangibility makes it difficult for people to understand its full design (Chon & Sparrowe, 2000, p. 13), quality management systems in service industries such as leisure, tend to focus more on the intangible service elements of the product and the people who deliver it (Horner & Swarbrooke, 2005, p. 278). These authors explain that quality enhancement in service is largely targeted at reducing the gaps between the perception of service quality held by the organization and the service customers.
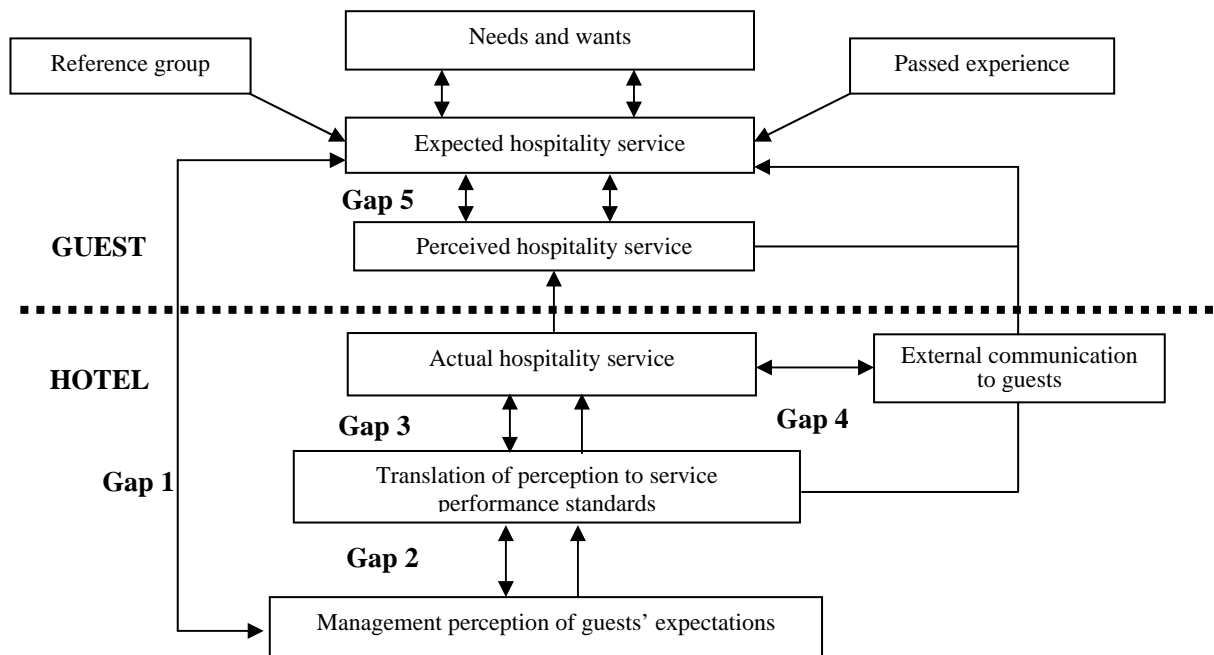

Figure 1. The gaps model for hospitality service quality. Source: Adapted from Pizam and Ellis (1999, p. 331).

According to Zeithaml et al. (2006, p. 33), products that predominantly consist of service must be viewed in a structured and integrated way using a framework referred to as the gaps model of service quality. In the gaps model, these authors give an outline of five gaps that must be addressed in order to ensure an impeccable service quality offering. The first gap is called the customer gap, which is the difference between the customer's

expectation and perception of the service. The other four gaps are referred to as the provider gaps; all being gaps that occur within the organization providing the service (Zeithaml et al., 2006, pp. 34-46).

Pizam and Ellis (1999, p. 331) agreed with this service quality assessment framework, but redesigned it to reflect a specific focus on a hotel business as shown in Figure 1. The model provides appropriate demonstration of how quality should be assessed and managed in a service business and more specifically in hotels. Similar studies of service quality management using the gaps models and especially with reference to hotels have been carried out (Parasuraman, 2004, pp. 45-52; Gabbie & O'Neill, 1997, pp. 43-49; Tsang & Qu, 2000, pp. 316-326). Gabbie and O'Neill (1997, pp. 43-49) refer to the four company gaps as the positioning gap, the specification gap, the delivery gap, and the communication gap.

Tsang and Qu (2000, pp. 316-326) also refer to five gaps but label them differently as understanding gap, the service standard gap, the service performance gap, the communication gap and finally the service quality gap. All these arguments still point to the same gaps model by Zeithaml et al. (2006, p. 46) and the one by Pizam and Ellis (1999, p. 331). For the purpose of this study, the model depicted in Figure 1 shall be applied in the evaluation of the hotel service offering.

Measuring Satisfaction With Perception Versus Expectation

As a business whose product offering is predominantly service, hotels provide consumers with a service experience, which is influenced by four components namely the contact personnel, the consumers themselves, the servicescape as well as the invisible organization and systems (Hopkins, S. A., Hopkins, W. E., & Hoffman, 2005, p. 329). Since customer satisfaction is the ultimate goal of any quality management (Randall & Senior, 1994, p. 69), further quality frameworks will be evaluated in this study to select the best framework. This is in application of the proposal by Green and Boshoff (2002, pp. 2-8) that satisfaction is insufficient to predict customer behavior, and that perceived value is a much better predictor based on service experience, amidst remote sacrifices made by customers to obtain the service.

Many studies have been carried out on hotel quality and most of them have been based on the critical assessment of customers' value of service attributes, their importance or significance, and their expectation of the hotel service versus the emergent perception of the same service upon service experience (Min, Min, & Chung, 2002, pp. 302-321; Tsang & Qu, 2000, pp. 316-326; Juwaheer, 2004, pp. 350-364; Pizam & Ellis, 1999, pp. 326-339; Juwaheer & Ross, 2003, pp. 105-115). Various attributes have been used to examine hotel service quality with reference to what scholars perceive as the critical elements of customer satisfaction in these hotels. The attributes used to measure hotel product quality have been categorized in four main groups namely the general comprehensive product, front office and guest relations, food and beverage as well as guest rooms. These are explained as outlined below:

(1) The comprehensive product—measuring the total or unclassified aspects of hotel characteristics;

(2) Front office and guest relations—measuring the front of house services that guests receive before check in, upon check in, stay period and upon check out;

(3) Food and beverage—measuring the food and beverage service outlets together with the food and beverage quality as well as value;

(4) Guest rooms—measuring the quality factors that make up room accommodation and service provisions.

Implementing National Quality Strategy

The role of government in the management of tourism and hotel enterprises has been found to be of profound importance (Chon & Sparrowe, 2000, p. 45). It is outlined in this text that the government may contribute by creating conducive frameworks for hospitality development and business, establishing convention centres and providing definitive guidelines for the quality operation of hospitality business enterprises. Indeed, this reflects what the government of Kenya has been trying to do within the hospitality and tourism sector and which may be considered as a catalyst for institutionalizing quality.

One sustainable way of institutionalizing hotel product/service quality is hotel quality rating or hotel service grading (Holloway, 2002, p. 167; Abbott & Lewry, 2002, p. 6). The most widely used mechanism for hotel quality rating is "Star Rating". This is a method of providing hotel establishments a certain number of stars, ranging from one to five, depending on predetermined quality attainment conditions (Abbott & Lewry, 2002, p. 6). The framework is merely a guiding summary and may vary from country to country depending on a destination's quality focus and strategy. It is, however, a vital input for hotel standards' classification which enables institutionalization of quality as well as providing guests with a mechanism to develop normative expectations and later, perceptual judgment of quality (Desombre & Eccles, 1998, p. 21). The South African Tourism Grading Council gives a more comprehensive explanation of what the different star rating categories should entail (Tourism Grading Council, SA, 2005, pp. A82-A9).

Kenya's Hotel and Restaurant Authority reviewed its classification recently and upon publication attracted a lively debate amongst hotelkeepers and government officials (Anon, 2005, p. 12). This study will provide a meaningful contribution to hotel quality definitions in Kenya in order to reduce industrial quality disputes. It is important to note at this point that quality rating or hotel service grading should not be confused with classification or categorization (Holloway, 2002, p. 167). These concepts are used interchangeably to refer to type of hotel or accommodation.

Research Methodology

This research employed a descriptive quantitative design in which descriptions of phenomena or characteristics associated with the research population is provided, giving an estimate of the population that have certain defined characteristics while also making discoveries on the associations among different variables (Cooper & Schindler, 2003, p. 161). Three sets of populations were used to generate sample groups that were judgmentally selected to enable cross comparison.

It used a structured survey method to describe the characteristics and preferences of the tourists visiting Kenya as a destination by measuring hotel quality expectation and perception of tourist. It also examined the hotel service providers' perception of the quality expectation of tourists who use their services. Lastly the study enquired from the national destination marketing organization to establish the influence of the marketing effort on Kenya's destination competitiveness. The information was then used to evaluate the extent to which hotel quality can influence tourists to prefer Kenya as the place to visit instead of other competing destinations.

The first and main population for this study was the international tourists visiting Kenya for various tourism purposes and activities. The second study population was the hotel operators in charge of the management of selected hotel facilities in Kenya. Two major tourist regions namely Nairobi and Coast provinces were selected as

two cluster catchments for hotels as sample units and tourists as sample elements. The tourists targeted were described as those who had just spent at least one night's accommodation in a hotel that is star rated at either 3 or 4 or 5 star within either of the two regions. A total of 9 hotels were selected to represent Coast province while Nairobi was represented by 10 hotels. From each of these hotels, one senior operations manager (referred to as Hotel Operator) and 19 tourists were targeted for the survey. This means that a total of 342 tourists was the target sample size for this study while the second sample was made up of 19 hotel operators. The third sample group was that of the five destination marketing managers employed by the Kenya Tourist Board. This study justified this sample size of tourists based on the sample sizes that have been adopted by other similar studies (Chen & Gursoy, 2001, pp. 79-85; Madu, Feilmayr, & Madu, 2002, pp. 327-353; Min, Min, & Chung, 2002, pp. 302-321; Malhotra & Grover, 1998, pp. 407-425).

Discussion of Research Findings

Normative and Perceptive Hotel Product/Service Quality

Normative quality was measured by asking the tourists their expectation of hotel product/service quality along specified parameters and on a 5-point Likert scale. The responses received from 211 surveyed tourists are summarized in Table 1. These results are grouped under the four quality measurement categories namely comprehensive, front office, food and beverage, and guest room products/services.

Table 1

Hotel Product/Service Gap Averaging

Hotel product and services	No.	Min.	Max.	Group mean scores		Gap
				Normative	Perceptive	
The comprehensive hotel product	211	1	5	4.22	3.37	0.85
Front office and guest relations	211	1	5	4.50	3.38	1.12
Food and beverage	211	1	5	4.47	3.29	1.18
The guest rooms	211	1	5	4.56	3.08	1.14
Valid N (List-wise) average	211	1	5	4.44	3.28	1.16

The analysis in Table 1 reveals significant gaps between the expected total product/service quality level and the experienced or perceptive product/service quality level. It means that while tourists rate importance of hotel product/service parameters at a composite mean score value of 4.44, which is above "very important", the same is experienced and perceived at a "satisfied" mean score of only 3.28 which reflects that tourists have recorded an under-performance of service at a negative point rating of 1.16 which is the gap. This means that the hotel product/service quality experience of the tourists was lower than what they expected from the hotel product/services quality as evidenced in all the aspects of hotel quality that were measured in this study, i.e., the comprehensive hotel product, the front office services, food and beverage services and the guest room services.

The majority of tourists visiting Kenya are motivated to do so for the purposes of wildlife safari (85.8%), beach holiday (71.1%) and to view the natural sceneries (61.1%). However, the other reasons that motivate tourists to come to Kenya include visiting friends and relatives, cruise tourism, sports and recreation, education and cultural experience, religion as well as business. Since the basic motivation for visiting Kenya was realised to be aspects that could be obtainable from several other competing destinations within the African region, tourists

were asked to state other possible influences that could have made them choose to come to Kenya. The study established that the influence that received the highest rating of importance is the kindness and hospitality of the Kenyan people, which had a mean rating of 4.48. It was followed by the quality of attractions (4.40) and high quality of accommodation, food and beverages (4.17). Other significant influences cited included variety of attractions and high level of safety and security.

Table 2

Gap Mean Scores: Tourists Versus Hotel Operators

Hotel product and services	No. (T/HO)	Min.	Max.	Group mean scores		Gap
				Normative (Tourists)	Normative (Hotel operators)	
Comprehensive hotel product	211/19	1	5	4.22	4.67	-0.45
Front office and guest relations	211/19	1	5	4.50	4.81	-0.31
Food and beverage	211/19	1	5	4.47	4.87	-0.40
The guest rooms	211/19	1	5	4.56	4.87	-0.31
Average		1	5	4.442	4.81	-0.37

Note. "No." column indicates sample for T (tourists) and HO (hotel operators).

The destination marketers of the Kenya Tourist Board were also asked to state what they think influence tourists further to choose Kenya as a destination. It was established that the marketers believe that the greatest influence is the variety and quality of attractions, which was rated at 4.80 on a 5-point Likert scale. Hospitality of the Kenyan people was again cited by destination marketers as the second most important influence with a mean rating of 4.60. The other significant influences mentioned were ranked as follows:

- Value packaging of the total travel experience (4.20);
- The state of safety and security (4.0);
- The quality of accommodation, food and beverage (3.80).

The main objective of asking tourists to list the other influences that could have made them choose Kenya was to establish the position of hotel quality with regard to variety vis-à-vis quality of attractions. From the tourists' point of view, the kindness and hospitality of the Kenyan people was rated highest at 4.48 with quality of accommodation, food and beverage being rated at 4.17. The tourists rated the quality of attractions at 4.40 while the variety of attractions was rated at 4.00. This is an indication that the hotel product, which is a significant embodiment of hospitality at the destination, is a very important influence in the choice of a destination by most tourists.

Destination marketers in Kenya do not see the influence of hotel product/service quality in a tourist's choice decision at the same level of importance as the tourists do. While tourists ranked hospitality of the people of Kenya as the greatest influence with a mean rating of 4.48, and the quality of accommodation, food and beverage with a mean score of 4.17 ranked as the third most important influence, the destination marketers ranked hospitality of the people of Kenya as the second most important influence after the quality and variety of attractions.

Conclusion and Recommenations

Why Tourists Visit Kenya

The first objective of this study was to determine why tourists choose to visit Kenya as a destination. This

research established that there are three basic motivations for tourists to visit Kenya namely wildlife safari (85.8%), beach holiday (71.1%) and viewing natural sceneries (61.1%). These are the traditional attractions in Kenya's tourism, while other emerging attractions now include education and culture (18.5%) and cruise tourism (5.7%). This is an indication that Kenya's destination managers should use the emerging needs to create new impetus for growth in tourism while at the same time mobilize support and promotion for the three most popular reasons why most tourists come to Kenya.

It has also been established that the kindness and hospitality of the Kenyan people provides the highest motivation, followed by the quality of Kenya's tourist attractions. Notably the high quality of accommodation, food and beverage came out as the third most influential reason why tourists choose Kenya against the other destinations with the same kinds of attractions. The fourth and the fifth reasons were recorded as the variety of attractions and the high level of safety and security respectively.

Normative and Perceptive Hotel Quality According to Tourists

The study revealed a normative quality grading of 4.44 out of 5.00 in a 5-point Likert scale, while the perceptive experience was registered at a mean score of 3.28 out of 5.00. This indicated a total product/service quality gap of 1.16 which means that hotels register significant under-performance against the expectations of tourists. With the level of influence that hotel product/service quality is already seen to be registering on tourists' destination choice decisions, as well as their decision to make a repeat visit, this means that hotel product/service quality in Kenya may be threatening the competitiveness of Kenya as a tourist destination.

The Hotel Operators' Perception of Service Design Quality

While tourists' expectations of the hotel product/service quality registered a composite mean score of importance at 4.44 out of 5.00, the hotel operators indicated their perception of the same at 4.81. This means that hotel operators were even more ambitious about product/service quality with regards to the level of quality that should be extended to tourists visiting Kenya. This therefore reveals even a greater product/service quality performance gap since tourists registered their perception of hotel product/service quality at a composite mean score of only 3.28 out of 5.00. This indicates that there is a need to establish why hotel operators are not able to meet their quality dream for the tourist visitors.

Study Proposition P_1

The first proposition in this study reads as follows: "The perceptive quality of the hotel product/service falls below the normative product/service quality level expectation of tourists visiting Kenya". This study revealed a negative total product/service quality gap which indicates that hotels register a significant under performance against the expectation of tourists. It confirms the initial proposition that the perceptive quality of hotel product/service falls below the normative product/service quality level expectation of tourists visiting Kenya.

Study Proposition P_2

The second proposition tested in this study was that: "Policies and regulatory mechanisms that govern hotel product/service quality are not appropriately shared and enforced". The study established that particular quality regulatory institutions with statutory and legal authority to incriminate hotel operators who do not comply with their requirements are well recognized. These include the quality requirements enforced by Hotels and Restaurants

Authority and the Local Authority Public Health Department. The other market driven quality management mechanisms proposed by organizations such as *Societe Generalle du Surveillance* (SGS International), Federation of Overseas Tour Operators (Europe), and the Kenya Bureau of Standards have not been effectively appropriated by hotel operators. In this regard, the study confirmed this proposition that policies and regulatory mechanisms that govern hotel product/service quality are not appropriately shared and enforced.

Hotel Product/Service Quality: An Integrated Framework

It has been established from this study that hotel product/service quality plays a significant role in influencing tourists' travel and destination experience. The study therefore, recommends that hotel operators at the destination should no longer view a hotel as just basic support at the destination, but as an aspect that can play the role of a pull factor. According to Bresler (2002, pp. 266-267), attractions provide the single most important reason for leisure tourism. She adds that amenities and facilities such as transport and accommodation are enabling conditions and rarely have a rationale in their own right but can be differentiating factors. This confirms that hotel product/service quality is a central input within a series of components that make up the destination product at the various stages in a tourist's consumption process.

This research revealed that hotel operators hold the same view as guests with regards to hotel product/service quality expectations. Indeed, the hotel operators' perception of the tourists' expectation of hotel product/service quality slightly exceeds that of the tourists. However, since the quality delivered to the tourists (perceptive quality) falls below expectation, this study recommends that hotel operators make a deliberate attempt to develop strategies that will enable a narrowing of the gap between the normative quality and the perceptive quality. Zeithaml et al. (2006, p. 46) outline possible causes of this particular gap such as poor design of hotel services, inappropriate physical evidence, deficiency in human resource policy and lack of customer driven service standards. It is also recommended that proper training and motivation of service staff should be mounted to help in the delivery of the desired service standards. Lastly, the government should play a central role in the enhancement of safety and security, while at the same time providing adequate support in the institutionalization of hotel quality designs.

Since hotel operators understand customers' expectations well, their main task in the management of these enterprises should be geared towards building a tactical framework that can deliver hotel product/service quality according to the established needs of the tourists. This will require that hotels operate with firm policies that guide recruitment, selection, placement, training, motivation and rewarding of hotel employees. Employees are the most significant resource in service businesses such as hotels, and as it has been asserted, people are the service. It would also be advisable for hotel operators to examine the service design and standard frameworks established in hotels such as in guestrooms, front office procedures, food and beverage menu and production mechanism, as well as restaurant service to ensure these are supportive of service delivery. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that tourists seek travel experiences that they can live to share for a significant period. In this regard, hotel operators should not just provide mundane service encounters but rather, spectacular ones. The physical evidence of service and the general servicescapes within particular hotels and their environs should provide a unique and exceptional image. All these discussions can be summed up in a hotel product/service quality framework as proposed in Figure 2.
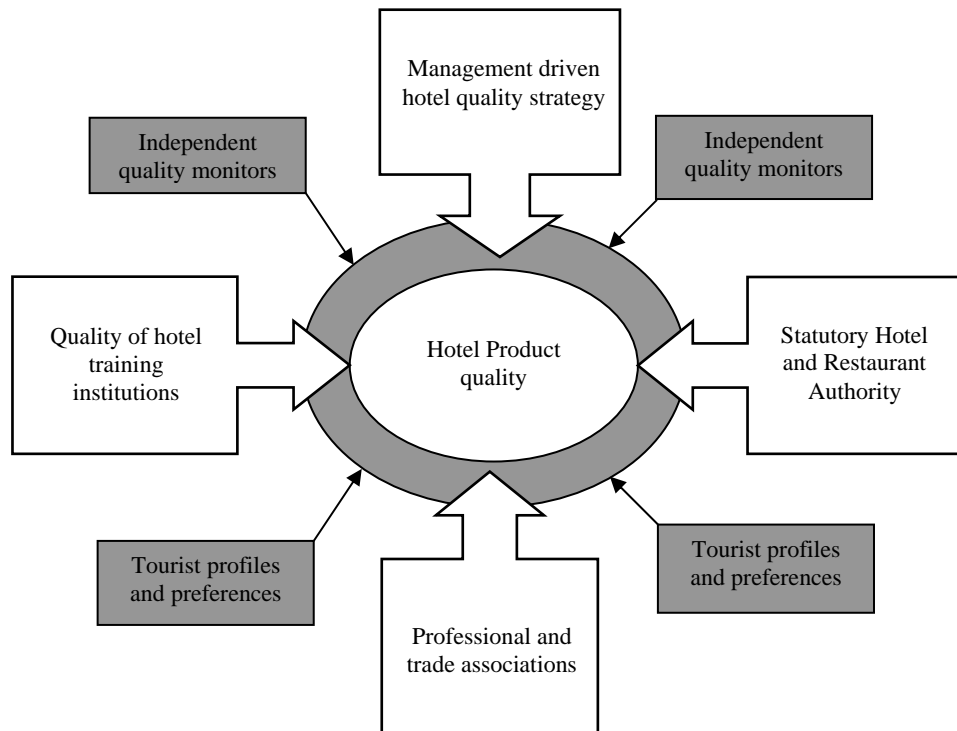
Figure 2. The proposed hotel product/service quality framework.

This framework illustrates that hotel quality is the output of the hotel quality strategy, the hotel training institutions, the hospitality professional and trade associations and the statutory Hotel and Restaurant Authority. These four basic elements play active roles to directly determine hotel product. However, to build a competitive hotel quality, there should be a direct reference to the tourists' profiles and preference while at the same time drawing critical quality benchmarks from independent national quality monitoring mechanism.

It would be important that an investigation be carried out into the causes of customer gaps registered by tourists consuming hotel products and services. The customer gap is the defined negative difference between the quality expectation of the customers and the quality experience or perception as judged by the same customer. The hotel operators understand customers' expectations very well and even give normative quality a composite mean score of 4.81 which means they have a product/service quality vision that is higher than that of the tourists. Several causes of this gap have been postulated and which have not been investigated by this particular study. It would therefore be necessary that studies focusing on the internal operation of hotels be carried out to help explain this gap.

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