

A Study on Service Marketing of Tibetan Inns in Lhasa, Tibet Based on Service Quality Gap Model

Lei Zhai¹ & Bosheng Wang¹

¹ Tibet University, Lhasa, Tibet 850000

Correspondence: Lei Zhai, Tibet University, Lhasa, Tibet 850000.

doi: 10.56397/FMS.2022.10.01

Abstract

The inn accommodation industry belongs to the service industry, and the phenomenon of homogenization of inn services is becoming more and more serious, and the level of service quality is gradually declining. However, the use of product marketing theory has been difficult to form good word-of-mouth publicity, so the development of the inn accommodation industry is paying more and more attention to service marketing, and the level of service marketing has become the key to promote the development of the inn industry. Based on the actual situation of Tibetan inns in Lhasa, this paper objectively assesses the current situation of service marketing and analyses the problems of service marketing, and proposes strategies to improve service marketing and enhance service quality and customer satisfaction.

Keywords: service quality gap model, Tibetan inn, service marketing

1. Research Background

In order to standardize the operation of B&B services and improve service quality, the Chinese National Standards Committee has issued the *Basic Requirements and Grading of Tourist B&Bs* (GB/T41648-2022), which applies to officially operating tourist B&Bs, including but not limited to residential houses, mansions, inns, stagecoaches, manors and mountain villages. The standard stipulates the general requirements for the operation and management of tourist lodges, including requirements for operating conditions, scale, safety, hygiene, epidemic prevention and environmental protection; requirements for the public environment and support, including requirements for traffic conditions, the ecological environment in which they are located, parking areas for transport, communication networks, etc.; and requirements for buildings and facilities, including The requirements for building decoration, guest room facilities, kitchens and dining rooms, public leisure facilities, cloth rooms, washing rooms, toilets and other functional areas. The standard specifies the hygiene and service requirements for tourist B&Bs, including requirements for guest rooms, restaurants, kitchens, indoor and outdoor public areas and guest supplies hygiene, host services, daily hospitality services, customised services and other services; and operational and management requirements, including publicity and marketing through media platforms, establishment of management systems and service specifications, and effective handling of various complaints. In recent years, China's inn B&B service industry has made great progress, especially in Taiwan, China, where the development of the B&B inn industry started early and developed rapidly and quickly, but problems with service quality still abound, exposing the shortcomings of B&B inn management, the backwardness of the service concept and the loopholes in service marketing management. Therefore, it is important to attach great importance to and accurately grasp the special characteristics of service marketing in the inn industry, systematically apply theories of service marketing, scientifically formulate corresponding service marketing strategies and continuously improve the level of service quality, so as to promote the high-quality development of the inn industry.

2. Literature Review

Boom and Bitner (1981) pointed out that on the basis of the traditional 4Ps of product marketing mix theory, three more Ps, namely people, physical environment and process, were added according to the characteristics of service marketing, thus forming the 7Ps theoretical model of service marketing (Liang Jun, 2007). Michael Merz (2009) studied the relationship between service marketing and brands and found that service marketing is the key to enhancing brand value (Michael Merz, Yi He & Stephen L Vargo, 2009); Robert Lusch (2010) pointed out that compared with the traditional product marketing concept service marketing has more advantages in terms of value chain construction and resource allocation (Robert. F. Lusch, Stephen L Vargo & Mohan Tanniru, 2010). (1988) proposed the SERVQUAL scale and SERVQUAL evaluation method, which consists of five dimensions of service quality and 22 indicators, based on the theory of quality, marketing and service (Parasuraman, A., Zeitham, A., & Berry, A., 1985); Chen C. et al. (2013) studied the impact of service quality level on tourist satisfaction and loyalty in Kin men Island B&B (Chen C M., Chen S H. & Lea, 2013). China's research results on service quality and service marketing are relatively few compared to Western countries, Du C. Qin (2016) pointed out that hotels need to pass on their own brand unique service model and operation methods, and adopt proven service marketing methods in order to be in a distant position in the current fierce competition and development of the service industry [6]. Liu Yong (2014) pointed out that hotel managers must pay attention to the internal service quality and personnel training of the hotel, and implement precise positioning and scientific and standardized management concepts to the external to carry out all-round management (Liu Y, Li X.M., 2014); Li Ping (2015) pointed out that the key to hotel marketing is to accurately grasp the needs of consumers and customer expectations, and strengthen the construction of hotel culture, so as to drive the overall hotel industry development (Li Ping, 2015); Lian Mengna (2015) concludes that the best way for hotels to promote their core brand values is to carry out a centralised marketing strategy. The best option is to adopt an undifferentiated marketing strategy when addressing the characteristics of varying levels of consumer demand (Lian Mengna, 2015). Service marketing is improved and developed on the basis of product marketing, and service quality is an important part of service marketing, and focusing on the quality of service is a key factor in the success of service marketing. Based on the research results of service marketing in the related accommodation industry and foreign accommodation industry, this paper takes the Tibetan inn in Lhasa, Tibet as the research object, aiming to improve the level of service quality of the inn, with the goal of improving customer satisfaction as well as customer loyalty, analyse the service quality of the inn and put forward targeted service marketing strategies.

3. Analysis of the Service Marketing of Tibetan-style Inns in Lhasa

The service quality gap model is shown in Figure 1 and consists of a customer gap and four inn service sector gaps. The customer gap is the core of the model, and the key to bridging the customer gap is to address the four gaps in the service business. The service quality gap model demonstrates the causes of service quality problems and integrates customer expectations and customer perceptions in the service marketing process with the service business strategies and service marketing strategies of service companies.

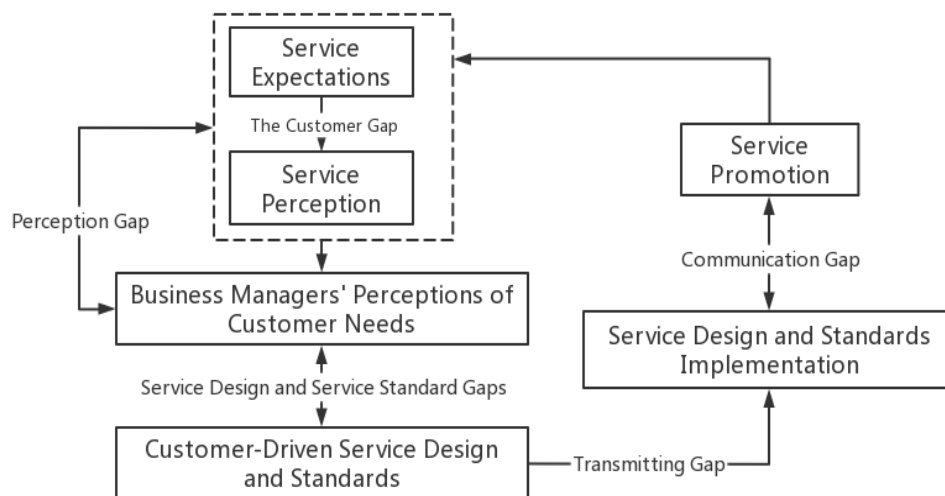


Figure 1. Service quality gap model diagram

3.1 Gaps in the Tibetan Inns Service Sector in Lhasa, Tibet

3.1.1 Communication Gap

Communication gap refers to the gap between the actual service delivered by the inn service industry and its advertised service. The service promises made by the Tibetan inn service industry in Tibet Lhasa using media advertisements, word of mouth of the inn and other means of publicity may lead to higher customer expectations, as the degree of inconsistency with the actual perception of services received may increase when customers will use this as an evaluation criterion for service quality, thus widening the customer gap. When Tibetan inns in Lhasa, Tibet are promoting their service products, the disseminator of the information lacks understanding of customers' needs and expectations, and the information promoted does not fully present the requirements of the service standards, making a gap between the promotional information and the actual standards; secondly, there is also a gap between the services provided by different service personnel and the service information promoted.

3.1.2 Delivery Gap

The service staff of Tibetan inns in Lhasa, Tibet, have different interpretations of service standards, and their personal abilities, professional knowledge and professionalism are also different, leading to differences in the implementation of service standards. With regard to the responsiveness of Tibetan inns in Lhasa, Tibet, when customers need service staff to provide accurate and convenient opening hours and to solve difficulties and problems in a timely manner, some service staff can respond to customers quickly and politely, while others may be lazy, resulting in customer dissatisfaction.

3.1.3 Service Design and Standards Gap

The service design and standards gap is the gap between the inn service industry's understanding of customer expectations and the development of customer-driven service designs and standards. Service companies need not only to accurately understand customer expectations, but also to be able to design service policies, behaviors and standards that meet customer expectations. Poor service design, failure to adopt customer-driven design standards, and inappropriate physical displays and service scenarios are three important factors contributing to the service design and standards gap.

3.1.4 Perception Gap

Before choosing to stay in an inn, customers have a basic demand for inn services, i.e. the accommodation facilities are well-equipped and clean and comfortable. At the same time, customers will have certain psychological expectations about the whole process of inn services, such as reasonable prices, perfect service facilities and quick response from service staff, based on their own experience tests of staying at the inn, word-of-mouth publicity from friends and relatives, and relevant media advertisements of Tibetan inns in Lhasa, Tibet. However, due to differences in customers' backgrounds, perceptions and other aspects, possible information asymmetries, etc., will then result in a mismatch between the Tibetan inn operators' definition of customer needs and the actual needs of customers, thus creating a cognitive gap, i.e. the cognitive gap between customers and inn managers.

3.2 Analysis of Customer Gap

The actual perceived value of the service quality of the inn is "satisfaction"; the expected value of the service quality of the inn is "importance". The level of customer satisfaction is between 3 and 4, which means that the actual perception of customers is between average and satisfied, indicating that the service quality of Tibetan inns in Lhasa Chengguan District is not bad. According to Table 1, the gap analysis between customer satisfaction and importance of service quality, each indicator is compared to each other for a more in-depth analysis of the service quality of the Tibetan Guest House in Lhasa Chengguan District.

Table 1. Analysis of the gap between customer satisfaction and importance of service quality

Dimension	Number	Measurement Standard	Satisfaction Mean	Importance Mean	Gap SQ
Tangibility	1	Convenient and complete accommodation facilities, clean and comfortable rooms	3.87	4.85	-0.98
	2	The service staff are neat and generous, which can reflect the characteristics of this Tibetan-style inn	3.86	4.51	-0.65

	3	The surrounding transportation is convenient, there is a parking lot for easy access	3.89	4.76	-0.87
		Average	3.87	4.71	-0.83
Reliability	4	What the service staff promises to the customer can be completed in time	3.83	4.69	-0.86
	5	When customers encounter difficulties, service staff can show concern and help	3.82	4.53	-0.71
	6	Service personnel inform the use of equipment and facilities and matters needing attention	3.86	4.58	-0.72
		Average	3.84	4.60	-0.76
Responsive ness	7	The service personnel provide timely service and can quickly solve the problem when there is a problem	3.93	4.55	-0.62
	8	The owner of the inn is willing to take the initiative to help customers, with a smile and a warm welcome	3.88	4.59	-0.71
	9	Service staff take the initiative to deal with complaints and complaints in a timely manner and take appropriate measures	3.85	4.45	-0.60
		Average	3.89	4.53	-0.64
Guaranteed	10	The inn owner and service staff are trustworthy	3.85	4.57	-0.72
	11	Provide customers with accurate and convenient business hours	3.88	4.39	-0.51
	12	The service staff has a high level of service and is familiar with folk customs and local culture	3.85	4.65	-0.80
		Average	3.86	4.54	-0.68
Empathy	13	Service staff will provide personalized and detailed services for different customers	3.90	4.61	-0.71
	14	The owner of the inn takes the initiative to communicate with the customers to understand the special needs of the customers and give them family-like care	3.84	4.54	-0.70
		Average	3.87	4.58	-0.71

Safety	15	The safety of the inn is guaranteed (fire safety, property safety, personal safety, public security, etc.)	3.88	4.55	-0.67
	16	The catering provided by the hotel is clean and hygienic, and the food safety is guaranteed	3.88	4.54	-0.66
	Average		3.88	4.55	-0.66
Cultural	17	The interior and exterior decoration and design of the inn can highlight the characteristics of Tibetan culture	3.93	4.42	-0.49
	18	The catering dishes provided by the inn have Tibetan characteristics	3.82	4.73	-0.91
	19	Customers can participate in Tibetan-style folk cultural activities	3.83	4.57	-0.74
	20	Inns use local resources to develop Tibetan-style tourism commodities and cultural and creative products	3.87	4.58	-0.71
	Average		3.86	4.58	-0.71

According to the above table, according to the analysis of the mean value of the importance of each measurement index, the mean value of the importance of the index ranges from 4.53 to 4.71, with a total mean value of 4.58, and the overall expectation value is relatively high. In terms of customer perceptions of the service quality of the inn, the mean values of actual customer perceptions range from 3.84 to 3.89, with a total mean value of 3.87. The overall perceptions are not low and basically show a relatively satisfactory state.

When it comes to service quality issues related to cultural and tangible aspects of Tibetan ethnicity, 19. the inn can guide customers to participate in cultural activities with Tibetan characteristics and experience local folk culture; 20. the inn uses local resources to develop tourist goods and cultural and creative products; and 2. the service staff are neatly and generously dressed, reflecting the characteristics of Tibetan-style inns. These three aspects reflect the low perceived value and low expectation of customers, which shows that most customers do not know the Lhasa inn very well before they experience it, and their expectation is correspondingly low; secondly, the inn operators do not make full use of the folklore of the Tibetan people, and customers do not experience the customs of the Tibetan people better.

When it comes to tangible, reliable and guaranteed service quality related issues, 1. accommodation facilities are convenient and complete, rooms are clean and comfortable; 4. service staff can complete what they promise to customers in a timely manner; 12. service staff are familiar with folk customs and local culture. There is a large gap between customer satisfaction and expectation in the above three aspects, and satisfaction is relatively low, so operators should strengthen follow-up observation, focusing on room facilities as well as the professional quality of service personnel, etc., to find out the problems and focus on rectification.

4. Suggestions on the Service Marketing of Tibetan Inns in Lhasa, Tibet

4.1 Close the Listening Gap and Understand Customer Needs

Inn operators should actively use market research to focus their service marketing on service quality; enhance communication between inn service staff and inn management, as well as between managers and customers; place emphasis on maintaining or improving relationships with existing customers. And effectively carry out service remedial measures to encourage staff to listen to customer complaints and grievances, improve service staff's ability to respond quickly to service failures, provide appropriate communication and adequate explanations, and service remedial measures to achieve fair outcomes and fair processes, leading to a fuller understanding of

customer expectations.

4.2 Close Service Design and Standards Gap to Enhance Customer Experience

The relevant government departments can invite experts and scholars or professionals to carry out systematic service design for Tibetan Lhasa inns, link service design standards to service positioning and issue service quality standards to individual Tibetan Lhasa inn operators in a timely manner. Focus on the process of managing customer needs, establishing a formal process for service quality standards and adhering to them. In turn, innkeepers need to create service scenarios that match customer and staff service interactions and maintain and upgrade them, designing and producing hardware and equipment and intangible services that match customer expectations, and tangible goods or props that facilitate service delivery and communication to enhance the customer experience.

4.3 Close Communication Gap and Manage Customer Expectations

Service strategies and procedures should be consistent within the inn, innkeepers should fully understand service design standards and the service delivery process, and communications about the inn must be accurate rather than exaggerated and deceptive to customers. Inn operators need to grade their service offerings and establish different service standards to help customers better understand service promises and evaluation criteria and choose the right service for them. Manage customer expectations and make customers more aware of the service process and the work that service staff put in. Make customers aware of how to prepare for the service delivery process and also guide them on how to evaluate the effectiveness of the service. Service price will be seen by customers as a more important indicator of service quality. Service price affects customer expectations and companies need to choose an appropriate pricing strategy based on the type of value perceived by customers.

4.4 Close the Perception Gap and Establish Good Psychological Expectations

A well-equipped guest house as well as clean and comfortable rooms are the most basic requirements that customers have for an inn. As most Tibetan-style guest houses are converted from Tibetan-style dwellings, they can suffer from unsatisfactory sound insulation and the presence of safety hazards. Therefore, innkeepers should regularly inspect and update the facilities and equipment of the inn to enhance the safety of the inn's facilities. At the same time, the interior and exterior architectural decoration of the inn is the first impression that affects customer expectations and perceptions. The architecture should reflect Tibetan cultural characteristics and integrate into the local cultural environment, but also avoid the intensification of homogenization.

Fund Project

Full Title of Project: 2022 National Innovation Training Program for University Students, Tibetan University, "Research on Service Quality Improvement of Tibetan Guest House in Chengguan District, Lhasa from the Perspective of Customer Perception". (Project Number: 202210694022).

References

- Liang Jun. (2007). *Logistics service marketing*. Beijing: Tsinghua University Press.
- Michael Merz, Yi He, Stephen L Vargo. (2009). The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, (3), pp. 328-344.
- Robert. F. Lusch, Stephen L Vargo, Mohan Tanniru. (2010). Service, value network and learning. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, pp. 19-31.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeitham, A., and Berry, A. (1985). Conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, (49), pp. 41-50.
- Chen C M., Chen S H., Lea. (2013). Interrelationship between physical environment quality, interaction quality, satisfaction and behaviour intentions in relation to customers loyalty: The case of Kin men bed and breakfast industry. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 18(3), pp. 262-287
- Du Zhiqin. (2014). Research on the service marketing strategy of retail industry based on customer value. *Enterprise Technology Development*, 32(12), p. 144
- Liu Y, Li X.M. (2014). Research on the problems and countermeasures of hotel marketing among Chinese star hotel managers. *Hotel Management Research*, pp. 120-121.
- Li Ping. (2015). Some thoughts on the modern hotel marketing model. *Capacity Economy*, p. 377.
- Lian Mengna. (2015). Analysis of the choice of hotel marketing strategy and market positioning. *Mobile Communication*, pp. 3-4.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).