

Experience quality dimensions and customer perceptions: A case study of guesthouses in Ghana

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Abstract

This study focused on guesthouses and aimed to examine the dimensions of experience quality, determine customers' perceptions of experience quality and investigate various relationships: between the experience quality dimensions and experience quality; between experience quality and satisfaction; and between satisfaction and behavioural intentions. A structural equation model confirmed these relationships. The findings of the study resulted from the views of 541 customers of 51 guesthouses in Ghana. The results will assist guesthouse managers in developing and implementing a competitive customer experience strategy that can enhance customer satisfaction, positive behavioural intentions, growth and sustainability.

Keywords: Behavioural intentions; Experience quality; Ghana; Guesthouse; Satisfaction

Introduction

For a long time, service quality was regarded as an antecedent to customer satisfaction. In line with this thinking, service quality improvements were expected to lead to customer satisfaction, help retain existing customers, attract new ones, and result in profit expansion and a gained market share (Hu & Kai, 2004; Mohsin, 2007; Rahman, 2006). A satisfied customer becomes an advocate for the organisation, is increasingly less easily persuaded by competitors (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007), and is more likely to repurchase the organisation's products and services (Ferrel & Hartline, 2010; Othman, Zahari & Radzi, 2013; Wu, 2015), and show positive behavioural intentions, such as word-of-mouth advertising and loyalty (Wang & Hung, 2015). However, contemporary tourism and hospitality research suggests that the traditional dimensions of service quality might not address the affective and holistic factors required for high-quality overall service experiences. Chen (2007) argues that customers should be delighted through *experience quality* rather than through the mere provision of *service quality*, which implies that experience quality "goes beyond the notion of service quality" (Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2011). This argument might be founded in the emphasis been placed on the creation of a consumer "experience" since the late 1990s. For example, Pine and Gilmore, (2011) suggest a paradigm shift from a delivery-focused service economy that emphasises quality, to an "experience economy" that creates a memorable consumption experience. From a consumer perspective, such an experience is an enjoyable, engaging,

and memorable encounter (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). From a business perspective, experiences are events that engage individuals in a personal way (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). The idea of an experience is particularly relevant to tourism (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). Within a tourism context, the experience may relate to everything a tourist encounters at a destination, be it behavioural or perceptual, cognitive or emotional, expressed or implied (Oh, et al., 2007).

Tourism across the globe has increased substantially with projections indicating that the number of international tourist arrivals will further grow by an average of 3.3% per year over the period 2010 to 2030 (UNWTO, 2012). All these tourists need some form of accommodation at their respective destinations. Accommodation providers include traditional hotels and small-scale or specialist accommodation types such as bed and breakfasts (B&Bs), guesthouses, farm stays, boarding houses and lodging, which provide guests with personalised services in a small and homely environment (Wang & Hung, 2015). Accommodation experience quality can thus be defined as a guest's affective response to the general experience received at the accommodation establishment, with particular reference to social-psychological benefits. This research focuses on guesthouses in Ghana. Guesthouses represent one of several small-scale accommodation types that play an important role in providing alternative accommodation to visitors and tourists. In Ghana, a guesthouse usually represents a normal home, converted or specially built, for the purposes of providing accommodation to guests. It comprises fewer than 11 rooms, and is owned by individuals or operated as a family business (Mensah, 2006). Although guesthouses in Ghana have grown rapidly over the years, research about customers' experience of quality remains limited and studies on how to operationalise successful customer experience, are lacking. In addition, guesthouse owners in Ghana lack managerial knowledge and are criticised for providing poor service quality (Mensah, 2006).

This article is grounded on the following three objectives: first, to examine the dimensions of experience quality; second, to determine guests' perceptions of experience quality, and finally, to investigate the relationship between experience quality dimensions and experience quality, between experience quality and satisfaction, and between satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The overall aim is to contribute to knowledge and theory on experience quality and provide guesthouse managers with a better understanding of guests' perceptions of delivered quality. The remaining sections of this article are structured as follows: provision of a short literature review and a conceptual framework dealing with experience quality and its proposed dimensions within the guesthouse context and a short review of customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. This is followed by a description of the research methods, with a focus on questionnaire design, scale construction, and data collection and analysis. Next, the empirical findings are reported in terms of the sample profile, the identified experience dimensions and supporting statistical evidence that describe the relationships between the variables. Thereafter, the conclusions of the study are provided, followed by managerial implications and recommendations.

Literature review and conceptual framework

Experience quality

Service quality has been one of the dominant research foci over the years (Bubalo & Gaggero, 2015; Chen, 2012; Lupo, 2015; Rajaratnam, Munikrishnan, Sharif & Nair, 2014; Siddiqi, 2011). In line with this, a series of models have been formulated to measure service quality (e.g. Grönroos, 1984; Johnson, Tsiors & Lancioi, 1995; Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). SERVQUAL, one of the popular models, has been founded on five principles,

namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, et al. 1985). *Tangibility* refers to the physical characteristics associated with the service encounter. With respect to guesthouses, the general appearance of the building and functionality of facilities inside and outside the property represent tangibles. *Reliability* implies rendering a good service from the first encounter with the customer. It is the extent to which employees can be depended on to perform services correctly and consistently. *Responsiveness* relates to employees' willingness to promptly and efficiently solve customers' problems. *Assurance* comprises the knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to inspire trust and confidence, while *empathy* reflects being caring and giving attention to individual customers. SERVQUAL has been widely used for measuring service quality in the hospitality industry (e.g. Chang, 2008; Ekinci & Riley, 2000; Humnekar & Phadtare, 2011) and has been replicated in other service industries such as public hospitals (de Jager, du Plooy & Ayadi, 2010) and telecommunication (e.g. Chen & Yang, 2015). Although service quality still plays an important role in customer satisfaction, the general principles underpinning its conceptualisation seems to be of less importance to contemporary customers. Service quality is primarily founded on functional and technical aspects of service delivery, while increasingly, customer expectations tend to focus on the affective and holistic factors that lead to quality of the overall service *experience* (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Various studies have recommended a more dynamic approach to describing quality (Chang & Horng, 2010; Jin, Lee & Lee, 2015; Kim & Choi, 2013; Kim, Woo & Uysal, 2015; Lemke, Clark & Wilson, 2011). For example, Chen and Chen (2010) suggest that in a contemporary society, customers have moved from being enticed with new product developments to customer-oriented developments that emphasise the quality of personal experiences. Experience quality extends beyond the conventional service quality dimension since "the quality visitors perceive is much more associated with their experiences during the process of visitation than the services *per se*" (Chen & Chen, 2010:35). Chang and Horng, (2010:2401) explain the customer experience as "the customer's emotional judgment about an entire experience with an elaborately designed service setting". Otto and Ritchie, (1996) emphasised that the nature of experience quality benefits is experiential, hedonic, or symbolic, while service quality benefits are functional or utilitarian. While numerous studies have emphasised the customer experience of quality, research into this phenomenon within the guesthouse sector in Ghana is still lacking. As mentioned, guesthouses in Ghana could serve as an alternative means of accommodation to hotels. However, guesthouses face similar challenges as hotels, including poor service quality, environmental and infrastructural concerns, poor managerial skills and staff inefficiencies (Afriyie, Abaka & Osuman, 2013; Amisah, 2013; Asiedu, 1997; Debasish & Dey, 2015; Mensah, 2006; Mensah-Kufuor, et al., 2015). It is argued that knowing guest experience perceptions on quality of services delivered at guesthouses and devising strategies to satisfy their needs might help guesthouse managers to be more competitive both nationally and internationally. In addition, since the conceptualisation of experience quality, several authors have found that experience quality positively influence customer's satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Chang & Horng, 2010; Chen & Chen, 2010; Cole & Scott, 2004; Jin, et al., 2015; Kao, et al., 2008; Kashif, Zakiah, Samsi, Awang & Mohamad, 2016; Otto and Ritchie, 1996). In line with this argument, it is expected that experience quality might positively impact guest satisfaction and future intentions.

Dimensions of experience quality

No consensus seems to exist in the literature on exactly what comprises experience quality. Table 1 lists 19 dimensions of experience quality that could be identified in the literature. Some dimensions (e.g. involvement and peace of mind) are common to different studies and contexts, while other dimensions seem to be unique to a specific context. As far as could be determined none of these dimensions have been examined in a guesthouse context.

Table 1: Dimensions of experience quality

| Dimensions | Context | Source |
|-----------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| Hedonics | Hotels, airlines, tours, and attractions | Otto and Ritchie (1996:165-174) |
| Peace of mind | Hotels, airlines, tours, and attractions | Otto and Ritchie (1996:165-174) |
| Involvement | Hotels, airlines, tours, and attractions | Otto and Ritchie (1996:165-174) |
| Recognition | Hotels, airlines, tours, and attractions | Otto and Ritchie (1996:165-174) |
| Immersion | Theme parks | Kao <i>et al.</i> (2008:163-174) |
| Surprise | Theme parks | Kao <i>et al.</i> (2008:163-174) |
| Participation | Theme parks | Kao <i>et al.</i> (2008:163-174) |
| Fun | Theme parks | Kao <i>et al.</i> (2008:163-174) |
| Physical surroundings | Museum and shopping context | Chang and Horng (2010:2401-2419) |
| Service providers | Museum and shopping context | Chang and Horng (2010:2401-2419) |
| Other customers | Museum and shopping context | Chang and Horng (2010:2401-2419) |
| Customers' companions | Museum and shopping context | Chang and Horng (2010:2401-2419) |
| Customers themselves | Museum and shopping context | Chang and Horng (2010:2401-2419) |
| Involvement | Heritage tourism | Chen and Chen (2010:29-35) |
| Peace of mind | Heritage tourism | Chen and Chen (2010:29-35) |
| Education | Heritage tourism | Chen and Chen (2010:29-35) |
| Entertainment | Rain forest | Cole and Scott (2004:79-90) |
| Education | Rain forest | Cole and Scott (2004:79-90) |
| Community | Rain forest | Cole and Scott (2004:79-90) |

Source: Own construction

The four experience quality dimensions proposed by Otto and Ritchie (1996), namely hedonics, peace of mind, involvement, and recognition were adopted as representing experience quality in the current research. These dimensions were chosen because of a number of reasons: firstly, these dimensions were deemed to fit the experience quality definition proposed for the current study, namely a guest's affective response to the general experience received at the guesthouse with particular reference to social-psychological benefits; secondly, Otto and Ritchie's, (1996) study focused on both the hospitality and tourism sector which can include guesthouses; thirdly, previous studies (e.g. Chen & Chen, 2010; Hanzaee & Rezaeyeh, 2013; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Khan, Garg & Rahman, 2015; Lo, 2016) found that the chosen dimensions positively influence customer satisfaction albeit in different contexts; and fourthly, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there is no empirical study that has validated these constructs (hedonics, peace of mind, recognition, and involvement) in the context of guesthouses in Ghana, and the current research sought to do so. The next section describes the four experience quality dimensions in more detail and provides their application to a guesthouse experience.

1) *Hedonism*

Hedonics is associated with fun characteristics rather than functional characteristics (Josiam & Henry, 2014). The "fun factor" in the experience has more value than the service or product forming part of the experience as it is fascinating (Mathiot, 2010). Chan, (2010) notes that fun creates a positive atmosphere for organisations. With respect to guesthouses variety shows or comedy programmes, crossword competitions, and programmes that will engage guests in what they really like to do, might create fun and influence the perception of the experience being hedonic. Furthermore, spending time together with family and friends, enjoying good food in a restaurant surrounded by beautiful scenery, or enjoying the physical experience of walking up a mountain could be seen as utilising resources in producing and consuming highly worthwhile and memorable experiences (Kim, et al., 2012). While guesthouses might not be able to provide the foregoing activities themselves, they might still be able to capitalise on their availability in the vicinity, for example, by providing guests with transportation to these areas, or offering guests a picnic basket for use in the mountain experience. In sum, it is argued that to ensure a high-quality experience, guesthouses should engage guests to do something they

really like to do, offer them something they will remember, and strive to appease them with 'once-in-a lifetime experience' offers. Authors (e.g. Jin, et al., 2015; Otto & Ritchie, 1996) showed a positive relationship between hedonics and experience quality. It is thus hypothesized that:

H1: Hedonics positively influences experience of quality.

2) *Peace of mind*

The second dimension of experience quality incorporated in the current study is "peace of mind". Peace of mind refers to a state of mental and emotional calmness, undisturbed by worries, anxieties, or fear (Sasson, 2014). This state of mind helps an individual to think clearly, improve concentration, and become more efficient in dealing with daily affairs (Sasson, 2014). Prior research revealed that three factors can provide customers with peace of mind. These include safety, security, and privacy. Customers prioritise these factors when visiting a destination because their presence contributes to peace of mind (Chan & Lam, 2013; Chen, Chuang, Huang, Lin & Chien, 2012; Kim, Lee & Ham, 2013). According to Chan and Lam, (2013), *safety* encompasses measures put in place to protect customers and employees from potential injury and death. *Security* involves measures to prevent unauthorised entry and, especially, movement of unwanted persons through the stairways, emergency doors, or staff entrances at a destination (Ellis, 2005). Privacy of customers can be divided into two forms: personal privacy and privacy of information. Personal privacy is associated with respect given to a customer, such as protecting their privacy in the guest room and avoiding unnecessary disturbances. The provision of safety, security, and privacy assures the customer's peace of mind. Ideally, in a guesthouse context, guests should feel physically comfortable, sure that their property is safe when left at the guesthouse, feel a sense of personal security and, finally, feel assured that their privacy is respected while staying at the guesthouse. Therefore, with respect to guesthouses, some common examples of safety and security measures might include the safety of flooring, safety of the building itself, safeguarding guests' personal information, restricting unauthorised entry into guest rooms, and ensuring customers are protected from criminal activities within the guesthouse. Several authors (e.g. Chen & Chen, 2010; Kashif, et al., 2016) have confirmed in their studies that peace of mind influences customers' perceptions of experience quality. It is expected that this might also be relevant to a guesthouse context in Ghana. Based on the foregoing discussions on peace of mind, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Peace of mind positively influences experience quality.

3) *Involvement*

Involvement represents the third dimension of experience quality proposed for the current study. Chen and Chen, (2010:30) refer to involvement as a "customer's desire to have a choice and control in the service offering, and the demand to be educated, informed, and incorporated with a sense of mutual co-operation". While there is no unified definition for involvement, three key dimensions of involvement can be deduced from the definitions found in literature, namely: participation, education, and communication. Goodwin and Radford, (1993) define participation as the customer's ability to exercise options which affect the sequence and substance of service delivery throughout the service experience. Schmitt, (2010) refers to participation as the act of engaging customers in being part of the experience creation. An educational experience provides guests with an opportunity to absorb events as they unfold at a destination (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). It affords the guest an opportunity to be actively involved in such events through interactive engagement of the mind, body, and soul (Oh, et al., 2007). Perovic, Stanovic, Moric and Pekovics, (2013) describe communication as a two-way interaction between an organisation and customers. Communication can take the form of verbal interaction (such as face-to-face contact) or using modern technology (such as through the organisation's website).

Many studies have found a close relationship between involvement and the quality of the experience. For example, in Otto and Ritchie's, (1996) study on service experience in tourism, the authors report that involvement positively influences experience quality. Chen and Chen, (2010) also confirm this relationship. Loureiro, Almeida and Rita, (2013) found that involving customers in creating positive experiences improves the individual's affective feelings when evaluating an experience. Pine and Gilmore, (2011) found that when individuals find themselves engrossed in an activity, they are more likely to have a memorable experience. Based on these findings, it is expected that involvement will influence experience quality in a guesthouse context. Involvement activities within guesthouses could include activities that engage guests in participating in what the guesthouse has to offer (e.g. self-entertainment), offering guests a choice of services (e.g. providing a variety of breakfast food), ensuring guests are provided with some kind of education, such as information concerning the guesthouse services (e.g. security measures, use of internet services within the guesthouse and other activities on offer). In general, positive effects of guests' involvement within the guesthouse context might result in customer satisfaction. Based on the above discussions on involvement, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Involvement positively influences experience quality.

4) Recognition

The final dimension of experience quality proposed for this study is 'recognition'. Recognition is associated with feeling important, confident, and being taken seriously at all times (Wu & Li, 2014; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Conventionally, the desire for recognition is one of the deepest human needs as it creates a positive feeling, lasting for a long time (Maslow, 1954). Recognition can result from social value/self concept and from employees' attitudes. Sheth, et al. (1991) define social value as the satisfaction obtained from association with a particular item, object, or group such as an organisation. A typical example of social value could be staying only at five star hotels because of its social value, prestige, or image, or because such hotels are associated with a certain class of people. Guests may also choose particular accommodation because it provides sophisticated experiences (Walls, 2013). The importance of recognition has been documented in past research studies. For example, Otto and Ritchie's, (1996) study on the service experience in tourism showed that recognition influences the experience of service quality. Similarly, Wu and Li's (2014) study on heritage tourism found that recognition influences experience quality and satisfaction.

Within the guesthouse context, recognition of a guest can be achieved in different forms. First, is the ability of the guesthouse manager and employees to show *respect* to all guests irrespective of culture, race, and personality. Guests should be treated equally with high professionalism. Guesthouses should also be *socially acceptable* in terms of customer service, pricing, after sales services and positive human relations. This can improve how people perceive the guesthouse. It is thus hypothesized that:

H4: Recognition positively influences experience quality.

Customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions

Customer satisfaction has been the central focus of many businesses due to its immense benefits to the entire organisation (Chiappa, Andreu & Gallarza, 2014; Forozia, Zadeh & Gilani, 2013; Ren, Qiu, Wang & Lin, 2016). Although a unified definition of customer satisfaction is still lacking, it can be deduced that satisfaction emerges from a customer's evaluative judgements of performance and fulfilment of expectations (Arnould, Price & Zinkhan, 2002; Chen, 2012; Gustafsson, et al., 2005; Kärnä, 2004; Oliver, 1997; Oliver, 1980; Siddiqi, 2011). This implies that customer satisfaction result from the fulfilment of a need or the evaluation of a product, service or experience, or an organisation's performance. Expectations thus provide

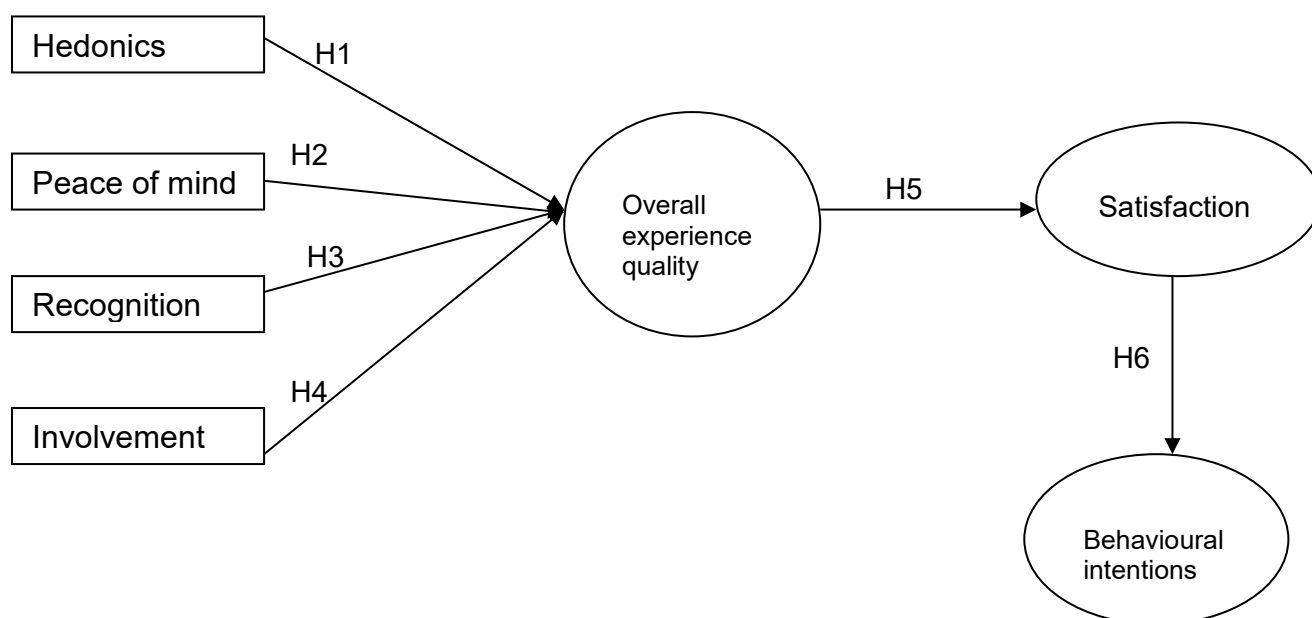
a benchmark for judgement of satisfaction. Satisfying and dissatisfying experiences typically result in some or other behavioural response and behavioural intentions. Customer satisfaction frequently leads to customers' favourable behavioural intentions (Othman, et al., 2013; Pratminingsih, Rudatin & Rimenta, 2014; Ren, et al., 2016; Wu, Li & Li, 2016), such as returning to the organisation or disseminating positive information about the organisation to family and friends (Othman et al., 2013; Wu, 2015) and it could impact on the long term success and growth of the organisation. Conversely, dissatisfaction creates a negative influence on customer intentions (Kitapci, Akdogan & Dortyol, 2014). Customer satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions are critical success factors for guesthouses and it is therefore hypothesised that:

H5: Experience quality positively influences customer satisfaction.

H6: Customer satisfaction positively influences behavioural intentions.

Based on the forgoing discussions, the following conceptual framework (see Figure 1) is proposed.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Research method

Questionnaire design

The current study formed part of a larger study on the guesthouse experience in Ghana. A self-administered survey questionnaire was used to collect the needed data. The questionnaire sections of this study comprised the cover page that highlighted the rationale of the research and assured respondents of their anonymity; and 16 items developed to measure respondents' perceptions of experience quality provided by the guesthouse, two items that measured satisfaction, and two items that measured behavioural intentions. A final section aimed at establishing a profile of the sample. Five-point Likert scale type questions with endpoints ranging from 'strongly disagree (1)', to 'strongly agree (5)' were utilised as is popular in many studies investigating experience quality, and customer satisfaction (e.g. Loureiro, et al., 2013; Manhas & Tukamushaba, 2015). A high overall score indicated a positive attitude

whereas a low overall score denoted a negative attitude. An initial pool of 30 items was generated to describe the four proposed dimensions of experience quality. Most of these items were sourced from the work of Otto and Ritchie, (1996), and Chen and Chen, (2010), while the remainder originated from the researchers. These items were scrutinized for relevance by a panel of subject experts from a university and a Polytechnic in Ghana, and four guesthouse managers in Ghana and subsequently reduced to 21 items. The remaining items were evaluated for content and face validity by two subject experts from a South African university, further reducing the items to 16. Customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions were measured by using two items each, adapted from studies by Hosany and Witham (2010) and Wu and Liang (2009).

Data collection and analysis

Four cities in Ghana (Accra, Cape Coast, Kumasi, and Koforidua) served as the focus sites for the study. These cities were chosen because they are populous in terms of tourists' arrivals and number of guesthouses. Using stratified sampling, 51 guesthouses were selected for the study, representing 13.5% of the total number of guesthouses within the study area. This include 24 guesthouses in Accra, 15 from Kumasi, seven from Cape Coast, and five from Koforidua. A total of 541 respondents completed the questionnaires during their stay in these various guesthouses. Statistica version 12 was used to perform the data analysis. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), a popularly used method (e.g. Chang & Horng, 2010; Mohsin & Lengler, 2015; Ren, et al., 2016), was applied in an attempt to identify the underlying dimensions in guests' perceptions of experience quality. Principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation was adopted as the basis of factor extraction and only items with a minimum loading of 0.300 were retained. Four factors resulted from the EFA (see Table 2). These factors were commensurate with the anticipated factors and were termed Peace of mind, Recognition, Hedonics, and Involvement. These four factors explained 71.3% of the total variance (17.2%, 19.4%, 17.4% and 17.4% respectively), meeting the recommended threshold in social sciences that a factor solution accounting for 60% or more of the total variance is satisfactory (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). Consequently, a four factor framework was regarded acceptable for this study.

Table 2: Exploratory factor analysis results

| Factor | Item | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 | Factor 4 |
|--------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1 | A6 | .808 | .248 | .167 | .256 |
| | A7 | .786 | .205 | .215 | .267 |
| | A5 | .698 | .267 | .285 | .163 |
| | A8 | .455 | .112 | .423 | .449 |
| 2 | A15 | .230 | .833 | .136 | .229 |
| | A16 | .161 | .791 | .198 | .222 |
| | A14 | .350 | .655 | .299 | .272 |
| | A13 | .225 | .634 | .386 | .310 |
| 3 | A1 | .207 | .142 | .751 | .175 |
| | A4 | .186 | .358 | .694 | .221 |
| | A2 | .365 | .267 | .679 | .265 |
| | A3 | .225 | .289 | .621 | .407 |
| 4 | A11 | .269 | .292 | .202 | .759 |
| | A10 | .284 | .253 | .255 | .751 |
| | A9 | .226 | .343 | .242 | .686 |
| | A12 | .255 | .440 | .305 | .467 |
| | Explained Variance | 2.75 | 3.10 | 2.78 | 2.78 |
| | % of Total Variance | 17.2% | 19.4% | 17.4% | 17.4% |

The internal consistency of the four factors was examined in the next step. The results are displayed in Table 3 which shows that the resulting Cronbach's coefficient alphas were in the excellent range of above 0.80, thus exceeding the generally acceptable lower limit of 0.70 (Hair, et al., 2010). The respective Cronbach's alphas coefficients for items measuring satisfaction and behavioural intentions were 0.87 and 0.90. These coefficients suggest that the scale was internally reliable.

Table 3: Internal consistency of the scale items

| Dimensions | Cronbach's alpha |
|------------------------|------------------|
| Peace of mind | 0.84 |
| Recognition | 0.88 |
| Hedonics | 0.84 |
| Involvement | 0.86 |
| Experience quality | 0.90 |
| Satisfaction | 0.87 |
| Behavioural intentions | 0.90 |

Findings

Profile of respondents

Table 4 reports the profile of respondents. The results showed that 58.0% of the respondents were males; 50.8% were between the ages of 18-30 years, followed by 24.0% being 31-40 years old and 20.7% between 41-50 years; 94.1% of the respondents were from Ghana, and 47.1% held a tertiary qualification. It has to be mentioned that guesthouses rather than hotels are popularly frequented by younger visitors in Ghana.

Table 4: Profile of respondents

| | | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Gender | Male | 314 | 58.0 |
| | Female | 227 | 42.0 |
| Total | | 541 | 100.0 |
| Age | 18-30 | 275 | 50.8 |
| | 31-40 | 130 | 24.0 |
| | 41-50 | 112 | 20.7 |
| | 51-60 | 22 | 4.1 |
| | 61 and older | 2 | 0.4 |
| Total | | 541 | 100.0 |
| Country | Ghana | 509 | 94.1 |
| | USA | 8 | 1.5 |
| | UK | 4 | 0.7 |
| | Nigeria | 14 | 2.6 |
| | Togo | 4 | 0.7 |
| | Poland | 1 | 0.2 |
| | Senegal | 1 | 0.2 |
| Total | | 541 | 100.0 |
| Education | Less than high school | 25 | 4.6 |
| | High school | 220 | 40.7 |
| | Diploma/degree | 255 | 47.1 |
| | Post-graduate qualification | 41 | 7.6 |
| Total | | 541 | 100.0 |

Descriptive statistics for experience quality dimensions, satisfaction and behavioural intentions

Table 5 summarises the descriptive results associated with the various experience quality dimensions, satisfaction and behavioural intentions. An inspection of Table 5 indicates that the mean scores for the items of the experience quality dimensions ranged from 3.27 to 3.81. The highest mean scores (Items 5, 6, 7 and 8) all related to Peace of mind. The standard deviation values for the items varied from 0.89 to 1.11. Items 9 and 12, measuring Involvement, had the highest deviation values (SD=1.11). The percentage distributions in Table 5 show that most of the respondents were fairly positive about experience quality provided by the guesthouses, with less than 10% of the respondents who strongly disagreed with any of the statements. Overall, the respondents reported positive satisfaction scores and positive behavioural intentions. The relevant mean scores ranged from 3.67 to 3.84 and the standard deviations from 1.00 to 1.06. This suggests that the respondents were generally satisfied with the guesthouse experience, and had an intention to return and engage in positive communication about the guesthouse.

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Table 5: Descriptive statistics for the dimensions of experience quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions

| Items | Strongly disagree | | Disagree | | Neutral | | Agree | | Strongly agree | | Mean | SD |
|--|-------------------|-----|----------|------|---------|------|-------|------|----------------|------|------|------|
| | n | % | N | % | N | % | n | % | n | % | | |
| EXPERIENCE QUALITY | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Hedonics | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A1. Staying at this guesthouse was something I really liked to do | 23 | 4.3 | 102 | 18.9 | 119 | 22.0 | 216 | 39.9 | 81 | 14.9 | 3.43 | 1.09 |
| A2. Staying at this guesthouse was something I will remember | 11 | 2.0 | 70 | 12.9 | 145 | 26.8 | 239 | 44.2 | 76 | 14.0 | 3.55 | 0.95 |
| A3. Staying at this guesthouse was a "once-in-a lifetime" experience | 32 | 5.9 | 61 | 11.3 | 142 | 26.2 | 217 | 40.1 | 89 | 16.5 | 3.50 | 1.08 |
| A4. Staying at this guesthouse was a thrilling experience | 16 | 3.0 | 70 | 13.0 | 139 | 25.7 | 221 | 40.9 | 94 | 17.4 | 3.57 | 1.02 |
| Peace of mind | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A5. I felt physically comfortable in this guesthouse | 3 | 0.6 | 51 | 9.4 | 114 | 21.1 | 265 | 49.0 | 108 | 20.0 | 3.78 | 0.89 |
| A6. I felt that my property was safe when left in this guesthouse | 3 | 0.6 | 57 | 10.5 | 136 | 25.1 | 215 | 39.7 | 130 | 24.0 | 3.76 | 0.95 |
| A7. I felt a sense of personal security staying at this guesthouse | 8 | 1.5 | 52 | 9.6 | 123 | 22.7 | 214 | 39.6 | 144 | 26.6 | 3.80 | 0.99 |
| A8. I felt that my privacy was respected while staying at this guesthouse | 19 | 3.5 | 47 | 8.7 | 108 | 20.0 | 211 | 39.0 | 156 | 28.8 | 3.81 | 1.06 |
| Involvement | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A9. I actively participated in what this guesthouse had to offer | 23 | 4.3 | 85 | 15.8 | 135 | 25.0 | 185 | 34.3 | 111 | 20.6 | 3.51 | 1.11 |
| A10. I had a choice in deciding which services I wanted to use while staying at this guesthouse | 22 | 4.1 | 56 | 10.4 | 149 | 27.5 | 222 | 41.0 | 92 | 17.0 | 3.57 | 1.02 |
| A11. I was informed about everything I had to know concerning this guest house's services, activities on offer, and the like | 20 | 3.7 | 68 | 12.6 | 157 | 29.0 | 207 | 38.3 | 89 | 16.5 | 3.51 | 1.03 |
| A12. I learnt new things while staying at this guesthouse | 36 | 6.7 | 78 | 14.4 | 162 | 30.0 | 183 | 33.9 | 81 | 15.0 | 3.36 | 1.11 |
| Recognition | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A13. My stay at this guesthouse made me feel socially accepted | 22 | 4.1 | 69 | 12.8 | 154 | 28.5 | 199 | 36.8 | 97 | 17.9 | 3.52 | 1.05 |
| A14. My stay at this guesthouse made me feel important | 29 | 5.4 | 67 | 12.4 | 150 | 27.8 | 201 | 37.3 | 92 | 17.1 | 3.48 | 1.08 |
| A15. My stay at this guesthouse improved how others see me | 29 | 5.4 | 86 | 15.9 | 180 | 33.3 | 175 | 32.3 | 71 | 13.1 | 3.32 | 1.06 |
| A16. My stay at this guesthouse made others respect me more | 25 | 4.6 | 91 | 16.8 | 195 | 36.0 | 174 | 32.2 | 56 | 10.4 | 3.27 | 1.01 |
| Satisfaction | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A49. Overall I am satisfied with this guesthouse | 11 | 2.0 | 48 | 8.9 | 108 | 20.0 | 223 | 41.2 | 151 | 27.9 | 3.84 | 1.00 |
| A50. Overall, my stay at this guesthouse was better than I expected | 18 | 3.3 | 65 | 12.0 | 122 | 22.6 | 211 | 39.0 | 125 | 23.1 | 3.67 | 1.06 |
| Behavioural intentions | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| A51. I will return to stay at this guesthouse again | 17 | 3.1 | 56 | 10.4 | 107 | 19.8 | 229 | 42.3 | 132 | 24.4 | 3.74 | 1.04 |
| A52. I will recommend this guesthouse to others | 17 | 3.1 | 53 | 9.8 | 97 | 17.9 | 212 | 39.2 | 162 | 29.9 | 3.83 | 1.06 |

Hypothesis testing and Structural Equation Modelling

The results of the hypothesis testing are summarised in Table 6. It is clear that all six hypotheses were supported ($\text{sig} < .0005$).

Table 6: Hypothesis testing

| Dependent | Path | Independent | Estimate | S.E | C.R. | P | Result |
|---------------|------|-----------------|----------|-------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| Hedonics | --> | Exp.Quality | 1.028 | 0.057 | 18.136 | <.0005 | Significant |
| Peace_of_Mind | --> | Exp.Quality | 1.010 | 0.066 | 15.232 | <.0005 | Significant |
| Involvement | --> | Exp.Quality | 1.077 | 0.069 | 15.534 | <.0005 | Significant |
| Recognition | --> | Exp.Quality | 1.109 | 0.064 | 17.269 | <.0005 | Significant |
| Exp. Quality | --> | Satisfaction | 1.184 | 0.068 | 17.303 | <.0005 | Significant |
| Satisfaction | --> | Beh. Intentions | 0.921 | 0.040 | 22.958 | <.0005 | Significant |

A structural equation model was constructed using the software programme IBM SPSS Amos Version 23 to test the conceptual model. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Hair, et al., 2010) was performed in preparation for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Table 7 presents the results of the CFA. All the items representing the four latent factors were retained. All the indicators ($\text{CFI}=.98$; $\text{AGFI}=.96$; $\text{RMSEA}=.017$; $\chi^2/\text{df}=1.16$) were better than the recommended goodness-of-fit criteria, except for NFI (0.90) which was slightly smaller than the target of 0.92 (Hair, et al., 2006; Schreiber, et al., 2006).

Table 7: Confirmatory Factory Analysis (CFA)

| Absolute/predictive Fit Statistics | Abbreviation | Target | Observed |
|---|---|-------------|----------|
| Chi-square (Max. likelihood) | p ($\chi^2=79.21$; $\text{d.f.}=68$) | $\geq .050$ | .166 |
| | χ^2/df | ≤ 3 | 1.16 |
| Comparative Fit Indices | | | |
| Bentler-Bonnet normed fit index | NFI | $\geq .92$ | .90 |
| Bentler comparative fit index | CFI | $\geq .92$ | .98 |
| Other | | | |
| Jöreskog adjusted GFI | AGFI | $\geq .95$ | .96 |
| Root mean square error of approximation | 95%Lo | | .000 |
| | RMSEA | $\leq .08$ | .017 |
| | 95%Hi | | .032 |

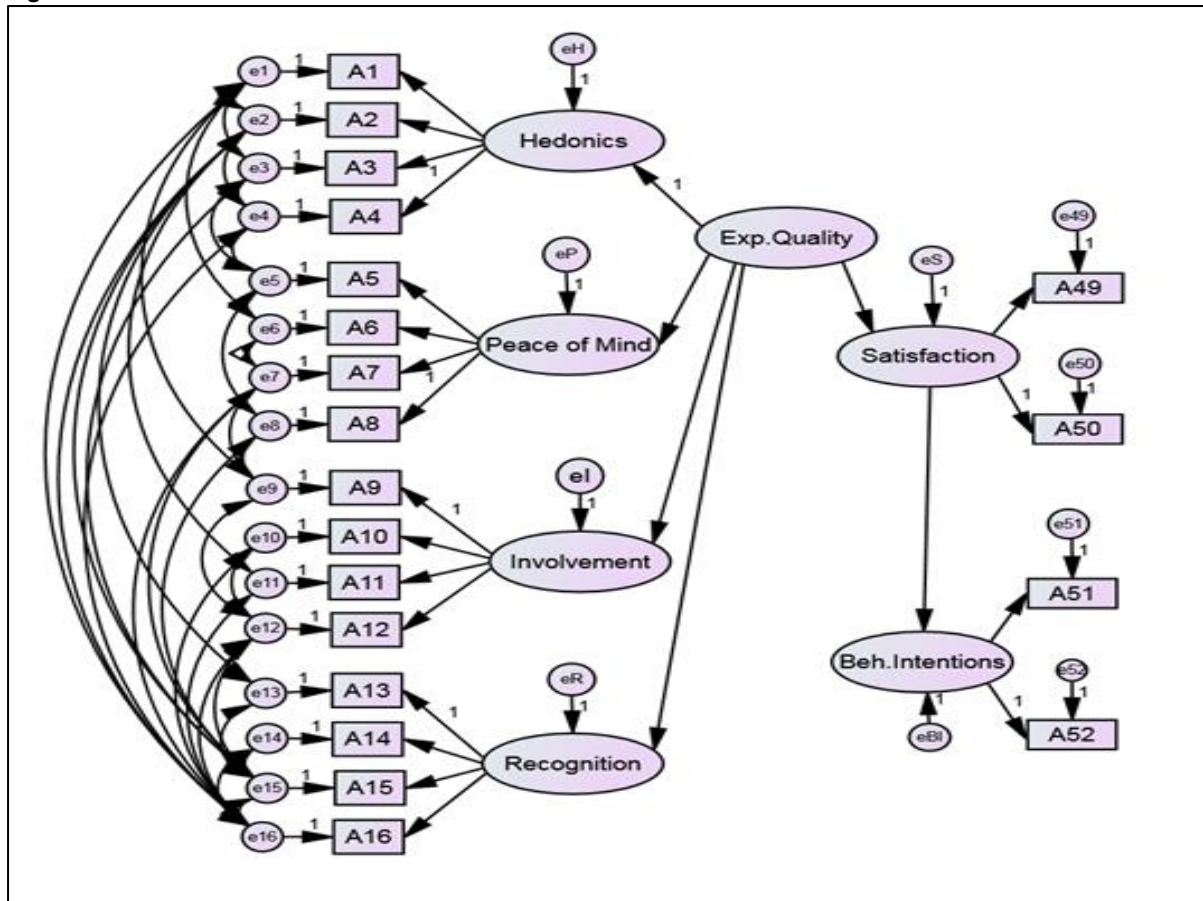
As shown in Table 8, the SEM results for the normed Chi-square (χ^2/df) is 1.56. Given that the normed Chi-square is less than the recommended threshold value of 3.0, it can be concluded that the data has a good fit within the model. The CFI was within the recommended level of 0.92 and therefore regarded as an indication of a good model fit. The AGFI exceeded the target value of 0.97. The RMSEA indicated a good fit for the model as it equaled 0.32, well within the recommended value of less than 0.08 (Hair, et al., 2010).

Table 8: Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) Fit Statistics

| Absolute/predictive fit | Abbreviation | Target | Observed |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Chi-square (Max. likelihood) | p ($\chi^2=202.66$; d.f.=130) | $\geq .050$ | $< .0005$ |
| | χ^2/df | ≤ 3 | 1.56 |
| Comparative Fit Indices | | | |
| Bentler-Bonnet normed fit index | NFI | $\geq .92$ | .81 |
| Bentler comparative fit index | CFI | $\geq .92$ | .92 |
| Other | | | |
| Jöreskog adjusted GFI | AGFI | $\geq .95$ | .97 |
| Root mean square error of approximation | 95%Lo | | .023 |
| | RMSEA | $\leq .08$ | .032 |
| | 95%Hi | | .041 |

Figure 2 displays the result associated with the structural model and indicates the path coefficient from and independent construct to its corresponding dependent construct as stated in the research hypotheses.

Figure 2: Structural Model



Conclusions, managerial implications and recommendations

The proliferation of guesthouses in Ghana adds an important dimension to accommodation alternatives meeting the demand of tourists. In order to be competitive, guesthouses should provide customers with high quality experiences that not only meet their functional needs, but provide social-psychological benefits. Furthermore, since past research (e.g. Chang & Horng, 2010; Chen & Chen, 2010; Cole & Scott, 2004; Kashif, et al., 2016; Otto & Ritchie, 1996) has shown that experience quality positively influences customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions, three objectives were set for the study, namely to examine the dimensions of experience quality associated with guesthouses in Ghana, determine guests' perceptions of experience quality, and finally to investigate the relationship between experience quality dimensions and experience quality, between experience quality and satisfaction, and between satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The overall aim was to provide guesthouse managers with a better understanding of guests' perceptions of delivered quality. Four dimensions were proposed to represent experience quality associated with guesthouses in Ghana, namely hedonics, peace of mind, involvement, and recognition. The empirical results confirmed that these dimensions of the study positively relate to overall experience quality. These results support earlier findings by Chen and Chen, (2010), Jin, et al., (2015), and Otto and Ritchie, (1996). Guesthouse managers in the study area in Ghana can therefore focus on these dimensions if they want to examine and evaluate the experience quality they are offering. These dimensions can also be used to positively impact competitive strategy, satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Overall, respondents' perceptions regarding these dimensions were favourable, suggesting that they were satisfied with the guesthouse experience.

The results further indicate that experience quality has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. This result is in line with previously conducted studies (e.g. Chang & Horng, 2010; Chen & Chen, 2010; Cole & Scott, 2004; Jin, et al., 2015; Kao, *et al.*, 2008; Kashif, et al., 2016; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). It was also found that customer satisfaction positively influences behavioural intentions. This lends support to the findings of authors such as Kashif, et al. (2016). Guesthouse managers are therefore advised to ensure that they provide the levels of safety and security (Peace of mind) desired by their guests and activities that adds to the feelings of fun and engage guests in what they really like to do (Hedonics). However, since a positive relationship with satisfaction was found for all four experience quality dimensions, it is important to pay attention to the remaining dimensions (Involvement and Recognition).

In summary, our research provided a number of important pointers. First, customers are no longer merely satisfied by high levels of service quality, but desire overall experiences of high quality. Second, although no consensus exists in terms of what the dimensions of experience quality are, experience quality is noted as an important competitive differentiation strategy. Third, experience quality associated with guesthouses in Ghana comprises hedonics, peace of mind, involvement, and recognition and are important as part of overall experience quality. This finding lends support to similar findings about the relationships in other, non-guesthouse contexts, such as those of Jin, et al., 2015; Otto & Ritchie, 1996 (hedonics); Chen & Chen, 2010; Kashif, et al., 2016; Otto & Ritchie, 1996 (peace of mind); Chen & Chen, 2010; Otto & Ritchie, 1996 (involvement), and (Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Wu & Li, 2014). Experience quality positively impacts customer (recognition). Our study thus positively identified four experience quality dimensions within a guesthouse context in Ghana. Similar dimensions were also found in other contexts.

Fourthly, our study confirmed a positive relationship between perceptions of experience quality and satisfaction, and between satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions. These findings support the general premise of a positive relationship between quality and satisfaction (Kashif, et al., 2016; Jin, et al., 2015; Lemke, *et al.* 2011) and satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Ren, et al., 2016). These relationships have been further supported by the structural equation model resulting from our study.

Finally a number of suggestions for implementation by guesthouse managers in Ghana can be made. Guesthouse managers are advised to pay attention to the said experience quality dimensions in managing their guests' experiences to maximize satisfaction and positive behavioural intentions. To raise the level of recognition, front line staff should be trained in serving customers in a professional manner such as given recognition and respect to every customer that visits the guesthouse. The guesthouse experience has to include activities that engage customers in having fun and encourage their participation in such activities such self-entertainment, self-catering, fun games and competitions. Peace of mind can be ensured through maximising security, safety and respondents privacy at the guesthouse. Finally, the study resulted in a measuring instrument that guesthouse managers can use to assess the perceptions of their guests on a regular basis.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study provides a number of important contributions to the theory and management, but also has a few limitations that lead to suggestions for future research. First, experience quality in this study was measured by four items. The researchers are optimistic that there may be other influential factors to determine guest perceptions of experience quality which might also affect satisfaction. It is therefore suggested that future research should attempt to identify and also investigate other potential experience quality dimensions that might enhance the growth and competitiveness of guesthouses. Secondly, there are many guesthouses in Ghana, but only 51 of the guesthouses were selected for the study. This limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research could be extended to other guesthouses and regions in order to obtain a more complete view of the situation in Ghana and expand on the experience quality model. Lastly, this study could also be performed in African countries other than Ghana to verify the existence and impact of the identified experience quality dimensions.

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