



Service Quality of the Gauteng Hotel Industry Supply Chain

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Abstract

The success of a hotel's food operation unit depends on customer satisfaction and repeat patronage. There is a high probability that customers will be satisfied with their dining experience if the service and product quality provided by an hotel food operation unit are of an exceptional quality. The provision of high-quality products and service is only possible if the inputs from suppliers the food operation unit relies on, are also of the highest possible quality. Research-based articles on the quality of service by suppliers of hotel food operation units in Gauteng province, South Africa, could not be sourced. The researcher was therefore of the opinion that it is important to fill this gap in the existing body of knowledge by conducting a study on the perceived service quality provided by suppliers as experienced by hotel food operation unit managers. The study followed a quantitative approach and non-probability sampling was applied to selected participants from the population of 1 428 hotel food operation unit managers. A pilot study was completed, after which 178 SERVPERF questionnaires were analysed for the study. The findings of the research indicate that the hotel food operation unit managers' perceived suppliers' service positively in all five SERVPERF service quality dimensions.

Keywords: Expectations, hotel industry, perceptions, service quality, SERVPERF, suppliers

Introduction

A hotel's food operation unit manager's primary strategic intent should be the success of the hotel's restaurant. According to Majid, Samsudin, Noorkhizan, Zaki and Bakar (2018:1434), proper product and service standards need to be developed for food operation units to ensure business success. A food operation unit's success depends on the successful consideration, implementation, and management of various quality aspects regarding service and tangibles (Hoe & Mansori, 2018:21). One can therefore extrapolate that researching and communicating findings on food operation unit managers' perceptions of suppliers' service quality can contribute to a better understanding of the hotel industry.

Delivering excellent service quality is a critical component to ensure a viable and positive business-to-business environment (Mehta & Durvasula, 1998:40). A positive business environment contributes to the growth of a business, which leads to an increase in revenue (Ghotbabadi, Feiz & Baharun, 2015:267). An increase in revenue normally ensures growth in profit, which results in a successful business (Ghotbabadi *et al.*, 2015:267).



The success of the hotel food operation unit depends on, among others, the service quality competitiveness of the organisation, as well as excellent relations between suppliers, hotel food operation unit managers, and customers (Madupalli, Pannirselvam & Williams, 2014:149; Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017:1; Kadlubek & Grabara, 2015:266). Suppliers' service quality is an important input in the production process in order to produce output to customers to maintain the competitiveness of a hotel food operation unit (Al-Tit, 2015:129). Politis, Giovanis and Binioris (2013:216) state that food suppliers play a significant role in hotel food operation units as they provide inputs (raw material) to the operation units to be transformed into outputs for the customers. Hotel food operation managers' perceptions of suppliers' service quality will also help the suppliers to better understand their need for consistent service quality delivery. Consistent high-quality service provision will help to strengthen the relationship between supplier and manager and will help to create competitive hotel food operation units (Jack & Powers, 2015:135).

Literature review

In 2018, the South African economy expanded by 1.4%, partially as a result of the 3% growth in the tourism industry (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2019:2). The South African tourism industry generated R80.7 billion in 2017, which included R16.6 billion raised by accommodation (Department of Tourism, 2018:15).

South Africa's business environment will become increasingly complex and challenging (Badenhorst-Weiss & Waugh, 2014:283). The country's business environment is still under pressure because of widespread inequality, crime, and unemployment (Cheteni, Mah & Yohane, 2018:1). For the South African economy to prosper and grow, it is essential that all sectors of the tourism industry function optimally (Government Communications, 2017:1). The hotel sector can contribute significantly towards the overall South African economy if the demand for accommodation and services meets the supply (Stats SA, 2018:5). The required demand will be created only when customers' service quality expectations are met (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1985:42). If customers' service quality needs are met, they are likely to display destination identification, perform positive word-of-mouth promotion, and will be interested in revisiting the destination (Baba & Majeed, 2018:62). However, in order for the hotel sector to meet the service quality expectations of customers, hotels need high-quality service from their suppliers (Gouws & Motala, 2019:3). Politis *et al.* (2013:216) state that food suppliers provide inputs (raw material) to the operation units, to be transformed into outputs for the customers.

In an endeavour to provide excellent service and products to customers who dine at hotels, the hotels' suppliers are a vital link in the quality chain (Buyukkeklik, Ozoglu & Kemer, 2014:660). Suppliers' service quality management is one of the responsibilities of the food operation unit manager. Supplier service quality management aspects that require the attention of the manager are setting and communicating specifications, controlling service and product quality, and building a positive relationship (Ismail, Rose, Tudin & Dawi, 2017:127). The relationship theory dictates that food operation unit managers must foster, nurture, and maintain enduring relationships with suppliers not only to ensure that quality standards are maintained, but also to achieve and maintain a competitive advantage, customer satisfaction, and loyalty (Allaudin, Ahsan, Mowla, Islam & Hossain, 2019:29). Tyagi, Varma and Vidyarthi (2013:34) highlight the three types of service quality expected from suppliers, namely intangible service, perishable service quality, and tangible service quality. It is essential that food operation unit managers communicate their requirements regarding service quality to suppliers (Lee, Lee & Dewald, 2016:21; Fernandes & Neves, 2014:1). Regular, clear communication with suppliers will enable the food operation unit manager to be knowledgeable on developments, availability, new products, and changes in prices (Yan & Dooley, 2014:59). Well-planned and -executed communication with suppliers will also eradicate service quality variations (Ghotbabadi *et al.*, 2015:268).



While interacting with suppliers, food operation unit managers form perceptions of supplier service quality (Markovic & Raspor, 2010:196). These perceptions are the result of comparing the communicated expectations with the actual experience during interaction with the supplier (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017:3). By far, most of the interactions between the food operation manager and the supplier take place during the delivery of products to the food operation unit of a hotel (Mmutle & Shonhe, 2017:4). If the service quality expectations of the food operation unit are not met during this interaction, the manager will experience the shortcomings as service quality problems. A supplier needs to minimise these shortcomings to ensure good relationship with the customers (Johann & Anastassova, 2014:99). To minimise service quality lapses, suppliers must focus on the service quality that is valuable to hotels' food operation unit managers and cater to what the hotel food operation unit managers require (Sapukotanage, Warnakulasuriya & Yapa, 2016:72).

According to Alhkami and Alarussi (2016:18), the service quality of suppliers is perceived by the hotel food operation unit managers based on the visible behaviour, commitment, and accessibility of the supplier. Service quality dimensions on which perceptions of service quality are based are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Service quality dimensions

Dimensions	Description
1. Tangibles	Explain the visibility of suppliers' physical delivery equipment, delivery documents, and employees' appearance.
2. Reliability	Refers to suppliers meeting their promised and agreed delivery time and consistently delivering high-quality products.
3. Responsiveness	Refers to suppliers' willingness to help and support hotel food operation unit managers at any requested time, service quality communication, and responding promptly.
4. Assurance	Mentions the respect, safety, and trust of the suppliers regarding hotel food operation unit managers during service quality interaction.
5. Empathy	Demonstrates suppliers' service quality attention, understanding, and best interest at heart they offer hotel food operation unit managers during interactions.

Source: Parasuraman *et al.* (1985:47)

In this study, the abovementioned dimensions were used as they are contained in the SERVPERF measuring instrument; however, the questions in the measuring instrument were adapted to suit this study.

Research methodology

Rauch, Collins, Nale and Barr (2015:88) state that continuous research on service quality is important as needs and perceptions are dynamic and change constantly. Crick and Spencer (2011:472) encourage service quality researchers to investigate the service quality of all the stakeholders involved in the hospitality industry. This study will add to the available information on this dynamic industry by collecting perception data of stakeholders who are frequently overlooked in the quest for excellent quality in the hotel industry.

A descriptive study is a research design used to describe the population that is being investigated (Fourie, 2015:78). A descriptive study design approach was implemented to determine the service quality perceptions that food operation unit managers have of the service provided by their suppliers. The choice of a descriptive design for this study was made firstly based on the researcher's aim to determine perceived service quality; and secondly, the researcher found that a descriptive design was used by Gray (2014:136) in the study titled "Measure and assess the relationship between service quality variables in previous studies". Modise (2018:68) also used a descriptive design in her study on service quality.

Research approach

A quantitative research approach allows for the collection of data in numeral format which are counted, recorded, and used, and statistical procedures can be applied to them (Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009:104). A quantitative study approach was used in this study. This decision is supported in the study by Msosa (2015:56) that also used a quantitative approach to produce relevant data.

Population

“Population” is a term that refers to a community from which a sample can be drawn for a research study (Gray, 2014:146; Maziriri, 2016:70). The managers of food operation units at hotels in Gauteng formed the population for this study.

According to Traveloka.com (2019), there are 1 428 hotels in Gauteng. Figure 1 is a schematic representation of the metropolitan areas in Gauteng where the population is located. It was assumed that every hotel would have at least one food operation unit manager.

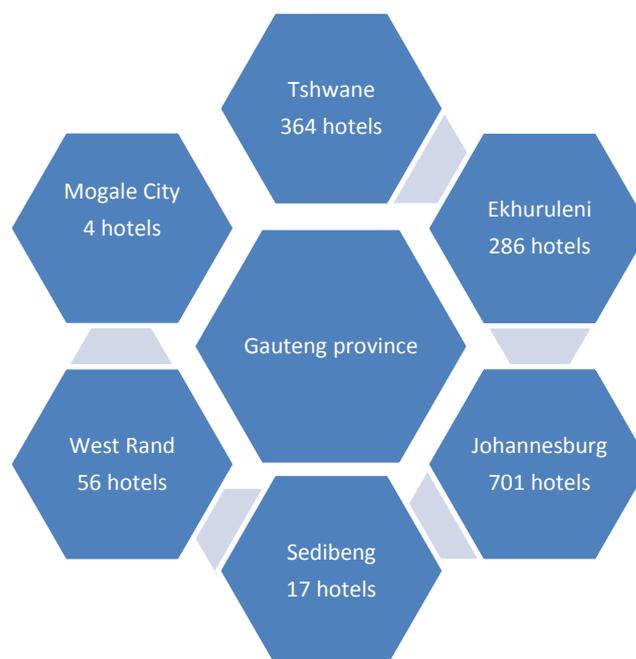


Figure 1. Hotels in the Gauteng province

Source: Gauteng Province (2016:4)

Of the 1 428 hotels, 49% or nearly half are located in Johannesburg. The population for this study is therefore the 1 428 food operation unit managers employed at hotels in Gauteng.

Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting individuals from the population who will participate in the study and who will provide the data (Maziriri, 2016:70).

The researcher applied a non-probability convenience technique sampling where not all members of the population had the same chance of being sampled (Kumar, 2011:199). Convenience sampling was the most appropriate for this study as it is less costly and easy to perform (Gray, 2014:224).

Data collection

Data were collected from 178 participants using an adapted SERVPERF questionnaire (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). The adaptations were necessary to align the questions to the subject



on which data were collected, namely the perceptions of the quality of suppliers of food operation units at hotels (Atici, Kansa, Lev-Tov & Kansa, 2013:665).

The researcher distributed 220 questionnaires to voluntary participants in hotels in Gauteng. Twenty respondents did not participate even after reminders were sent, and 22 questionnaires had to be excluded because they were incomplete, resulting in 178 being included in the data-analysis process, even though 37 of these had items with no responses to some of the items. Pampaka, Hutcheson and Williams (2016:21) state that it is “common practice to ignore missing data”. In this paper where perceptions are reported in percentage format, the missing data did not influence the findings as the percentage for each aspect of the quality dimensions was computed by using the total responses for specific aspects.

Data-collection tool

The researcher made appointments with the food operation unit managers to personally request their participation, as well as to ensure the completion of the SERVPERF questionnaire while he was present to attempt to ensure a high return and completion rate. The use of a questionnaire was beneficial to allow for accurate data collection as the managers had time to read, interpret, and answer the questions properly during the hour-long meetings that were scheduled (Naqavi, Refaiee, Baneshi & Nakhaee, 2014:87). The adapted SERVPERF questionnaire collected data on five SERVPERF dimensions, namely (1) tangibles; (2) reliability; (3) responsiveness, (4) assurance; and (5) empathy.

The adapted SERVPERF questionnaire was used to determine hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of suppliers' service quality. The questionnaire used a seven-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Objectives

The main objective of this study was to determine hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of the service quality of their suppliers. This main objective was reached via the following sub-objectives:

- To determine hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of suppliers' tangibles (appearance of equipment and personnel);
- To establish hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of suppliers' reliability (ability to perform the promised service accurately);
- To determine hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of suppliers' responsiveness (willingness to help food operation managers and to provide better service);
- To identify hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of the suppliers' assurance (combination of competence, courtesy, credibility, and security); and
- To ascertain hotel food operation unit managers' perceptions of the suppliers' empathy (combination of access to and communication and understanding with the food operation manager).

Results and discussion

The first section of the questionnaire consisted of questions designed to collect demographic information to allow the researcher to understand who participated in the study (Fourie, 2015:89). The statistics on demographics were as follows: (1) the first question was on gender. The respondents comprised 54.49% males and 45.51% females. (2) As far as age is concerned, 59.88% of the respondents were between 21 and 30 years of age and 39.53% were from the age group 31 to 55. Only 0.58% of the respondents were 51+ years of age. (3) The highest qualification section revealed that most (48.31%) food operation unit managers



had a diploma as their highest qualification. (4) Most (67.8%) of the respondents worked at large hotels (100+ rooms).

The second section of the questionnaire was dedicated to questions for the collection of data on the perceptions of the five dimensions of service quality. The first dimension on which participants provided their perceptions was tangibles (see Figure 2). On the aspect that covers whether the delivery documents are correct, 84.75% in total chose the options “somewhat agree”, “agree”, or “strongly agree”, and only 2.26% selected the options “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, or “somewhat disagree”. The second highest combined percentage (82.75%) for “somewhat agree”, “agree”, or “strongly agree” was for the aspect “Delivery equipment maintained”. This aspect was followed by the following aspects in order from highest to lowest for “somewhat agree”, “agree”, or “strongly agree”: “Delivery equipment is clean” (77.4%); “Delivery equipment is appealing” (74.43%); “Modern delivery equipment” (74.01%); and “Employees are neat” (72.32%).

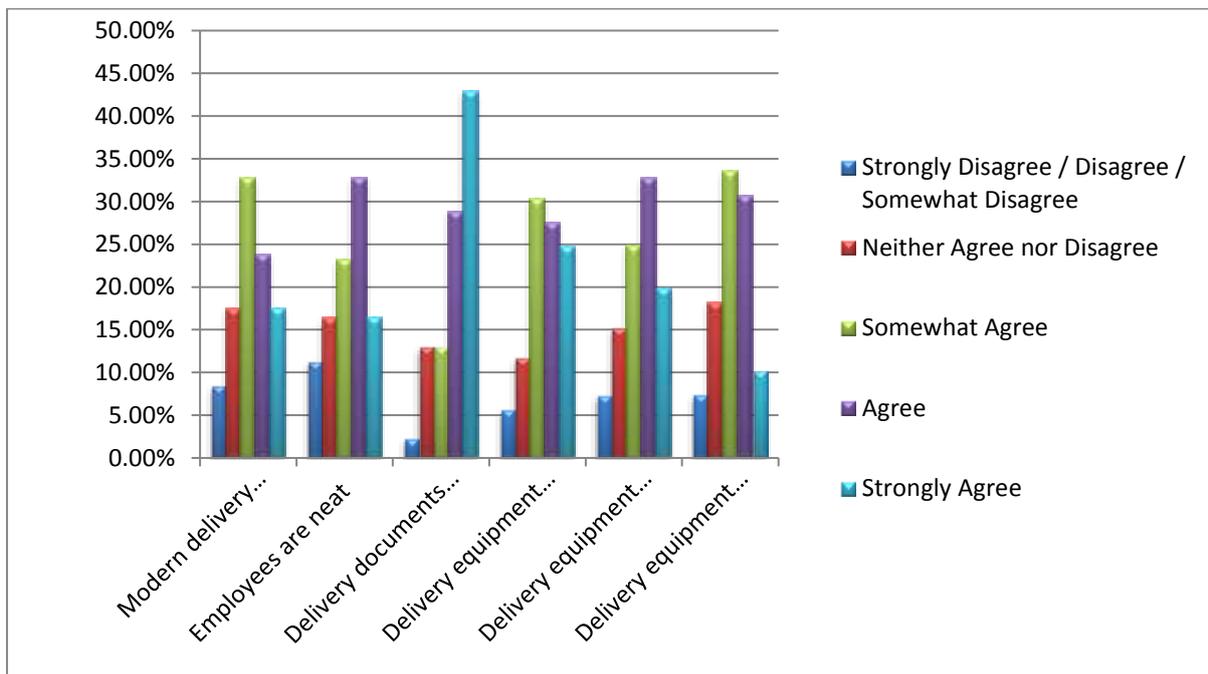


Figure 2. Tangibles

The respondents’ “strongly agree” perceptions were the highest for “Delivery documents correct” at 42.94%. The highest “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, and “somewhat disagree” were for the aspect “Employees are neat”, at 11.3%.

The second quality dimension in terms of which the respondents’ perceptions were measured was reliability (see Figure 3). The highest combined score for “somewhat agree”, “agree”, and “strongly agree” was 85.39% for the aspect “Delivers high-quality products”. The second highest combined “agree” score was for the aspect “Products according to specifications” at 84.75%. The highest combined “disagree” score was for the aspect “Delivers on time”, which received 15.91% of the responses.

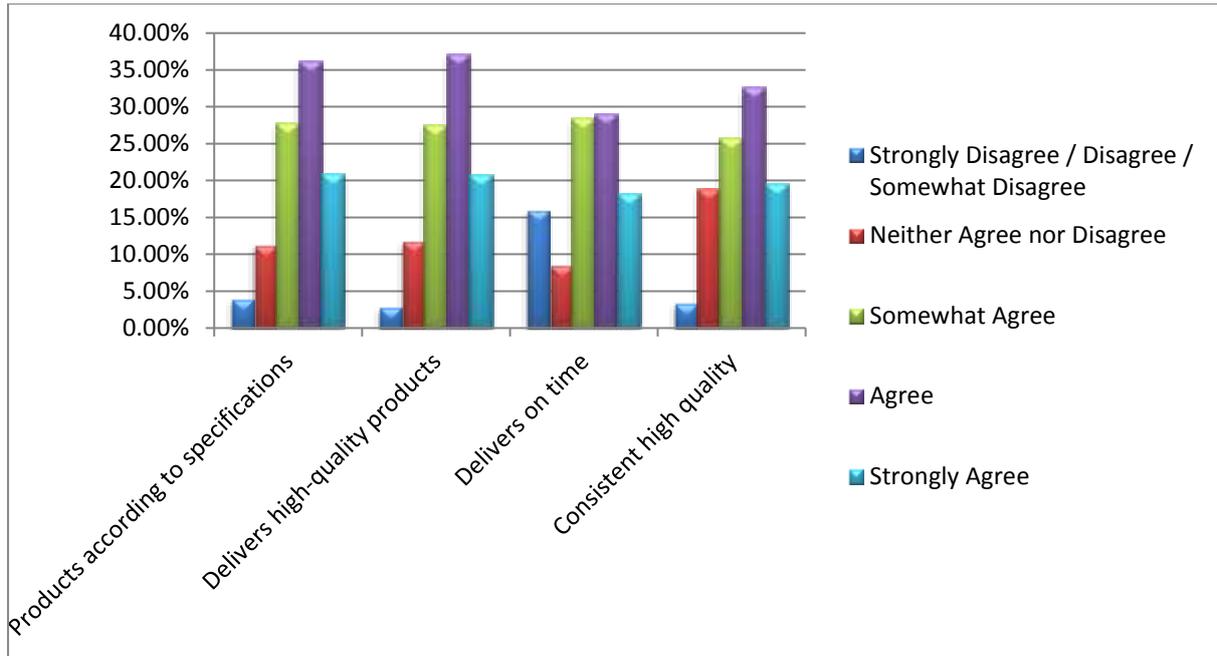


Figure 3. Reliability

The third dimension on which perceptions were tested was responsiveness (see Figure 4). The hotel food operation unit managers had highly positive perceptions regarding this dimension. The combined percentage responses for “somewhat agree”, “agree”, or “strongly agree” were 84.66% for “Supplier helps when I run out of stock”; 78.53% for “Supplier responds promptly to requests”; 76.27% for “Supplier accommodates urgent orders”; 74.01% for “Supplier informs on delivery time”; and 71.35% for “Supplier provides support”.

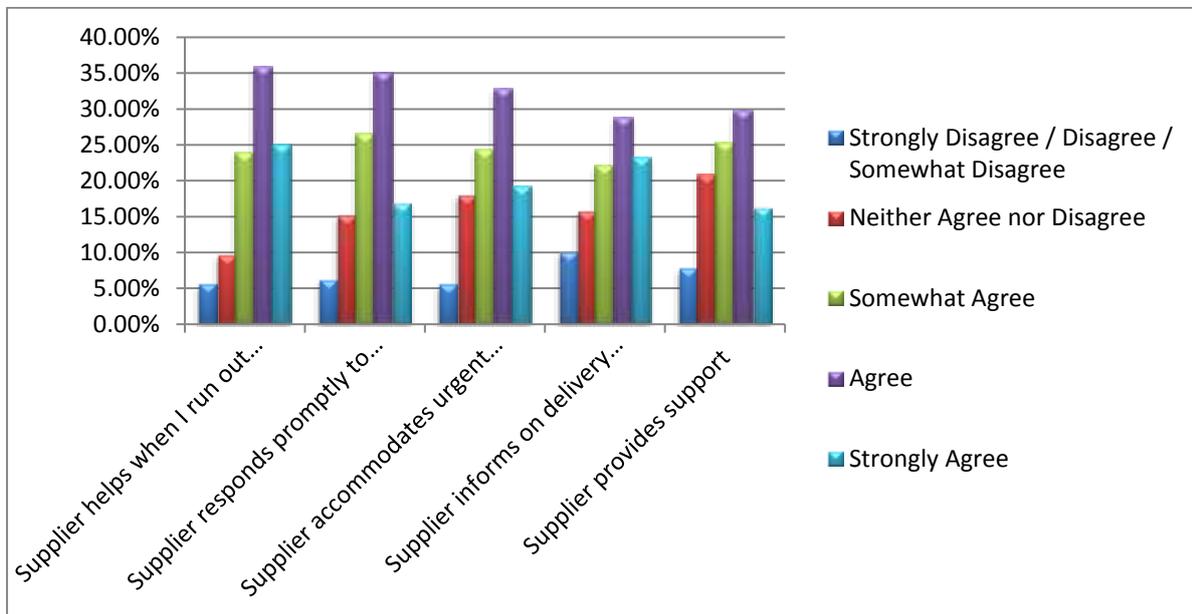


Figure 4. Responsiveness

The highest combined “disagree” response was for “Supplier informs on delivery time” (10.17%). The lowest combined “disagree” percentage was for the aspect “Supplier accommodates urgent orders” (5.65%). On the aspect for “Supplier provides support”, 20.79% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

The fourth quality dimension that was tested was assurance (see Figure 5). For this aspect, the highest “strongly agree” percentage was for the aspect “Supplier acts respectfully” (25.28%). This aspect also had the highest combined “somewhat agree”, “agree”, and “strongly agree” score of 87.64%. In descending order, the remaining assurance aspects were scored as follows: “Comfortable doing financial transactions” (82.08%), “Trust the supplier to deliver on time” (79.66%), and last “Supplier supports food operation unit manager” (75.28%). The highest combined “disagree” score was for “Supplier supports food operation unit manager” at 7.3%.

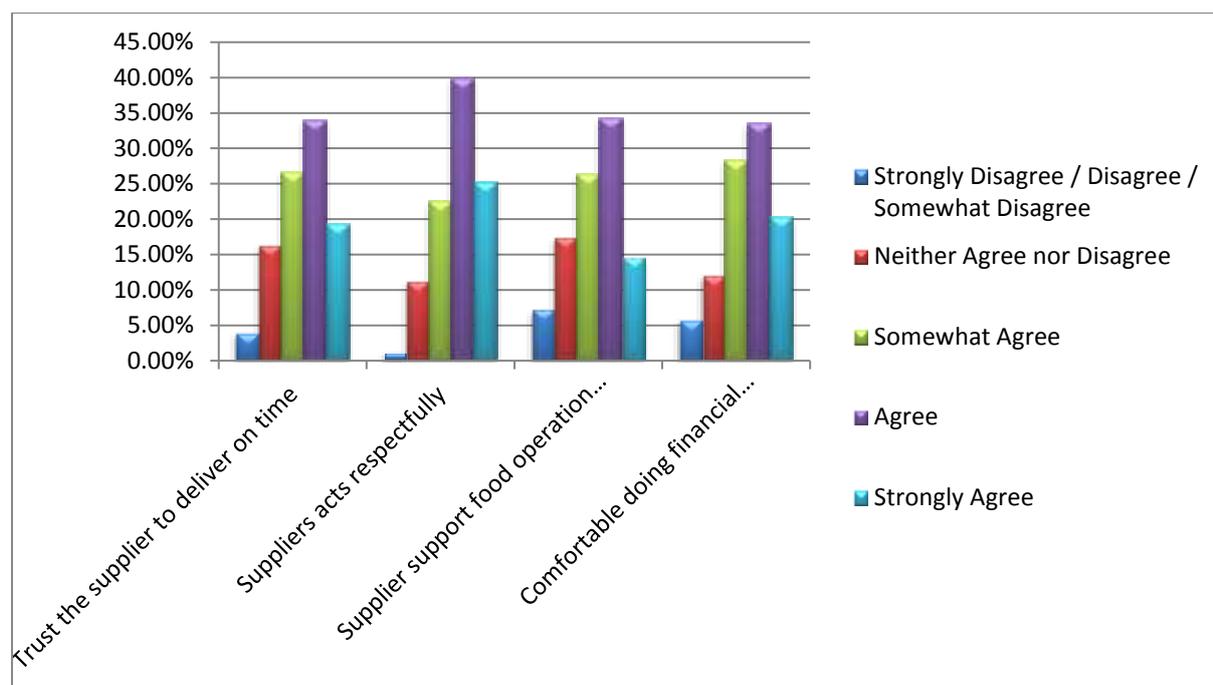


Figure 5. Assurance

The second highest combined “disagree” score was for the aspect “Comfortable doing financial transactions”.

The last dimension that was tested was empathy (see Figure 6). The respondents perceived that suppliers displayed empathy in their interactions with them. The combined “somewhat agree”, “agree”, and “strongly agree” options were selected by 85.31% of respondents for the aspect “Supplier understands my unique requirements”, 84.83% for the aspect “Supplier offers special-quality products on request”, 82.39% for “Supplier has my best interest at heart”, and 78.65% for the aspect “I get special attention”.

The highest combined “disagree” percentage was for the aspect “I get special attention” (8.99%). The other three aspects of this service quality dimension all received a combined “disagree” response of 6%.

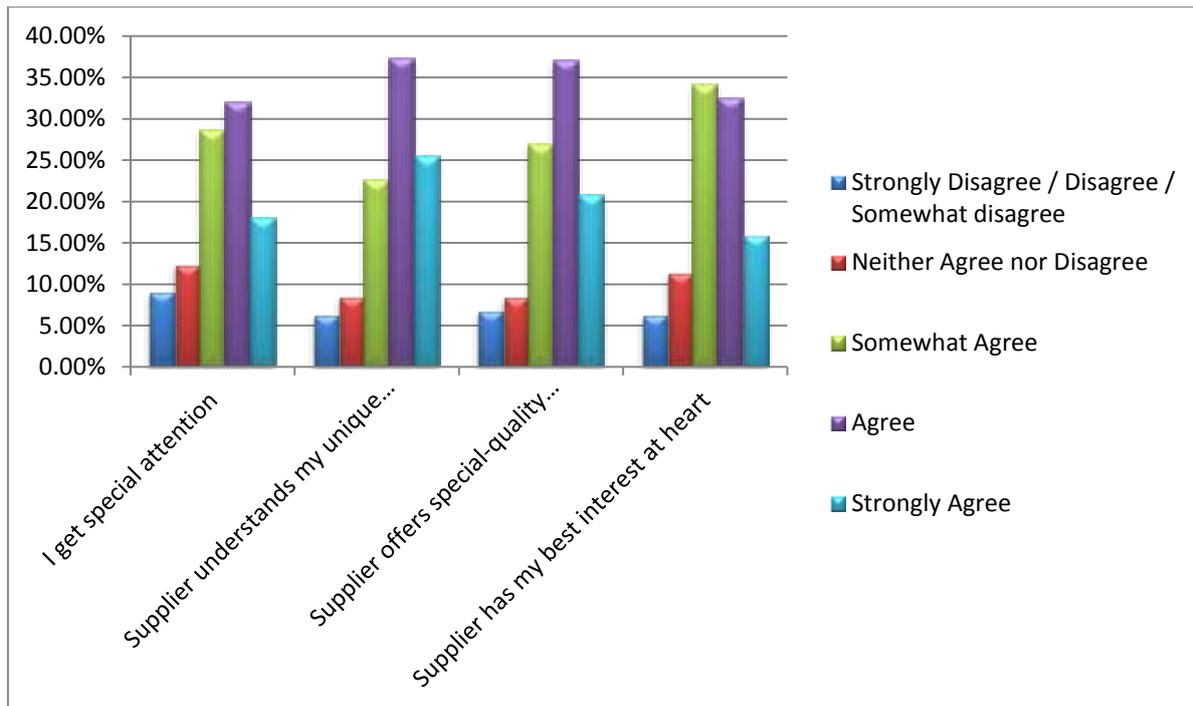


Figure 6. Empathy

The quality aspects where the “strongly agree”, “agree”, and “somewhat agree” options were selected by most participants were “Supplier acts respectfully” (87.64%), “Delivers high-quality products” (85.39%), and “Supplier understands my unique requirements” (85.31%).

Conclusions and recommendations

This study adds to the existing body of literature by explaining perceived service quality of food operation unit managers. The results of five SERVPERF service quality dimensions showed that the hotel food operation unit managers perceived service quality highly and their quality expectations corresponded significantly with the suppliers’ provided service quality. The findings therefore emphasise that the participants were happy and satisfied with the service offered by the suppliers. Suppliers should, however, take note of the aspects that received higher-than-average combined “disagree” scores and implement improvement strategies for those aspects. For future studies, the researcher recommends that the same study be conducted in other hotel departments (housekeeping, maintenance, front office, banqueting, and finance). It will help in comparing the suppliers’ service quality perceptions for the whole hotel.

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