



**Addis Ababa University College of Business and Economics
School of Commerce Department of Marketing Management
Post Graduate Program**

**A STUDY ON SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION WITH TRAVEL AGENCIES IN ETHIOPIA**

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**June, 2014
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



A STUDY ON SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH TRAVEL AGENCIES IN ETHIOPIA

A Thesis Submitted to Addis Ababa University College of Business and Economics School of Commerce in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Degree of Master of Arts in Marketing Management

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Temima Nassir Kemal**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research entitled “A Study on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction with Travel Agencies in Ethiopia” is my original work done under the guidance of my advisor Dr. Birhanu Denu. It has never been presented in Addis Ababa University or any other university for any purpose. All sources of the materials used for writing the research report are duly acknowledged.

Temima Nassir Kemal

Signature: _____

Date: _____

LETTER OF CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that Temima Nassir Kemal has carried out her thesis on the topic “A Study on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction with Travel Agencies in Ethiopia”. This work is original in nature and is suitable for submission for the award of Degree of Master of Arts in Marketing Management.

Birhanu Denu (PhD)
Thesis Advisor

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADD: Addis Ababa International Airport
ATAG: Air Transport Action Group
BSP: Bank Settlement Plan
CRS: Computer Reservation System
df : Degree of freedom
ETB: Ethiopian Birr
ET: Ethiopian Airlines
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
GDS: Global Distribution Systems
IATA: International Air Transport Association
VFR: Visit of Friends and Family

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ABSTRACT

The research was conducted to investigate the perceived service quality of travel agencies in Ethiopia and its implication on customer satisfaction from the perspective of customers who in this case are air travelers. The SERVQUAL model with five dimensions namely Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy was used with slight modification on the 22 service attributes to fit travel agency scenario. Data gathered from 207 usable questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. It was found out that travel agencies fell short of expectation in all the 22 attributes, hence in all the dimensions and overall perceived quality. The highest negative gap score was registered for Reliability dimension followed by Responsiveness. It was also discovered that there is no major difference in perceived service quality with a difference in purpose of trip or frequency of usage of travel agency. Overall satisfaction was also measured with a score ranging from 1 (highly dissatisfied) to 5 (highly satisfied) and the average result obtained was 3.62 showing that customers are slightly satisfied with the overall service despite the negative gap score in over all perceived quality. The linear regression analysis conducted by taking overall customer satisfaction as dependant variable and the five dimensions as independent variables, showed that perceived service quality explains 38.9% of the variation in customer satisfaction. The detailed analysis showed that only Reliability and Responsiveness dimensions are the important factors affecting customer satisfaction. Therefore, travel agencies need to improve their service quality by educating travel agents in the areas of customer handling, product knowledge, and good industry practice.

Key words: Travel agency, Service Quality, Customer satisfaction

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This is an introduction chapter that talks about the background of the research, the problem statement, research questions, objectives, significance, and scope of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Airlines transport over three billion passengers annually with revenue passenger kilometers (RPK) totaling nearly 5.5 trillion in 2012. 3.5% of global GDP is supported by aviation (IATA. Org, 2014). Aviation provides the only rapid worldwide transportation network, which makes it essential for global business and tourism. It plays a vital role in facilitating economic growth, particularly in developing countries. Air transport supports 6.9 million jobs and \$80.5 billion in GDP in Africa (ATAG, 2014).

Service quality is believed to be one of the most important success factors for the service industry. High service quality results in customer satisfaction which in turn gives a key competitive advantage to a service firm (Fick and Ritchie, 1991 cited in Avci and Karatepe, 2004). Hence, measuring and understanding the elements of service quality has been a focus of many scholars.

The airline industry is characterized by triadic relationships. The triad consists of the consumer of the air travel service, an intermediary, and the airline which is the service provider (Holma, 2004). Airlines use both direct and indirect distribution channels to sell their product. The direct channel includes opening of own sales outlets and reaching the customer directly through the internet. The indirect channel includes traditional travel

agencies or Travel Management Companies (TMCs) or consolidators, Tour operators and online travel agencies (OTAs).

Many argue that the role of traditional travel agents as intermediaries of travel services has diminished with the advent of the internet. The internet has had a tremendous impact on today's travel and tourism businesses due to the rapidly growing online market over the past several years (Ferreira, 2008). However, the traditional travel agencies still play a very significant role. They also have a fundamental role in the development of the tourist sector through the development of the transportation industry (Katircioglu, Smadi, Kilinc and Unlucan, 2012). According to IATA's 2013 annual review, traditional travel agencies which are also referred as mortar and brick travel agencies, account for 60 % ticket sales globally (IATA.org, 2014).

The airline industry is among the service sectors where a number of researchers have applied service quality related theories and methods. There is a growing emphasis given to researches related to quality and customer satisfaction in the airline industry because the delivery of high service quality is essential for airlines' survival and competitiveness (Park, Robertson and Wu, 2005)

Given the significance of travel agencies in the airline and travel industry, understanding the level of service quality by travel agencies is also important for overall development of the sector. There are a number of researches made in the service quality of travel agencies in other parts of the world. For example, Lam and Zhang (1999), assessed customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality in travel agencies in Hong Kong by using the SERVQUAL model and found out that customers' perception of service quality fell short of their expectations.

However, it is the belief of the writer that there is a literature gap in the area of service quality on travel agencies in Ethiopia. The aim of this paper is to investigate the perceived service quality of travel agencies in Ethiopia from the view point of air travelers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Oxford dictionary defines a travel agency as an agency that makes the necessary arrangements for travelers. Services provided by travel agencies include air ticket sale, hotel booking, rent a car, and tour packages. In Ethiopia there are travel agencies that are mainly engaged in air ticket sale, and there are some that are engaged in both tour and travel services. There are tour operators whose main task is only to provide package tours mostly to incoming tourists.

There are 12 international airlines operating in Ethiopia at the moment. Ethiopian Airlines (ET) is the national carrier where as the rest eleven namely Emirates (EK), Lufthansa (LH), Turkish Airline (TK), Kenyan Airways (KQ), Qatar Airways (QR), Saudia Airlines (SV), Yemenia (IY), Gulf Air (GF), Egypt Air (MS), Sudan Airways (SD), and Fly Dubai (FZ) are international airlines registered and operating in Ethiopia. Until recently, airlines used to pay commission to travel agencies. However, since 2012 most of the major operators including ET have withdrawn the commission payment and now the service fee concept is applied. Travel agencies charge a service fee per ticket.

As mentioned above, travel agencies take the lion's share of airline ticket sales and airlines spend a lot on promotional activities directed to this channel. However, discussions with sales managers of the different airlines operating in Ethiopia have revealed that, they are not confident about the service level of travel agencies in the country. This generalization emanates from the fact that most travel agents are still reliant on airline call centers and ticket offices in order to finish transactions in a complete manner.

From the travel agency perspective also, with the removal of commission by suppliers and the increase in the number of travel agencies in the past three years, the competition has gone intense. Hence, understanding customers' perception of quality and its implication on satisfaction will be beneficial for both suppliers and owners of travel agencies in order to be able to design appropriate marketing strategies.

This study aims at finding out the perceived service quality of travel agencies from the customer perspective. It will compare customers' perception of a travel agency service against their expectation. It will also see the impact of service quality dimensions on overall satisfaction. The resultant paper could be a good starting point for future researches.

1.3 Basic Research Questions

The research will try to answer the following questions:

- ◆ What level of service quality do customers of travel agencies expect?
- ◆ How do customers perceive the service of travel agencies?
- ◆ Is there a gap between the two? If so, is it positive or negative?
- ◆ Is there a difference in perceived service equality based on purpose of trip and experience?
- ◆ How does the perceived service quality affect overall satisfaction?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

General:

The main objective of the study is to establish the service quality of travel agents in Ethiopia as seen by air travelers.

Specific:

- ◆ To measure the gap between the expectation and perception of customers along the five dimensions
- ◆ To measure the overall perceived service quality of travel agencies in Ethiopia
- ◆ To assess if there is a variance in the gap score depending on the purpose of travel and frequency of travel
- ◆ To assess which dimension is more significant in determining overall customer satisfaction.

1.5 Significance of the Study

There are a number of researches made in service quality or customer satisfaction in relation to airlines both globally and in Ethiopia mainly from Ethiopian airlines context. There are also researches made in the tourism as a whole and tour operators. However, as far as the knowledge of the writer of this paper goes, there is no research made so far on service quality of travel agents in Ethiopia. Hence, it is the belief of the researcher that this paper could be used as a foundation for future researches and also for practical use by airlines and owners of travel agencies in formulating marketing strategies.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study will be conducted on travel agencies in Ethiopia. Even if selling of air travel and associated services is the core reason of their existence, travel agencies give other services like hotel reservation, car rental and other travel arrangements. The focus of this paper is air travelers departing from Addis Ababa who have purchased their tickets from travel agencies. Since only IATA travel agencies can issue ticket in their offices, the study has been conducted in reference to these agencies only.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Operational Definitions:

IATA Travel Agent: An agency that is certified by IATA and has the capability to issue airline ticket (IATA. Org, 2014)

Personal business/trade as a purpose of travel: Passengers travelling on their own cost to take care of personal business, like trading

Corporate Business: Passenger travelling at a company cost for company business

1.8 Organization of the paper

This paper is organized in five major parts. The first chapter is introduction that includes statement of the problem and objectives of the study, the second part is review of related literatures including the conceptual framework of the study, the third part is the description of the methods used to conduct the research, the fourth part is data analysis and interpretation, and the final fifth part is conclusions and recommendations. List of reference materials and questionnaire used for the study are attached at the end of the paper.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter summarizes different literatures that are related to Service quality, SETVQUAL model, and customer satisfaction. It talks about the intermediation role played by travel agencies. It also gives a short summary of literatures on service quality of travel agencies by other authors in other parts of the world.

2.1 Service

According to Kotler (2000), whether the production is tied with a tangible product or not, a service is any act or performance that one party offers to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Using simple terms, services are also defined as deeds, processes and performances (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

2.1.1 Characteristics of Service

Most literatures talk about four characteristics of services that differentiate them from that of physical goods. These unique characteristics have their implication on marketing strategy of services. Below are the descriptions as elaborated by Mudie and Pierrie(2006).

1. Intangibility

Unlike tangible goods, services cannot generally be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelled before being consumed.

2. Inseparability (or simultaneous production and consumption)

There is a marked distinction between physical goods and services in terms of the sequence of production and consumption: Whereas goods are first produced, then stored and finally sold and consumed, services are first sold, then produced and consumed simultaneously.

3. Variability (or heterogeneity)

An unavoidable consequence of simultaneous production and consumption is variability in performance of a service. The quality of the service may vary depending on who provides it, as well as when and how it is provided.

4. Perishability

Services cannot be stored for later sales or use. Hotel rooms not occupied, airline seats not purchased and college places not filled cannot be reclaimed.

2.2 Service Quality

Due to the characteristics inherent to services, it is difficult to define and judge service quality. Over the years service researchers have suggested that consumers judge the quality of services based on their perceptions of the technical output provided, the process by which that out come was delivered, and the quality of the physical surroundings where the service is delivered (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

Quality in general is the ability of a product to successfully conform to the purpose of the user during usage. Service quality is exceeding customer's expectation (Garvin, 1988). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) also suggest that Quality is a comparison between expectations and performance. Meeting or exceeding customers' expectation means good service quality. They have outlined three basic principles that underline the concept of service quality:

1. Service quality is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate than the quality of a good
2. Service quality perceptions result from a comparison of what the consumer expected prior to the service with the actual service performance
3. Service quality evaluations are based not only on the outcome of a service but also involve evaluations of the process of service delivery

2.3 Dimensions and Measurements of Service Quality

The quality dimension in manufacturing and other product-oriented businesses has existed since the industrial revolution in the 1890s where pioneers as Frederic Taylor and Henry Ford introduced quality production and standardization of design and output. However, the relevance of quality to the management of services or service-oriented businesses is a relatively modern phenomenon and the initiation of service quality is closely connected to the change of the services marketing paradigm (Beckford, 1998).

Different scholars have classified service dimensions in a number of ways. Service dimensions are criteria that customers use to evaluate service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Below listed are some of the classifications.

Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) mentioned five dimensions that are classified under two approaches with the first having three and the second having two dimensions.

The three dimensions in the first approach are:

1. Physical Quality

The dimension of quality originating in the physical elements of service (Covers both the quality of materials and facilities). It is broken down into two parts:

- a. Physical Product: Good/Goods consumed during the service production process

b. Physical Support: Framework which enables or facilitates the production of service

2. Interactive Quality

The dimension of quality originating in interaction between the customer and interactive elements of the service organization: Interactive Persons vs. Interaction equipment.

3. Corporate Quality

Dimension of quality that develops during the history of the service organization. Therefore a new company will not have any corporate quality because of its recency. It is concerned with how current and potential customers view the company.

The two dimensions in the second approach are:

1. Process Quality: Customers' personal and subjective judgment on their participation in the process. Based on how customers see the production process and how well they feel fitting into the process

2. Output Quality: Consumers evaluation regarding the results of a service production process .This approach deals with the intensity of customer participation

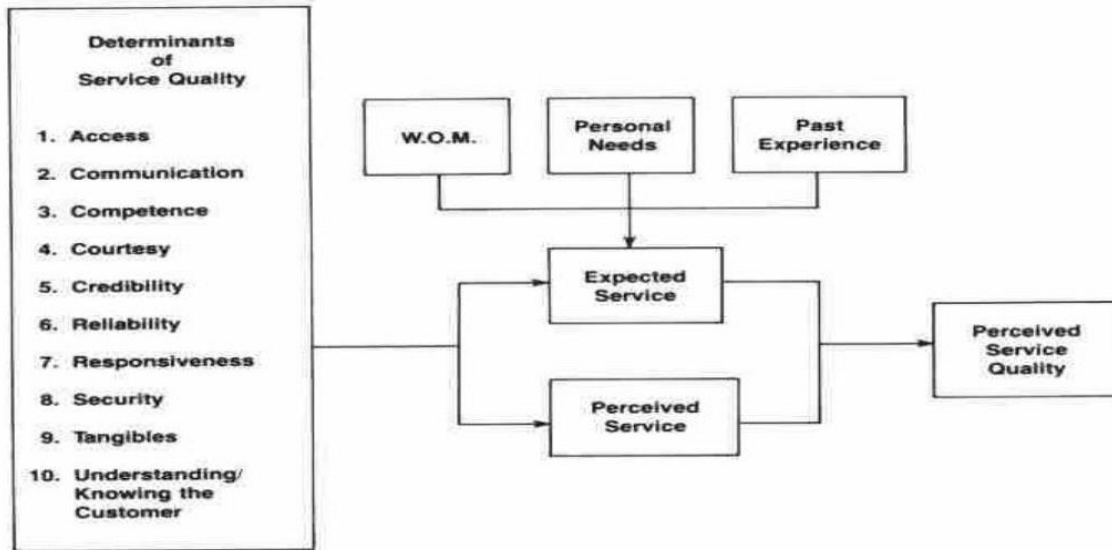
Gronroos (1990) on the other hand has identified two dimensions of service quality:

1. Technical quality: involves the tangible product of the service

2. Functional Quality: involves the manner in which the service is delivered.

The most popular classification of service dimension is the one which is given by Parasuraman et al. (1988). They identified 10 overlapping service components in 1985 and later in 1988 they merged them in to five service quality dimensions.

Figure 1: Determinants of perceived service quality



Source: Parasuraman et al. (1985)

The final five dimensions are:

1. **Tangibles:** Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel
2. **Reliability:** Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
3. **Responsiveness:** Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
4. **Assurance:** Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
5. **Empathy:** Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers

There are several models that have been developed through time for measuring service quality. Different academicians have used different ways of defining dimensions or measuring gaps. Some have suggested changes and made amendments in previously developed models. Technical and functional quality model by Gronroos in 1984, Gap

model by Parasuraman and others in 1985, Attribute service quality model by Haywood-Farmer in 1988, Synthesized model of service quality by Brogowicz and others in 1990 and Performance only model by Cronin and Taylor in 1992 are among these models (Deshmukh and Vrat, 2004).

2.3.1 The Gap Model of Service Quality

The Gap model of service quality is one of the prominent models that was developed in order to evaluate service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985) defined five gaps. The first four gaps are associated to the marketer or provider of the service leading to the fifth gap which is the measure of service equality from the customer perspective.

GAP 1: Consumer expectation-management perception Gap: - it is the difference between what customers expect from a service and what management believes customers expect from a service.

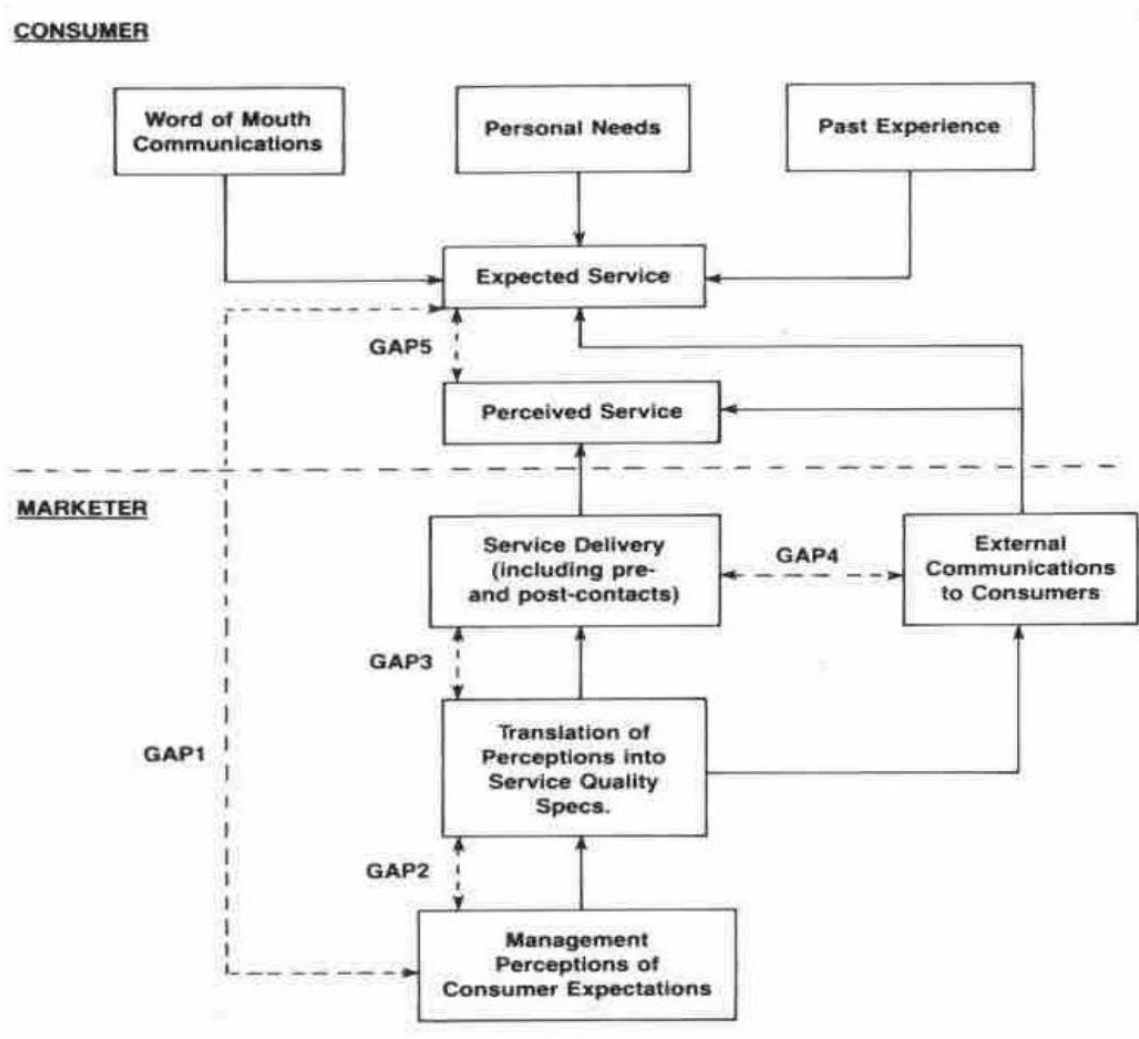
GAP 2: Management perception- service quality specification gap:- it is the difference between management's perception of consumer expectations of a service and the service quality specifications.

GAP 3: Service quality specifications –service delivery gap:- it is the difference between the service quality specifications for a service and the delivery of these specifications by the service provider.

GAP 4: Service delivery-external communications gap:-it is the difference between the service that was delivered and the external communications of the firm

GAP 5: Expected service-perceived service gap: - is the overall comparison of what consumer expected from the service provider and their perception of the service they received from the provider. A negative score indicates that the service did not meet consumer's expectations; a zero score means the service met expectations and a positive score means the service exceeded the customer's expectations. Below is a graphical depiction of the Gap model of service quality.

Figure 2: Service Quality Model



Source: Parasuraman et al. (1985)

2.3.1.1 SERVQUAL Instrument

The SERVQUAL instrument is a multiple- item scale that was developed to measure customers' perception of service quality (Gap 5) by combining service quality dimensions with customer expectations and perceptions. Customer expectations in the service quality context are defined as the standards or reference points for performance against which service experiences are compared and are often formulated in terms of what a customer believes should or will happen. Perceptions are subjective assessments' of actual service experiences (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

SERVQUAL measures service quality as the difference between customers' expectations and perceptions. It uses 22 items in order to express the five dimensions that are used by customers as the evaluation criteria. Its applications include: (Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991)

- ◆ Assessing quality along each of the five service dimensions
- ◆ An overall measure of service quality
- ◆ Assessing the relative importance of the five dimensions in influencing customers' overall quality perceptions
- ◆ Categorizing customers in to several perceived-quality segments

The authors have argued that SERVQUAL is a generic instrument with good reliability and validity and broad applicability.

A number of criticisms have been made regarding the conceptualization and operationalization of the SERVQUAL instrument. Cronin and Taylor (1992) suggested that it is unnecessary to measure customers' expectation in service quality research and it is enough to measure perception only. They argued that service quality should be

measured as an attitude and developed a performance-based scale called SERVPERF. According to their justification SERVPERF is more adoptable and efficient than SERVQUAL.

Teas (1993) questioned the validity of perception-expectation gap with conceptual and operational problem in the definition of the expectation. Another one is a psychometric concern about the use of difference score. It argues that the gap model would have a poor reliability as a result of positive correlation between expectation and perception (Brown et al., 1993 cited in Shahin & Samea, 2010)

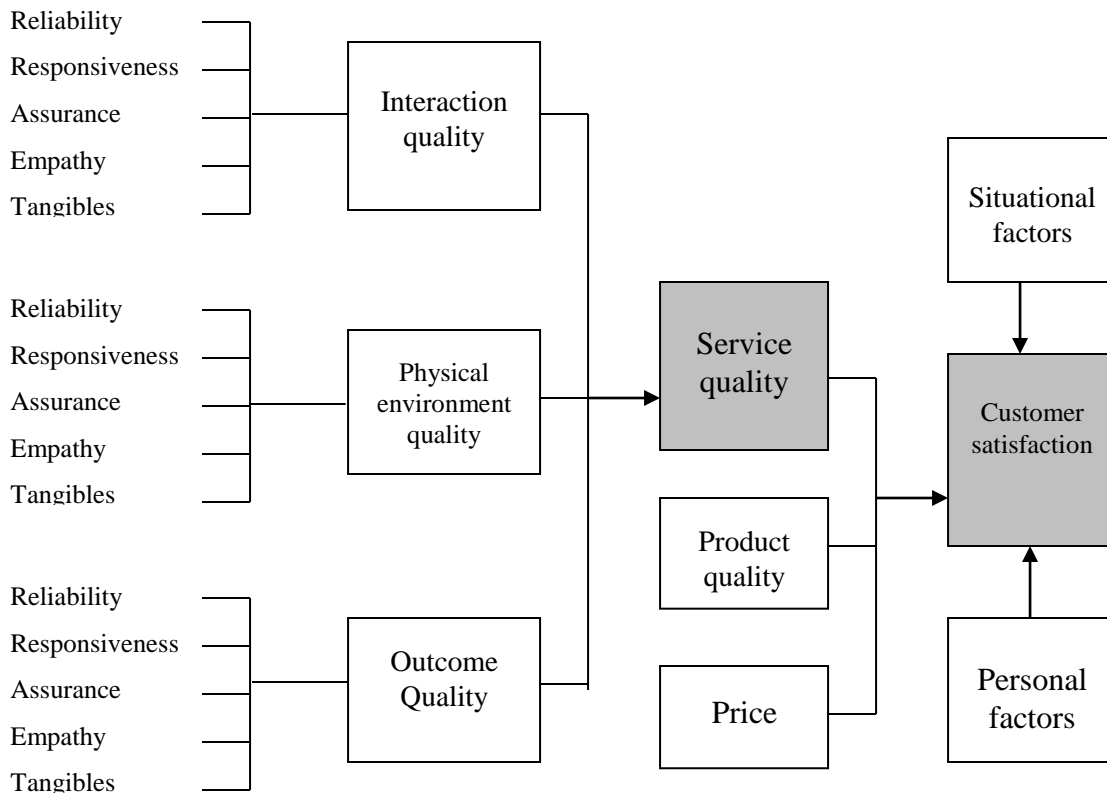
Despite the several criticisms, the gap model based on the SERVQUAL instrument is a well-known and widely used measurement approach (Mukherjee and Nath 2005). Ladhari (2008) in his analysis of the different available models to measure service quality, has argued that SERVQUAL is the most useful and widely used. He has also argued that the methodological approach used in developing and refining SERVQUAL was more rigorous than others.

2.4 Customer Satisfaction

Many writers use the words quality and satisfaction interchangeably. However, service marketers and researchers argue that there is a difference between the two. Even if there are similarities, satisfaction is believed to be a much broader concept. The main focus of service quality evaluation is assessment of service dimensions where as satisfaction takes in to account additional factors such as price and product quality (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). Research has found that customers' perceived evaluation of service quality has an impact on their level of satisfaction, Therefore service quality evaluation is an antecedent to customer satisfaction (Clow and Kurtz, 2003).

Clow and Kurtz (2003) depicted the below diagram to show the relationship between customers' perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction.

Figure 3: customer perceptions of quality and customer satisfaction



Source: Clow and Kurtz (2003)

2.5 Aviation’s Contribution to Ethiopia’s Economy

The writer was unable to find a detailed published data that is specific to the aviation sector’s economic contribution. However, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) makes a yearly evaluation of the economic impact of travel and tourism in more than one hundred fifty countries and Ethiopia is one of them. Since tourism and travel are inseparable, the below data gives a good indication (Wttc.org, 2014).

Table 1: Impact of travel and tourism on Ethiopia’s economy

Travel & Tourism contribution	2013	2013
	ETBmn ¹	% of total
Direct contribution to GDP	35,766.6	4.2
Total contribution to GDP	88,691.2	10.3
Direct contribution to Employment ²	985	3.8
Total contribution to Employment ²	2,492	9.5

1=2013 constant prices and exchange rate 2='000 jobs

Source: WTTC, “Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Ethiopia”2014

Direct contribution reflects contribution by those sectors like hotels, airlines, airports, travel agents, and leisure and recreation services that deal directly with tourists.

Total contribution includes the wider impacts (both direct and indirect) on the economy. The indirect contribution includes GDP and jobs supported by: travel and tourism investment spending, government “collective” spending on areas that help travel and tourism activities, and domestic purchase of goods and services by the sectors dealing directly with tourists.

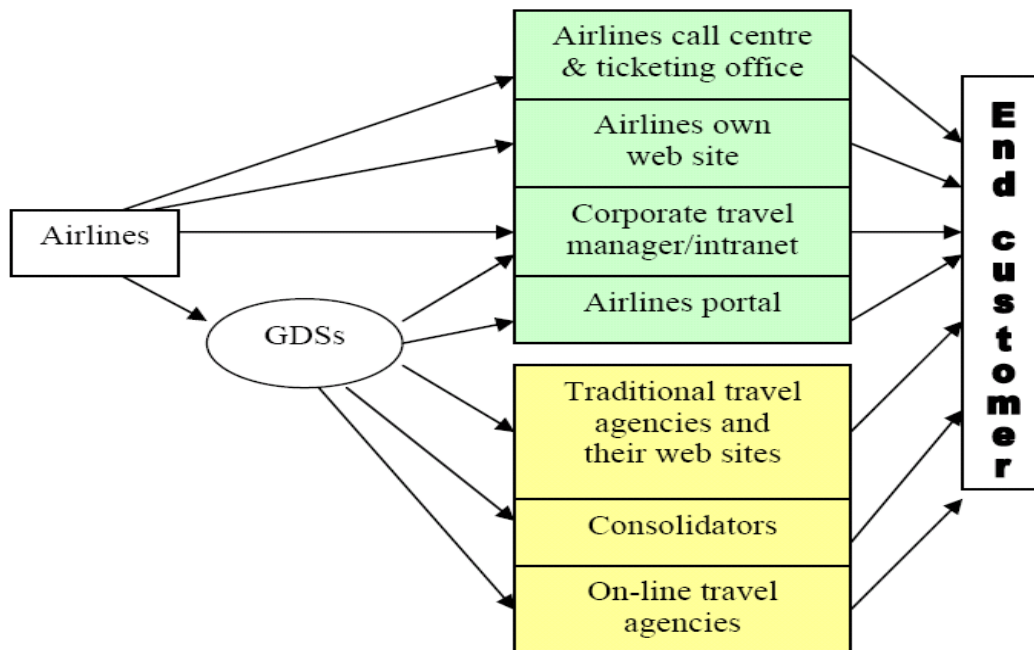
As shown in Table 1 above, the direct contribution of travel and tourism to GDP and total employment in Ethiopia is, 4.2% and 3.8% respectively. The total contribution to GDP is 10.3% and the total contribution to employment is 9.5%.

2.6 Airlines' Distribution Channels

Air travel is a final product provided by airlines which comprises of different service elements. According to IATA.org (2014), service items for airlines include seat reservation, selling ticket, airport check-in, cabin service, baggage delivery and the subsequent services after arriving at destinations, etc. In general, from a passenger's perspective, the service items of airline should include flight frequency, flight safety, cabin food and beverage, seating, flight on schedule, etc. On the other hand, from an operator's perspective, the airline industry generally pays more attention on safety, comfort, convenience, accuracy, and hospitality, etc. (Chen and Liu, 2002).

Airlines use different distribution channels in order to distribute their product. Traditionally, before the advent of the internet travel agencies used to be the sole intermediaries of airlines. With the advent of the internet, the distribution network of airline has changed dramatically. Below picture demonstrates the different channels available (Holma, 2004).

Figure 4: Airlines' Distribution Channels



Source: Almadari (2002:340), as cited in Holma (2004)

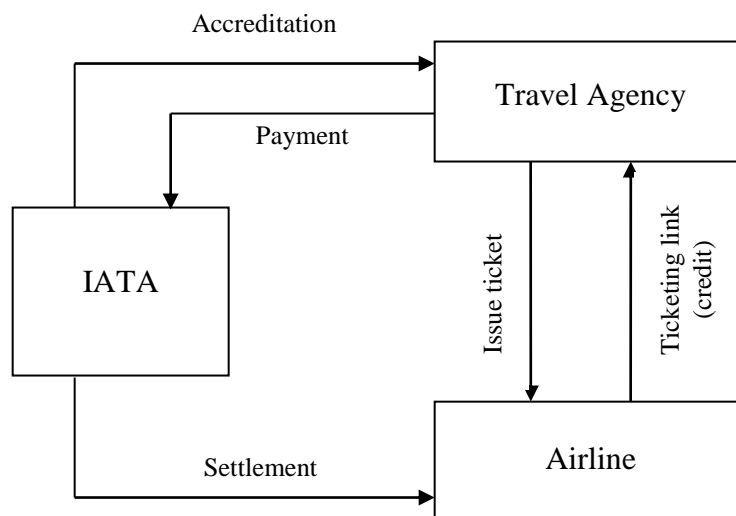
2.6.1 Travel Agencies as Intermediaries

Travel agency in this paper context refers to the traditional or brick and mortar travel agencies that give service to their customers in their offices. They play an intermediary role between customers and suppliers. Below information is gathered from IATA website and interpretation is given based on the current market practice in Ethiopia.

IATA is a regulatory body that governs the relationship between travel agencies and airlines in a BSP market. It works as a clearing house between the two entities. A BSP market is a market where BSP is implemented by IATA.

IATA gives accreditation to travel agencies up on qualifying certain standards. In a BSP market, an accreditation means the travel agency is set to issue airlines tickets. However, a travel agency can start issuing an airline ticket only after the airline allows the agent to have its ticketing link through GDS or CRS. IATA travel agencies access airline products and issue tickets through CRS that is linked to BSP. Giving the ticketing link means the airline has agreed to give credit facility to the agency which is later settled through BSP by IATA.

Figure 5: Graphical Representation of Travel Agency-Airline Relationship



2.7 Travel agencies in Ethiopia

At the time this research is compiled there are 88 IATA accredited travel agencies in Ethiopia. Among these 33 are tour and travel agencies whereas the rest are solely travel agencies that are engaged in air ticket sales only. The tour and travel agencies deal with tour arrangement within Ethiopia for incoming and domestic tourists in addition to air ticket sales. All the travel agents are located in Addis Ababa except for one which is located in Dire Dawa.

Since 2012, most airlines in Addis Ababa have removed the commission they used to give to travel agencies and have introduced a fixed service charge fee per ticket. Travelers in Ethiopia can choose to purchase their ticket from three main outlets, airline own websites, airline own ticket offices and travel agencies. The price that travelers get in airline offices and travel agencies is supposedly similar. However, it is the travel agencies decision regarding service charge fee beyond and above the fixed service charge amount.

2.8 Measuring Service Quality of Travel agencies

Different authors have used SERVQUAL model to measure service quality of travel agents and its implication on customer satisfaction.

Lam and Zhang (1999) used SERVQUAL to assess the service quality of travel agents in Hong Kong. They amended the original instrument and came up with 26 service quality attributes related to travel agents. Later they were reduced to 23 through factor analysis. The five dimensions were also worded and organized in a different manner. A self administered seven point likert scale questionnaire collected from 209 respondents was used for data interpretation. It was concluded that customers' expectations of service quality were not met. It was also concluded that "reliability" and "responsiveness and assurance" were the most influential factors in predicting customer satisfaction.

Ruiqi (2009) studied the service quality of travel agents in Guangzhou, Southern China by using the SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1991). Most of the 22 items under the five dimensions were used by making some alterations based on empirical studies and for linguistic reasons. A five point likert scale questionnaire was used. Two hundred twenty one questionnaires that were collected by interviewing people leaving from four top selling travel agencies were used. Data collected was tested for reliability with the values for all the five dimensions being above 0.7 and overall value of Cronbach alpha 0.95. It was concluded that the overall service quality of the top four travel agencies in Guangzhou was not satisfactory.

Johns et al. (2004) studied the service quality of travel agents in Northern Cyprus by reducing the original 22 items of SERVQUAL instrument in to 18 items. A sample size of 337 was used from targeted 400. It was concluded that customers in Northern Cyprus were most concerned with the efficiency and least concerned with the personalization of the service offered. Promptness, empathy, efficiency and service escape aesthetic were the most important determinant of customer satisfaction.

Filiz (2009) measured the service quality and customer satisfaction of travel agents in Turkey using the SERVQUAL measurement that was modified by Lam and Zhang(1999) to include 26 items which were categorized under six factors. The survey was conducted by interviewing 250 respondents that were discharged from four travel agencies with in two months interval. By analyzing 217 of the questionnaires, it was concluded that the travel agencies exceeded the expectations of the customers. It was also concluded that all the six factors were significant predictors of customer satisfaction.

Mohamed (2006) studied the service quality of travel agents in Egypt as seen by tourists. The SERVQUAL model with the 26 attributes as modified by Lam and Zhang was used. From a targeted size of 400 tourists, 226 responses were found to be valid. Factor analysis showed 24 items out of 26 to be important. Tangibility had the largest gap score while resource and corporate image had the lowest. The results of regression analysis showed that the five factors studied explained only 56.8% of the total variance in overall satisfaction.

2.9 SERVQUAL in Ethiopian Context

The SERVQUAL instrument has been used to measure service quality in the service sector of Ethiopia by different authors.

Negi (2009) explored the perceived service quality of Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation by using seven modified dimensions of SERVQUAL, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, network aspect, and convenience. A sample size of 220 was used and it concluded that the highest service quality gap is in the added dimension of network aspect, while the lowest score obtained was for convenience.

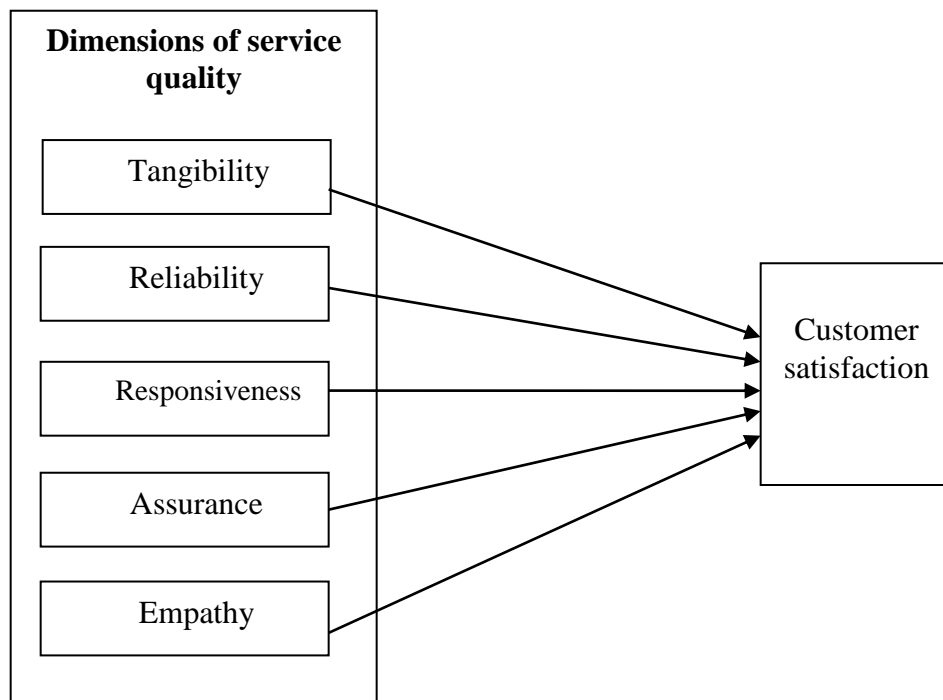
Mesay (2012) investigated the relationship between airline service quality, passengers' satisfaction and loyalty. The five dimension SRVQUAL model was used to measure the service equality of Ethiopian airlines. A sample size of 99 passengers was used and the study concluded that passengers are dissatisfied with all five dimensions of service quality with reliability having the highest gap score. The research indicated that assurance has the strongest effect on the level of customers' satisfaction.

Dawit (2013) studied the service quality and passengers' satisfaction of Ethiopian airlines by using seven modified dimensions of SERVQUAL namely, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, employees, flight pattern, facilities and customization. A sample size of 250 selected through non probabilistic sampling was used and it was concluded that all the seven dimensions have shown a negative gap score. Reliability and responsiveness dimensions were found to be the significant contributors towards customer satisfaction.

2.10 Conceptual Framework of the Study

This research will use the SERVQUAL model with the five dimensions and the 22 attributes as adopted by Ruiqi (2009) for the travel agency context by making slight modifications for linguistic reasons. It will also see the implication of perceived service quality on overall customer satisfaction.

Figure 6: Conceptual frame work of the study



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodology used in undertaking the research.

3.1 Research Design

The purpose of the research is to evaluate the perceived service quality of travel agencies from the customers' perspective. It is a quantitative research that makes use of descriptive and inferential statistics.

The SERVQUAL model that was developed and later modified by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, and 1991) is used to measure the gap between perception and expectation of customers on the service provided by travel agencies in Ethiopia.

The 22 attributes of the model as modified by Ruiqi (2009) in order to measure the service quality of travel agencies in Guangzhou was adopted by making minor modification for linguistic reasons after discussion with managers of the five top selling travel agencies and sales managers from the different airlines operating in Ethiopia.

The impact of perceived quality on overall customer satisfaction was also seen through regression analysis which follows from the literatures that service quality is an antecedent of overall satisfaction.

3.2 Population and Sampling Technique

All current users of travel agencies in Ethiopia constitute the population of the study. A current user for this study is defined as some one who has bought air travel and associated services from one or more travel agencies within the previous three months from the date of filling the questionnaire (Fick & Ritchie, 1991 cited in Lam and Zhang, 1999)

Addis Ababa international airport(ADD) is the hub of all travel originating from Ethiopia. Except for the domestic travel made by ET, all airlines including ET's international travel originate from ADD. Therefore, a non probabilistic sampling technique was implemented and passengers that used ADD airport between 10th April 2014 and 10th May 2014 were taken as sampling unit. The sample taken was believed to be a representative of the population because all international travelers from Ethiopia pass through the airport no matter where the ticket is purchased from.

A sample size of 250 was targeted given the time and budget constraint. It was believed that it is representative enough looking at the sample sizes used in similar studies made. The sample sizes used by Lam and Zhang (1999), Ruqqi (2009), Filiz (2009),and Mohamed (2006) were 209, 221 , 217 and 226 respectively. The minimum size suggested by Malhotra (2006) for this kind of research is also 200 with a typical range falling between 300 and 500.

3.3 Data Source and Collection Instrument

Primary data that was collected through questionnaire survey from a sample size of 207 respondents was used for the analysis. A structured questionnaire that has three parts was used. The first part was designed to assess perception and expectation for the 22 SERVQUAL items using a 5 point likert scale starting from 1= “strongly disagree” to 5= “strongly agree” . The second part was designed to assess overall satisfaction using a 5

point likert scale starting from 1= “ highly dissatisfied” to 5= “highly satisfied”. The third part constituted 5 questions about the socio-demographic data of the respondents.

3.4 Procedure of Data Collection

Passengers were approached upon availability while they were inline for check-in and asked to fill the questionnaire upon fulfilling the criteria. Those who were willing were allowed to take it to the boarding gate where they will have the time and the calmness to sit and fill, and pass it to the boarding agent upon boarding. By 10th May, 264 questionnaires were collected of which 207 were found to be usable, which is a response rate of 78%.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data is analyzed using the program SPSS 21 by applying descriptive and inferential statistical instruments like mean, frequency, correlation, one-way ANOVA, paired samples t-test, and linear regression analysis.

Descriptive instruments are used to determine the gap scores. The Pearson correlation (r) is used to see the correlation between the five dimensions and overall satisfaction. Multiple linear regression analysis is used to see how much of the variation in overall satisfaction was explained by the service quality dimensions.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

This research applies the SERVQUAL instrument that has been used by a number of researchers, as highlighted in the literature review, in different industries and countries who have confirmed its applicability and usability making it valid for this research.

The internal consistency of the scale was tested using the Cronbach's alpha. The result for all the dimensions was found to be above 0.7, indicating high internal consistency. Nunnally (1978:245), cited in Corbetta (2003) suggests that a cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 is a threshold of acceptability.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

In order to have unbiased and representative response, the option of gathering data from airport instead of travel agency offices was used. In addition, respondents were assured the anonymity and confidentiality of their response and questionnaires were handed out up on their consent only.

CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the main findings and interpretations of the study.

4.1 Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Out of the 264 questionnaires received, 207 were completed and usable, representing a response rate of 78%.

Table 2: Profile of travel agency user respondents (n=207)

Variables		Frequency	Percentage of Total
Gender	Male	134	64.7
	Female	73	35.3
Age	18-24	11	5.3
	25-34	76	36.7
	35-44	74	35.7
	45-54	29	14.0
	55-64	17	8.2
Level of Education	under 12	13	6.3
	high school complete	28	13.5
	Certificate/Diploma	41	19.8
	Bachelor's degree	70	33.8
	post graduate and above	55	26.6
Purpose of trip	Leisure	33	15.9
	Business/corporate	59	28.5
	personal business/trade	72	34.8
	VFR	27	13.0
	Others	16	7.7
Average use of travel agency	less than once a year	28	13.5
	once a year	37	17.9
	Twice a year	36	17.4
	Three times a year	31	15.0
	Four times a year	19	9.2
	Five times or more a year	56	27.1

Source: own survey

As Table 2 shows, 64.7 % of the respondents were male. More than seventy percent of the respondents were within the age groups of 25-34(36.7%) and 35-44(35.7%). 70(33.8%) of the respondents were holders of bachelors degree, followed by 55(26.6%) respondents of post graduate and above, and 41 (19.8) with certificate/diploma level of education. When it comes to purpose of travel, personal business or trade ranked first with 72(34.8%) respondents followed by corporate business 59(28.5%). Third was leisure 33(15.9%), and fourth being VFR 27(13.0%). The rest 16(7.7%) were categorized under other reasons like medical, student, and migration.56(27.1%) of the respondents indicated that they use travel agency service five or more times a year .37(17.9%) use once a year followed by twice a year users 36(17.4%). The remaining 37.7% of the respondents were categorized as, 31(15%) trice a year users, 28(13.5%) once a year users, and the rest 19(9.2%) as four times a year users.

4.2 Data Reliability

In order to determine the reliability of the data collected the Cronbach's alpha test was conducted. As shown in Table 3 below, the value of the Cronbach's alpha for all the dimensions is above 0.7. The values of all the 22 variables of expectation and perception are 0.935 and 0.933 respectively. The overall value of 0. 936 indicates high internal consistency of the scale.

Table 3: Data Reliability

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha		
	Expectation	Perception	No. of Items
Tangibility	.719	.804	5
Reliability	.774	.784	5
Responsiveness	.801	.832	4
Assurance	.835	.819	4
Empathy	.782	.849	4
All the five dimensions	.932	.933	22
Overall	0.935		45

Source: own survey

4.3 Gap Analysis

Table 4 summarizes the mean expectation and perception scores of the five dimensions and the Gap scores. The highest mean score for expectation was registered for responsiveness (4.20) while assurance(3.81) has the highest mean score for perception. Reliability has the lowest mean scores both for expectation (4.14) and perception (3.54) but with the highest Gap score(-0.60) indicating that the highest service quality issue for travel agencies in Ethiopia is related to reliability. This is similar to the findings of Lam Zhang (1999) for travel agents in Hong Kong where reliability was found to have the biggest gap score. The same was concluded by Ruiqi (2009) for travel agencies in Guangzhou.

Table 4: Summary of expectation, perception and Gap means

Dimension	Expectation (E)			Perception (P)			GAP Score (P-E)		
	Mean (E)	SD	Rank	Mean (P)	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
Tangibility	4.17	0.52	2	3.70	0.67	2	-0.46	0.82	4
Reliability	4.14	0.58	5	3.54	0.69	5	-0.60	0.76	1
Responsiveness	4.20	0.61	1	3.65	0.71	3	-0.55	0.75	2
Assurance	4.17	0.60	3	3.81	0.72	1	-0.36	0.68	5
Empathy	4.14	0.64	4	3.60	0.81	4	-0.54	0.98	3
Total mean score	4.16	0.51		3.66	0.59		-0.50	0.67	

SD: Standard Deviation

Source: Own Survey

The second biggest gap was found to be for responsiveness (-0.55) which goes hand with the high expectation. All the dimensions have negative Gap score indicating a quality concern in all aspects. The overall gap score (-0.50) shows that performance of travel agencies have fallen short of customers' expectations.

Table 5: paired samples t-test between dimensions

Dimensions		Paired Differences					t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Tangibility (P) - Tangibility(E)	-.46	.82	.06	-.58	-.35	-8.15	206	.000*
Pair 2	Reliability (P) - Reliability(E)	-.60	.76	.05	-.70	-.49	-11.33	206	.000*
Pair 3	Responsiveness(P) - Responsiveness(E)	-.55	.75	.05	-.65	-.44	-10.47	206	.000*
Pair 4	Assurance (P) - Assurance(E)	-.36	.68	.05	-.45	-.26	-7.55	206	.000*
Pair 5	Empathy(P)- Empathy(E)	-.54	.98	.07	-.68	-.41	-8.01	206	.000*
Grand score	Perception(P)- Expectation(E)	-.50	.67	.05	-.60	-.41	-10.79	206	.000*

*Significant at P < 0.01

SD: Standard Deviation

Source: Own survey

The paired sample t-test result summarized in table 5 above, confirms that there is a significant difference between the mean scores for all the dimensions and overall perception and expectation. This is also similar with the findings of Lam and Zhang (1999) and Ruiqi (2009). The highest difference is registered for reliability with $t(206)=11.33, P<0.01$, followed by responsiveness at $t(206)=10.47, p<0.01$. Assurance has the lowest t score of $t(206)=7.55, p<0.01$ which is in line with the findings that assurance has the highest perception mean score(1.72) and the lowest gap score(-0.36). This is similar with the finding of Dawit(2013) where assurance had the lowest gap score for service quality of ET. Overall mean gap score (-0.50) of perception and expectation has a t value of $t(206)10.79, p<0.01$, showing that the overall perceived quality of travel agencies is below the expectation of customers.

Table 6: Mean Gap score of each item and paired samples t-test between items

Items			Perception		Expectation		GAP mean			Paired samples test	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Rank	t	Sig. *
Tangibility	1	The environment is safe and comfortable.	3.94	0.89	4.41	0.61	-0.47	1.00	13	-6.82	.000
	2	Equipment and decoration is modern and appealing.	3.56	0.88	4.01	0.76	-0.46	1.05	14	-6.31	.000
	3	The reservation technology is advanced and easy to use.	3.73	0.84	4.11	0.77	-0.37	0.94	20	-5.72	.000
	4	The employees are neat, clean and carry professional attitude.	3.89	1.01	4.35	0.76	-0.46	1.12	15	-5.88	.000
	5	The promotional materials and brochures are visually appealing, high in quality, and adequate in information.	3.40	0.85	3.96	0.83	-0.56	1.12	9	-7.22	.000
Reliability	6	The employees are able to complete their promised tasks	3.67	0.86	4.13	0.80	-0.46	1.06	16	-6.20	.000
	7	The employees are able to fulfill their tasks at the time promised.	3.65	0.95	4.22	0.81	-0.57	1.04	8	-7.78	.000
	8	The employees are able to perform the service right the first time.	3.59	0.93	4.18	0.77	-0.59	0.94	6	-9.07	.000
	9	The employees show sympathy and concern when a customer has problems.	3.56	1.06	4.28	0.79	-0.72	1.12	1	-9.26	.000
	10	The employees are able to deliver error-free transactions.	3.26	0.91	3.91	0.86	-0.65	1.09	2	-8.64	.000
Responsiveness	11	The employees are able to inform the customer the exact time schedule of their service performance.	3.64	0.81	4.13	0.78	-0.49	0.83	12	-8.46	.000
	12	The employees are always willing and ready to help.	3.78	0.94	4.31	0.73	-0.54	0.94	10	-8.17	.000
	13	The employees are able to give prompt service.	3.65	0.84	4.22	0.74	-0.57	0.95	7	-8.61	.000
	14	The employees are never too busy to respond to your enquiries.	3.54	0.89	4.14	0.79	-0.59	0.95	5	-9.00	.000
Assurance	15	The employees are polite and respectful.	4.10	0.89	4.35	0.74	-0.25	0.75	22	-4.80	.000
	16	The employees have adequate product knowledge.	3.74	0.93	4.16	0.83	-0.43	1.02	18	-6.02	.000
	17	The employees are good in instilling confidence in customers.	3.63	0.85	4.06	0.82	-0.43	0.96	17	-6.39	.000
	18	Customers feel safe and secure in transactions with the employees.	3.77	0.88	4.09	0.81	-0.32	0.77	21	-5.94	.000
Empathy	19	The employees care for customer's specific needs	3.51	0.92	4.00	0.86	-0.49	1.11	11	-6.39	.000
	20	The travel agency is accessible any time of the day.	3.43	1.01	4.08	0.90	-0.65	1.23	3	-7.60	.000
	21	The employees value and respect their customers.	3.83	0.96	4.22	0.79	-0.39	1.07	19	-5.27	.000
	22	The employees have the customer's best interest at heart.	3.62	1.01	4.27	0.73	-0.64	1.13	4	-8.17	.000

*Significance (2-tailed), significant at $P < 0.01$

Source: own survey

Table 6 shows the mean gap score of each service quality item with associated paired samples t-test at significance value of $P < 0.01$ for all the items showing the importance of the difference between the means. The assurance item "The employees are polite and respectful." Has the highest perception score (4.10) consistent with the highest perception score of the Assurance dimension. The second item in terms of perception is "The

environment is safe and comfortable” (3.94), which is a tangibility item. The third item “The employees are neat, clean and carry professional attitude” is also from tangibility. This is may be because these items are easy to judge.

The tangibility item “The environment is safe and comfortable” has the highest expectation score of 4.41. The second item in terms of expectation is “The employees are polite and respectful” (4.35) which is an assurance item with the highest perception score. The third highest expectation score is for “The employees are neat, clean and carry professional attitude” which is a tangibility item. These shows that those item with high perception scores are also the ones with high expectation scores.

The lowest score in both perception (3.26) and expectation (3.91) is for “The employees are able to deliver error-free transactions” which is a reliability item and also consistent with the dimension wise result. This could be an indicator that even if customers’ do not hold high expectation regarding getting an error free service, they still are not satisfied with the service they are getting.

The highest gap score (-0.72) is for a reliability item “The employees show sympathy and concern when a customer has problems”, which again is consistent with the dimension wise result and shows reliability to be a main area of concern when it comes to service quality of travel agencies. The gap scores for all the 22 items are negative indicating a service quality shortfall in each of the service attributes.

4.4 One- way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Test

In order to see whether there is a variance in the gap score means of the five dimensions, with a difference in the “purpose of trip” and “frequency of travel agency usage”, a one way ANOVA test at significance level $P < 0.05$ was conducted. Accordingly, as shown in table 7 and 8, there is no statistically significant difference.

Table 7: ANOVA for purpose of trip

Dimensions		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangibility	Between Groups	3.405	4	.851	1.270	.283
	Within Groups	135.367	202	.670		
	Total	138.773	206			
Assurance	Between Groups	2.269	4	.567	1.246	.293
	Within Groups	92.008	202	.455		
	Total	94.277	206			
Empathy	Between Groups	5.515	4	1.379	1.461	.215
	Within Groups	190.594	202	.944		
	Total	196.109	206			
Reliability	Between Groups	2.560	4	.640	1.115	.350
	Within Groups	115.879	202	.574		
	Total	118.438	206			
Responsiveness	Between Groups	.788	4	.197	.344	.848
	Within Groups	115.690	202	.573		
	Total	116.478	206			

Source: Own survey

Table 8: ANOVA for average use of travel agency in a year

Dimensions		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Tangibility	Between Groups	7.377	5	1.475	2.257	.050
	Within Groups	131.395	201	.654		
	Total	138.773	206			
Assurance	Between Groups	1.852	5	.370	.805	.547
	Within Groups	92.425	201	.460		
	Total	94.277	206			
Empathy	Between Groups	7.631	5	1.526	1.628	.154
	Within Groups	188.478	201	.938		
	Total	196.109	206			
Reliability	Between Groups	5.593	5	1.119	1.993	.081
	Within Groups	112.845	201	.561		
	Total	118.438	206			
Responsiveness	Between Groups	1.526	5	.305	.534	.751
	Within Groups	114.952	201	.572		
	Total	116.478	206			

Source: own survey

4.5 Mean Score of Customer Satisfaction

Overall customer satisfaction was measured at 5 point likert scale; 5 being highly satisfied, 4 satisfied, 3 neutral, 2 dissatisfied and 1 being highly dissatisfied. The mean scores given by the 207 respondents as shown in table 9 is 3.62, which is above the average and shows customers in general are slightly satisfied with the service they get. This overall result is similar with that of Lam and Zhang (1999).

Table 9: Mean score of overall customer satisfaction

Overall level of satisfaction	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
	207	1	5	3.62	.967

SD: Standard Deviation

Source: own survey

Looking at the break down of the respondents as summarized by table 10 below, 48.3% indicated they are satisfied, 15.9% said they are highly satisfied, 18.8% remained neutral, 15.9% said they are dissatisfied and only 1% said they are highly dissatisfied.

Table 10: Break down of overall satisfaction level by number of respondents

Degree of satisfaction	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Highly dissatisfied	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
Dissatisfied	33	15.9	15.9	16.9
neutral	39	18.8	18.8	35.7
Satisfied	100	48.3	48.3	84.1
Highly satisfied	33	15.9	15.9	100.0
Total	207	100.0	100.0	

Source: own survey

4.6 Relationship Between Perceived Service Quality and Overall Satisfaction

In order to see the relationship between the perceived service quality and overall satisfaction a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was made.

As per the general principle suggested by Cronk (2008), correlation values less than 0.3 are considered weak, correlations between 0.3 and 0.7 are considered moderate, and correlations greater than 0.7 are considered strong as the closer it gets to 1 the stronger it becomes and the closer it gets to zero the weaker it is.

As shown in table 11, all the values of the Pearson correlation (r) were found to be significant at $p < 0.01$ showing a reliable relationship. However, the strength of the correlation for the most of the variables was found to be moderate. The strongest relationship was registered between reliability and responsiveness at r value of .718.

There was a moderate correlation between overall satisfaction and all the dimensions with r value ranging from .408 to .595. The highest score was with reliability dimension

which indicates that reliability has a stronger positive correlation with over all satisfaction compared to the other four variables. Hence, suggesting improving on the reliability item will improve the satisfaction level of customers.

Table 11: Summery of Pearson Correlation analysis

Dimensions		Tangibility	Empathy	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Overall level of satisfaction
Tangibility	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1					
Empathy	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.596** .000	1				
Reliability	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.619** .000	.683** .000	1			
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.600** .000	.621** .000	.718** .000	1		
Assurance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.480** .000	.715** .000	.708** .000	.692** .000	1	
Overall level of satisfaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.408** .000	.505** .000	.595** .000	.538** .000	.479** .000	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: own survey

In order to see the relevance of the five dimensions in affecting customer satisfaction, a regression analysis was made by taking the perceived service qualities of the five dimensions as independent variable and overall satisfaction as dependant variable.

Table 12: Regression analysis result per dimension

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.*
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	4.110	.069		59.295	.000
Tangibility	-.034	.090	-.029	-.382	.703
Assurance	-.043	.132	-.030	-.322	.748
Empathy	.155	.088	.156	1.764	.079
Reliability	.482	.120	.378	4.022	.000
Responsiveness	.267	.114	.208	2.336	.020

a. Dependent Variable: Overall level of satisfaction

* significance at $p < 0.05$

Source: own survey

The results summarized in table 12 above show that Reliability and responsiveness are the only two important factors affecting overall satisfaction at significance level $P < 0.05$, which is in tandem with the correlation analysis. Reliability has the highest Beta (.378) and t value (4.022) score followed by responsiveness with Beta (.208) and t value (2.366).

Table 13: Model Summary of the multiple regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.624 ^a	.389	.374	.765	.389	25.619	5	201	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Responsiveness, Tangibility, Empathy, Assurance, Reliability

Source: own survey

The summary of the linear regression model (Table 13) shows, 38.9% of the variation in overall satisfaction is explained by the model with a significance level $P < 0.01$. Hence, indicating the importance of service quality for overall customer satisfaction.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the findings followed by conclusions and recommendations. Limitations and implications for future research are discussed at the end.

5.1 Summary

The main aim of this study was to assess the service quality level of travel agencies from the customers' perspective. Since the main business of travel agencies in Ethiopia is airline ticket sell and they are the major contributors of airline sales, the customers taken in to consideration were air travelers. The SERVQUAL instrument was used to measure the gap between service expectations of customers and their evaluation of the actual performance. A survey questionnaire was used to collect data which later was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

The data collected from 207 respondents showed that the service quality of travel agencies fell short of customers' expectation in all the five dimensions, hence indicating a negatively perceived overall service quality. However, when the overall customer satisfaction was assessed, it was found out that customers are slightly satisfied which shows service quality is not the only factor that determines customer satisfaction.

The reliability dimension is the number one in terms of having a negative gap score and the items "The employees show sympathy and concern when a customer has a problem" and "the employees are able to deliver error-free transactions" which are reliability items, have also the highest negative gap scores. This shows that passengers are less happy with

reliability issues. Especially about error free transaction, it was indicated that travel agencies are unable to meet expectations' even if customers are holding low expectation.

The study also found that there is no major difference in the level of expectation and perception with a difference in purpose of travel and frequency of usage of travel agency. The analysis made to see the impact of service quality dimensions on overall customer satisfaction showed that the model as a whole explains 38.9% of the variation in customer satisfaction. However, only two dimensions namely Reliability and Responsiveness are found to be the relevant factors. The rest three namely: Tangibility, Assurance, and Empathy are not significant in influencing customer satisfaction.

5.2 Conclusions

Travel agencies are among the service sector where provision of excellent quality service is one of the essential factors to remain competitive. The study has assessed the service quality of travel agencies in Ethiopia as evaluated by air travelers and has found out that:

- ◆ Performance of travel agencies in Ethiopia is below the expectation of customers indicating a service shortfall. Perceptions of air travelers have fallen short of expectations in all the items used for measurement. Reliability items have the lowest score in both perception and expectation.
- ◆ The fact that the reliability dimension has the lowest mean in both expectation and perception leading to the highest service gap is an indication that customers already do not hold a high expectation even from an excellent travel agency but yet faced with unsatisfactory performance.
- ◆ Agencies need to improve the areas of “error free transaction”, and “sympathy and concern”, if the situation is to improve. Empathy elements “customer’s best interest at heart” and “accessibility of the travel agency” are also other concern areas. Elements of responsiveness “giving prompt service” and “never too busy to respond” are also very important elements that need attention in order to improve the overall perceived quality.
- ◆ It has also been established that the majority of the customers still feel satisfied even if there is a service shortfall with the average rating being slightly satisfied. The fact that service quality has an impact on customer satisfaction indicates that agencies have a room to further satisfy their customers by improving the quality of the service they provide.

- ◆ Among all the dimensions, Reliability was found to be the number one influencer of customer satisfaction which further stresses the need to focus on reliability items for overall satisfaction of customers.

5.3 Recommendations

With the advent of the internet, the nature of travel and travelers is changing dramatically. Customers are becoming more and more informed and demanding. Hence, for a sustainable travel agency business, provision of quality service is a must. In order to do so:

- ◆ As the findings of this study show, most of the issues are lying with reliability and responsiveness. Hence, managers and owners of travel agencies need to work on educating and training the agents dealing with customers in the areas of customer handling, product knowledge, and good industry practice.
- ◆ They should develop service quality standards that are measurable in coordination with airlines.
- ◆ They should make agents realize that the traditional way of doing business is fading away and it is in the airlines' best interest to reach customers directly (disintermediation), so they should do their best to please their customers as most of the problem areas are more of subjective.
- ◆ Since travel agencies are generators of the majority of their sale, airlines should also give frequent and timely trainings that increase product awareness to enable agents perform error free transactions.

5.4 Limitations and Implications for Further Research

Due to time and resource constraint, the study is conducted by targeting passengers who traveled through Addis Ababa Bole International Airport from 10th April to 10th May only depending on their willingness to fill a questionnaire. Hence, those travel agency users who did not travel during this period are not addressed. In addition, there is lack of detailed published data regarding airlines and travel agencies in Ethiopia.

The writer of this research believes that this study is just the tip of the iceberg. The area needs a thorough and detailed investigation with more resource both in terms of time and money. Future researches by applying other methods like SURVPERF, interview instead of questionnaire, and more sample size would shed more light on the subject. In addition, a research from the perspective of the supplier and employees of travel agencies is also an area to explore.

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APPENDIX

**Questionnaire to be filled by customers who use travel agencies to avail air travel
and associated services**

Dear Respondent,

First of all I would like to thank you for taking your time to read and fill this questionnaire.

My name is Temima Nassir and I am a graduating Master of Arts student at Addis Ababa University School of Commerce. This questionnaire is to be used solely for the research I am undertaking in order to fulfill my thesis work required to complete my study.

The aim of this research is to measure the service quality of travel agencies in Ethiopia. Your participation is invaluable and will remain anonymous. Circling the number that reflects your true opinion is very important for its success.

The questionnaire is divided in to three parts. Please read the instructions carefully before starting to answer. Once again, thank you for your participation.

PART I:

For each of the twenty three questions, there are two columns requiring your answer.

The first column is in relation to your expectation of quality service from an **excellent travel agency**. Please show the extent to which you think such travel agency would possess the feature described by each statement by circling on the number that you think is best to indicate your opinion. There is no right or wrong answer. All I am interested in is a number that truly reflects your feelings regarding travel agencies that would deliver excellent quality service.

The second column relates to your feelings about the **actual service** you received from your travel agent. For each statement please show the extent to which you believe the travel agency you used has the feature described by the statement by circling on the number that you think is best to indicate your opinion. Once again, there is no right or wrong answer as all I am interested in is a number that best shows your perception about your travel agent's actual service.

Level of EXPECTATION and PERCEPTION described as:

1. Strongly Disagree 2- Disagree 3- Neutral 4- Agree 5- Strongly Agree

Items	Level of Expectation					Level of Perception				
	Your expectation from an excellent travel agency					Your perception of the actual service by your travel agent				
1 The environment is safe and comfortable.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
2 Equipment and decoration is modern and appealing.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
3 The reservation technology is advanced and easy to use.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
4 The employees are neat, clean and carry professional attitude.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
5 The promotional materials and brochures are visually appealing, high in quality, and adequate in information.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
6 The employees are able to complete their promised tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
7 The employees are able to fulfill their tasks at the time promised.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
8 The employees are able to perform the service right the first time.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
9 The employees show sympathy and concern when a customer has problems.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
10 The employees are able to deliver error-free transactions.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
11 The employees are able to inform the customer the exact time schedule of their service performance.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
12 The employees are always willing and ready to help.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
13 The employees are able to give prompt service.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
14 The employees are never too busy to respond to your enquiries.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
15 The employees are polite and respectful.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
16 The employees have adequate product knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
17 The employees are good in instilling confidence in customers.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
18 Customers feel safe and secure in transactions with the employees.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
19 The employees care for customer's specific needs.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
20 The travel agency is accessible any time of the day.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
21 The employees value and respect their customers.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
22 The employees have the customer's best interest at heart.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Part II. Please circle the number of your opinion

1. What is your over all satisfaction level on the service you obtained?

Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly Dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Part III. General information

Please answer by choosing from the alternatives by circling on the reference number

1. Gender

1. Male

2. Female

2. Age

1. 18-24

2. 25-34

3. 35-44

4. 45-54

5. 55-64

6. 65 and over

3. Level of education

1. Under 12th grade

2. Completed high school

3. Certificate/Diploma

4. Bachelor's degree

5. Post graduate degree and above

4. Purpose of your trip

1. Leisure

2. Business/Corporate

3. Personal business/trade

4. Visit of family and friends

5. Other: Please pacify_____

5. Average use of travel agency service

1. Less than once a year

2. Once a year

3. Twice a year

4. Three times a year

5. Four times a year

6. Five times or more a year

የአየር ጉዞ ትኩረታቸውን ከጉዞ ወኪል በሚገዙ ደንበኞች የሚሞላ መጠይቅ

ውድ የዚህ መጠይቅ መላሽ ደንበኛ

ከሁሉ አስቀድሜ ጊዜዎን ወስደው ይህንን መጠይቅ ለመሙላት ፈቃደኛ ስለሆኑ ከፍ ያለ ምስጋናዬን አቀርባለሁ። ስሜ ተሟላ ማለት ይባላል። በአዲስ አበባ ዩኒቨርሲቲ የንግድ ስራ ትምህርት ቤት ውስጥ የማርኬቲንግ ማኔጅመንት ማስተራት ዲግሪ ተመራቂ ተማሪ ስሆን ይህንን ጥናት የማካሄደው ትምህርቴን ለማጠናቀቅ እንዲረዳኝ ነው።

የጥናቱ አላማ በኢትዮጵያ የሚገኙ የጉዞ ወኪሎችን የአገልግሎት የጥራት ደረጃ ለመለካት ነው። የእርስዎ ትክክለኛ ስሜትዎን በመግለፅ በዚህ ጥናት መሳተፍ ከፍተኛ ጠቀሜታ ያለው ሲሆን የጉዞ ወኪሉንም ሆነ የእርስዎን ማንነት መግለጽ አያስፈልግም።

ይህ መጠይቅ ሶስት ክፍል አለው ። ጥያቄዎችን መመለስ ከመጀመርያ በፊት እባክዎትን መመሪያውን በሚገባ ያንብቡ። ለትብብርዎ ደግሜ ላመሰግንዎት እወዳለሁ።

ክፍል አንድ:

ከዚህ በታች የተዘረዘሩት ሃያ ሶስት ጥያቄዎች እያንዳንዳቸው የእርስዎን መልስ የሚፈልጉ ሁለት ረድፎች አሏቸው።

የመጀመሪያው ረድፍ እጅግ በጣም ጥሩ የሚሉት የጉዞ ወኪል ሊኖረው ይገባል ብለው የሚጠብቁትን ጥራት ያለው አገልግሎት በተመለከተ ነው። ይህ አይነቱ የጉዞ ወኪል በእያንዳንዱ ጥያቄ ላይ የተመለከቱትን መስፈርቶች እስከምን ድረስ ሊያሟላ ይገባል ብለው እንደሚያስቡ ከተሰጡት ከ 1 እስከ 5 ቁጥሮች መሀከል መርጠው በማክበብ ይግለጹ። ትክክለኛ የሆነ ወይንም ያልሆነ የሚባል መልስ የለም። እኔ ማወቅ የምፈልገው በእርስዎ እምነት እጅግ በጣም ጥሩ የሚባል አገልግሎት የሚሰጥ ማንኛውንም የጉዞ ወኪል የተሻለ ሊገልጽ የሚችል መልስ ብቻ ነው።

ሁለተኛው ረድፍ የሚመለከተው ከተጠቀሙት የጉዞ ወኪል ስላገኙት አገልግሎት ያልዎትን ስሜት ነው። የጉዞ ወኪሉ በእያንዳንዱ ጥያቄ ላይ የተመለከቱትን መስፈርቶች እስከምን ድረስ እንደሚያሟላ ከ 1 እስከ 5 ቁጥሮች መሀከል መርጠው በማክበብ ይግለጹ። ትክክለኛ የሆነ ወይንም ያልሆነ የሚባል መልስ የለም። እኔ ማወቅ የምፈልገው የተጠቀሙበት የጉዞ ወኪሉ ስለሰጠዎት አገልግሎት የተሰማዎትን ትክክለኛ ስሜት የተሻለ ሊገልጽ የሚችል መልስ ብቻ ነው።

ቁጥሮቹ የሚወክሉት፡-

በጣም አልስማማም 2. አልስማማም 3. አስተያየት የለኝም 4. እስማማለሁ 5. በጣም እስማማለሁ

መስፈርቶች	አጅግ በጣም ጥሩ የሆነ የጉዞ ወኪል ይገባል የሚጠብቁት	ጥሩ የሆነ ሊኖረው ብለው	የተጠቀሙበት የጉዞ ወኪሉ አገልግሎት አመለካከት	የጉዞ ስለስጠዎት ያለዎት
1	ቢሮና አካባቢው ምቹና ደህንነቱ የተጠበቀ ነው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
2	መሳሪያዎቹና የቤት ውስጥ ማስዋቢያዎቹ ማራኪ ናቸው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
3	ለምዝገባ የሚጠቀሙበት ቴክኖሎጂ ዘመናዊና ለአጠቃቀምም ቀላል ነው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
4	ሰራተኞቹ ጽዱፍ በአለባበሳቸው ጥንቁቅና ፍጹም የስራ ብቃትን የተላበሱ ናቸው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
5	ለአይን የሚስቡ፣ ጥራት ያላቸውና በቂ መረጃ የሚሰጡ በራሪ ጽሁፎችን ያቀርባሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
6	ሰራተኞቹ ቃል የገቡለትን ስራ ያጠናቅቃሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
7	ሰራተኞቹ ቃል የገቡለትን ስራ ቃል በገቡበት ጊዜ ውስጥ ያጠናቅቃሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
8	ሰራተኞቹ አገልግሎቱን በትክክለኛው መንገድ በመጀመሪያው ጊዜ ይሰጣሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
9	ሰራተኞቹ ለደንበኛው ችግር ልባዊ ርዕይና ተቆርቋኝነት ያሳያሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
10	ሰራተኞቹ ከስህተት የፀዳ አገልግሎት ይሰጣሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
11	ሰራተኞቹ ደንበኛው አገልግሎት ማግኘት የሚችልበትን ትክክለኛ ሰአት ያሳውቃሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
12	ሰራተኞቹ በማንኛውም ጊዜ ደንበኛውን ለመርዳት ፈቃደኛና ዝግጁ ናቸው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
13	ሰራተኞቹ ፈጣን እና የተቀላጠፈ አገልግሎት ይሰጣሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
14	ሰራተኞቹ የደንበኛን ጥያቄ ለማስተናገድ ሁሌም ዝግጁ ናቸው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
15	ሰራተኞቹ ትሁትና ሰው አክባሪ ናቸው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
16	ሰራተኞቹ ስለሚሰጧቸው አገልግሎቶች በቂ ሙያዊ እውቀት አላቸው።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
17	ሰራተኞቹ ደንበኛው የመተማመን ሥሜት እንዲያድርበት ያደርጋሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
18	ደንበኛው ያደረገው ግብይት አስተማማኝና ጥቅሙን ያስጠበቀ	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

እንደሆነ ይሰማዋል።		
19 ሰራተኞቹ ለደንበኛው ግላዊ ፍላጎት ትኩረት ይሰጣሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
20 የጉዞ ወኪሉን በማንኛውም ጊዜና ሰዓት ለማግኘት ይቻላል።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
21 ሰራተኞቹ ለእያንዳንዱ ደንበኛ ልዩ ትኩረትና አክብሮት ይሰጣሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
22 ሰራተኞቹ ሁልጊዜም ለደንበኛው የተሻለ አማራጭ ለማምጣት ይተጋሉ።	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

ክፍል ሁለት:

በአጠቃላይ ከጉዞ ወኪሉ ባገኙት አገልግሎት ምን ያህል ረክተዋል?

በጣም ረክቻለሁ	ረክቻለሁ	አስተያየት የለኝም	አልረካሁም	በጣም አልረካሁም
5	4	3	2	1

ክፍል ሶስት: ጠቅላላ መረጃ

እባክዎ ምርጫዎትን በማክበብ ይመልሱ።

ጾታ

- 1. ወንድ
- 2. ሴት

እድሜ

- 18-24
- 2. 25-34
- 3. 35-44
- 4. 45-54
- 5. 55-64
- 6. 65 እና ከዚያ በላይ

3. የትምህርት ደረጃ

- 1. ከሁለተኛ ደረጃ በታች
- 2. ሁለተኛ ደረጃ
- 3. W.Cተፍኬት/ዲፕሎማ
- የመጀመሪያ ዲግሪ
- ሁለተኛ ደረጃ ዲግሪና ከዛ በላይ

የጉዞዎ አላማ

- 1. ለመዘናናት
- 2. ለመሰሪያቤት ስራ
- 3. የግል ስራ/ንግድ
- ቤተሰብ/ጓደኛ ለመጎብኘት
- ሌላ፤ ይግለጹ. -----

የጉዞ ወኪል አገልግሎት የሚጠቀሙበት ጊዜ በአማካኝ

1. በአመት ከአንድ ጊዜ በታች

3. በአመት ሁለት ጊዜ

በአመት አራት ጊዜ

2. በአመት አንድ ጊዜ

በአመት ሶስት ጊዜ

በአመት አምስት ጊዜና ከዚያ በላይ