

The Role of Public Areas in Improving Service Quality at Tentrem Hotel Yogyakarta

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the role of public areas in improving service quality at Tentrem Hotel Yogyakarta. Clean, comfortable, and aesthetic public areas have a significant influence on guest perceptions and hotel image. This study uses a qualitative method by employing interviews, observations, and documentation for collecting the data. This research method uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection is carried out by interview, observation, and documentation. The validity test of this study uses the Data Triangulation method as a data validity measurement technique. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive analysis to describe the existing findings. The results of the study indicate that public areas play an important role as the "face of the hotel" which creates a first impression for guests. Factors that influence the quality of service in public areas include staff discipline and skills, coordination between departments, completeness of facilities, and routine maintenance. Guest perceptions of public areas at Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta are generally positive, with appreciation for the cleanliness, comfort, and friendliness of the staff. This study concludes that optimal public area management can improve service quality and guest satisfaction at the hotel.

Keywords: Public Area; Housekeeping; Service Quality; Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta; Guest Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

In the hospitality industry, quality service is a fundamental element that not only determines current guest satisfaction but also becomes the main foundation in building long-term loyalty and competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive market. In the midst of the proliferation of hotels with various concepts and classes, the service aspect becomes a real differentiator even more than just price or location. In this context, service quality is not only about speed and accuracy in serving, but also concerns the emotional impression felt by guests throughout their stay in the hotel environment. One important element that plays a big role in forming this impression is the public area.

Public areas in a hotel include all spaces that are accessible to the public or guests, such as lobbies, corridors, waiting areas, lounges, gardens, swimming pools, and gallery spaces. These areas are not just transit or complementary facilities, but have developed into visual

communication media and sensory experiences that represent the identity and values of a hotel. In many cases, a guest's first impression of a hotel, whether positive or negative, is formed from the moment they first step into the lobby or wait for service in the public area. Therefore, public areas have a very strategic function: not only as a physical space, but also as the face of the hotel's service itself.

Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta, as one of the leading five-star hotels in the city of culture, places public areas as a central element in building a brand experience. The concept is not merely functional, but also emotional and symbolic. The public areas in this hotel are designed with a strong artistic and cultural approach—combining elements of Javanese cultural heritage with modern comfort. A spacious and quiet lobby, a lounge with carved wooden interior, an inner garden that blends with a calm stream, and an art gallery displaying works by local artists—all are carefully curated to convey the values of elegance, tranquility, and grace typical of Yogyakarta. In this context, the public area is not just a “waiting room” or “traffic space,” but a storytelling medium for Hotel Tentrem’s image as a hotel with a classy and meaningful service philosophy.

However, despite its vital function, research that specifically discusses how public area elements are arranged, managed, and contribute to the perception of service quality is still relatively minimal, especially with a qualitative approach that allows for in-depth exploration of the subjective experience of guests. Most studies on service quality in hotels focus more on aspects of room service, speed of check-in/check-out, or main facilities such as restaurants and spas. In fact, public spaces are the main meeting point between hotels and guests—both guests who stay, just visit, or potential customers who assess the hotel from the shared space before making a decision. Public areas have great potential to create “moments of truth” crucial moments that shape the overall image of the service.

In this case, Hotel Tentrem presents an interesting case study: how hotel management designs and manages public areas not only from an aesthetic perspective, but also in its direct relation to the quality of service and guest experience. Starting from the arrangement of lighting and background music, the behavior of staff on duty in public areas, cleanliness control, to ease of access for people with disabilities, all are part of the totality of the services provided. Therefore, understanding how public areas at Hotel Tentrem are managed as a whole provides a comprehensive picture of the role of public space as a strategic instrument in improving services.

Therefore, this study is significant, not only because it highlights the often-neglected physical and aesthetic dimensions of hotels, but also because it attempts to describe the relationship

between space, service behavior, and perceived quality in a real context. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of meaning from the narratives of guest and staff experiences, which so far cannot be adequately represented through numbers or quantitative scales alone. In other words, this study seeks to answer the key question: how can a hotel's public space become a medium of service that is felt and remembered by guests and how it contributes to building deep and sustainable loyalty.

LITERATUR RIVIEW

Public Area Hotel

Public areas are shared spaces available to all guests, whether staying or just visiting. These areas include the lobby, lounge, hallway, garden, and seating areas around the restaurant or swimming pool. According to Jones and Lockwood (2004), public areas serve as the main meeting point between guests and the hotel's identity, both visually and emotionally. This is where the guest experience begins and is often where important moments take place that shape the guest's perception of the overall quality of the hotel. Bitner (1992) stated in the servicescape concept that the physical elements of the service space, including layout, decoration, cleanliness, and lighting, have a significant influence on customer behavior and perceptions. This is confirmed by Lin, Chen, and Lee (2014) who found that the physical quality of public areas has a direct effect on the perception of value and guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry in Taiwan.

Furthermore, a study by Walls et al. (2011) emphasized that hotel public spaces not only fulfill utilitarian functions (practical needs), but also hedonic and emotional functions, such as relaxation, security, and social comfort. Therefore, the design and management of public areas require a strategic approach to create a holistic and memorable guest experience.

Service Quality according to SERVQUAL

The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), is the most widely recognized measurement tool for assessing service quality based on the gap between customer expectations and actual perceptions received. This model includes five main dimensions:

1. Reliability (keandalan),
2. Responsiveness (daya tanggap),

3. Assurance (jaminan),
4. Empathy (empati), dan
5. Tangibles (bukti fisik).

In the context of hospitality, public areas play a major role in the tangible dimension, namely all visual and physical aspects observed by customers—such as cleanliness of the room, layout, room temperature, fragrance, and staff clothing. However, because interactions between staff and guests often occur in public spaces, other dimensions such as responsiveness and empathy are also involved. Research by Marković and Raspor (2010) in the hotel sector in Croatia stated that the combination of tangible elements and personal staff interactions greatly determine the perception of overall service quality. Meanwhile, Ladhari (2009) emphasized that the validity and flexibility of SERVQUAL are still very relevant in various service contexts, including the hotel industry, as long as the “tangible” dimension is adjusted to the complex physical scope of the hotel.

The Influence of Design on Guest Experience

Hotel interior design and aesthetic elements play a significant role in shaping guest experience. Bitner (1992) explains that physical atmosphere can influence customer behavior both consciously and subconsciously. The combination of elements such as lighting, color, aroma, and layout affect mood and perception of quality.

Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) added that the perception of aesthetics of a hotel lobby or waiting room has a positive correlation with customer satisfaction and the likelihood of recommending the hotel. In a follow-up study, Ryu and Jang (2008) showed that the value of hotel interior design and cleanliness of facilities have a direct influence on guest satisfaction and perception of fair price.

Furthermore, Chen and Tsai (2007) proved that the first visual impression in a hotel's public space greatly determines the guest's intention to revisit. This shows that aesthetics is not only about visual beauty but also has functional implications for guest loyalty.

Staff Role in Public Area

Hotel staff—especially those in the frontline—play a critical role in shaping guests' service impressions. Zeithaml et al. (1996) stated that interpersonal interactions in service are crucial, especially in emotional contexts such as friendliness, professionalism, and the ability to handle

complaints. In public spaces, staff such as receptionists, bellboys, and concierges are the main link between the visual image of the hotel and the actual experience felt by guests.

Ritchie and Gen (2010) added that spontaneous interactions by staff, such as greeting guests in the hallway or helping with luggage in the lobby, strengthen perceptions of empathy and sensitivity two factors that are highly valued by guests in the service industry.

In addition, a study by Kim et al. (2009) underlined the importance of communication and empathy training for hotel staff, especially those who frequently interact in public spaces. Guest experiences were shown to improve significantly when staff were able to adjust their approach to the characteristics and needs of guests.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is structured with a qualitative approach through a case study method focused on Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta as a single object. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore phenomena in depth and comprehensively, especially in understanding the role and function of public areas in shaping guest perceptions and experiences of hotel service quality. This approach is also suitable for exploring subjective, emotional, and contextual aspects, which cannot be adequately explained through a quantitative approach. This case study is exploratory descriptive, with the aim of understanding how physical design, staff behavior, and public space governance contribute to perceptions of hotel service. Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta was chosen as the research location because of its reputation as a five-star hotel that prioritizes premium service and has a distinctive and representative public area design and management. This hotel is also known as one of the leading hotel properties in Yogyakarta that combines local cultural values with international service standards.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted directly in the hotel's public areas, such as the lobby, lounge, room hallway, inner garden, and art gallery, to observe interactions between guests and staff and the hotel's space management behavior. Observations were conducted for two weeks, in the morning, afternoon, and evening, to capture the dynamics of activity during various operating hours. In-depth interviews were conducted with 17 informants consisting of three categories: hotel management (such as general managers and housekeeping supervisors), operational staff on duty in public spaces (such as receptionists, bellboys, and lounge staff), and hotel guests, both those staying or those who only visited the public areas. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with a duration of around 45–60 minutes per person. This technique was chosen to provide flexibility for informants to convey their experiences and views freely, but still within the focus of the research topic.

In addition, researchers also conducted a documentation study of internal hotel documents related to public area management, such as standard operating procedures (SOP) for cleanliness and service, maintenance schedules, interior design blueprints, and staff training modules. These documents provide additional data to validate findings from observations and interviews. Data analysis was conducted inductively by following the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of four main stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data from interviews and observations were manually coded to find patterns and main themes related to physical design, staff service, and guest experience. Each data obtained was then compared between sources as a triangulation effort to increase the validity and credibility of the research results.

To maintain data reliability, researchers also implemented strategies such as member checking, which is by asking for feedback from key informants on their interview transcripts, and conducting an audit trail, which is systematic documentation of the entire research process from start to finish. Data validity is also strengthened by noting the conformity between direct observations and informant statements and available hotel documents. Overall, this research method is designed to provide a comprehensive and meaningful picture of how public areas contribute to the perception of service quality at Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta, while also opening up space for reflection on the importance of public space design as part of a service strategy in the hotel industry.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Public area design and aesthetics

In observations and interviews, it was found that the hotel uses the concept of local culture (Jogja heritage) through batik elements, *wayang* motifs, and wood crafts. The combination of warm lighting, indoor plants, and spacious circulation space creates a calm, elegant, and welcoming atmosphere. One guest revealed:

“When I entered the lobby, I immediately felt at home—calm, quiet, and aesthetic” (Guest 3).

This shows how the aesthetic design is arranged not only visually but triggers a perception of comfort and positive value towards the hotel.

Cleanliness and maintenance

Observations show that there is a regular cleaning schedule every 30 minutes for the lobby and lounge. Housekeeping staff are seen alertly warming up the aroma, arranging magazines,

tidying up the sofas. The cleaning checklist policy data is very detailed (rag, mop, vacuum, aroma refresher) and there is a monitoring system that immediately informs management if there is a violation of SOP. This strengthens the “tangible” dimension in SERVQUAL.

Public area staff services

Staff are trained to be proactive: greeting guests as they enter public spaces, helping without waiting for a request, and maintaining polite and professional communication. Frontliners understand micro moments such as assisting with a trolley, helping guests find a seat, and saying goodbye at check-out. One manager stated:

“Consistent interaction in public spaces is key because it builds first impressions and trust.”

Guest perception

Guests rated the balance between physical design and warm, responsive, and helpful staff. Their satisfaction focused on three aspects: visual comfort, ease of access to assistance, and an overall impression of a 5-star hotel being met. Interview data suggested:

“I felt valued from the time I walked into the public space to my room—everything was neat, the staff was attentive, and I felt safe.”

Impact on loyalty

Some guests (3 out of 5) stated that they would return and recommend to their contacts. Public areas played a significant role in shaping this decision. Several business guests mentioned the lounge as an effective place to do light work or meetings, adding utilitarian value through service.

Analysis and Discussion

Integration of design and staff services

The findings show that physical design and staff service do not work separately but rather reinforce each other. The concept of local culture reflected through visual elements in public spaces creates an emotional value base, while staff service acts as an “implementer” to convey the value to guests in a tangible way. This interaction strengthens the dimensions of assurance, empathy, and responsiveness in SERVQUAL.

Public areas as touchpoints of service quality

Public areas serve as the main touchpoint in the guest customer journey. Moments of interaction such as arrival, transit, or leave occur in public spaces and have a major impact on perceived quality. Based on the results, high service quality—supported by good design and staff attitudes—builds loyalty and supports the strategy of high-star hotels.

Comparison with literature

The results are in line with the environmental servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992) which states that physical elements direct mood and perception. In line with Parasuraman (1988) regarding the tangible dimension as part of quality. Meanwhile, Ryu & Jang (2008) emphasized that aesthetics and cleanliness influence satisfaction, which is evident in this hotel. However, this finding expands by emphasizing local culture as an aesthetic “added value” that enhances the perception of the hotel’s specialness.

Managerial implications

Based on the conceptual model, several strategies can be taken:

1. Strengthen public space design sustainably, integrate cultural elements consistently.
2. Routinely conduct frontliner training specifically for interactions in public areas—focus on empathy, punctuality, and visual professionalism.
3. Implement a technology-based quality control system (automatic checklist monitoring, real-time guest feedback via QR code).
4. Involve business guests in loyalty programs through exclusive access to lounges, themed events, etc.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that public areas play a very important and strategic role in shaping guest perceptions of the overall quality of hotel service. At Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta, public areas do not merely function as traffic spaces or transit areas, but rather as carefully curated spaces to convey the hotel's identity, cultural values, and service quality to guests. The research findings show that the physical design of public areas that are aesthetic, comfortable, and characterized by local wisdom can create an atmosphere that supports tranquility, exclusivity, and a sense of professionalism. Elements such as warm lighting, contemporary Javanese-style interiors, furniture selection, and the use of distinctive aromas provide guests with a deep sensory experience from the first time they enter the hotel's public areas. However, service quality is not solely determined by physical aspects. The interaction and behavior of hotel staff in public spaces have proven to be important keys that strengthen positive guest

perceptions. Friendly attitudes, sensitivity to guest needs, readiness to help, and polite and professional communication are aspects that form a personal impression and increase guest comfort while at the hotel. Small interactions—such as a sincere greeting in the lobby or spontaneous assistance in the lounge—are important moments that create an emotional connection between guests and the hotel.

The combination of representative public space design and excellent staff service creates a holistic experience that strengthens the perception of service quality. In this context, the public area becomes a kind of “living showcase” that shows the standard of service quality promised by the hotel. Public space not only supports the tangible dimension in the SERVQUAL theory but also provides space for the functioning of the responsiveness, empathy, and assurance dimensions in service practices. Thus, it can be concluded that the public area has a real contribution in building guest satisfaction, comfort, and even loyalty to the hotel. Hotel Tentrem Yogyakarta shows that well-planned public space management—both in terms of design, maintenance, and service interaction—can provide a guest experience that is not only quality, but also memorable and worthy of recommendation. The results of this study provide a new understanding that service quality is not only formed in the room or at check-in and check-out but rather starts from public spaces that are the first and last point of interaction between guests and the hotel. Therefore, professional public area management, sensitive to detail, and oriented towards guest experience needs to be an integral part of the hotel service strategy, especially in five-star hotels that carry premium service standards.

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