

Guest Satisfaction And Hotel Competitiveness In Emerging Tourism Markets: A Case Study Of Bukhara's Hotel Industry

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Abstract: This article investigates the competitive standing of prominent hotels in Bukhara through a structured empirical approach. Drawing on survey responses from 142 participants, the research examines the core determinants of hotel choice — namely pricing, accessibility, quality of service, and online guest feedback — alongside operational performance metrics and overall visitor satisfaction levels. The findings highlight both competitive advantages and notable gaps within Bukhara's hotel service landscape. In particular, Wi-Fi connectivity (6.99/10) and supplementary service offerings (7.41/10) were identified as the weakest-performing areas. The study further demonstrates that competitiveness varies considerably from one hotel to another. These findings advance the understanding of hospitality competitiveness in regions of historical and cultural significance, while offering actionable guidance for hotel operators and tourism authorities seeking to elevate service standards, strengthen guest loyalty, and foster the long-term sustainability of the local hospitality industry.

Keywords: hotel competitiveness, service quality, guest satisfaction, types of services, sustainability, review analysis, survey analysis

INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry is expanding rapidly, and the hotel services sector has become a strategic branch of the world economy. According to the UN Tourism (formerly UNWTO), the number of international tourist arrivals reached approximately 1.3 billion in 2023, representing about 88% of pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels (UN Tourism, 2024). Uzbekistan, including the Bukhara region, occupies an important position in this process. In 2025, the country received approximately 11.7 million foreign visitors for tourism purposes, according to data from the National Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan (2025).

Bukhara is a distinguished historical city inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, and the steady growth in tourist arrivals has made the development of the hotel industry increasingly important. In this context, competitiveness assumes a decisive role. Competitiveness refers to a hotel's ability to maintain and develop its advantages relative to competitors in the market (Porter, 1985; Barney, 1991). In assessing hotel competitiveness, service quality, pricing policy, location, digital marketing, guest satisfaction, and staff-related requirements are considered key indicators (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Kim & Kim, 2005). Numerous studies based on the SERVQUAL model have demonstrated a strong positive relationship between guest satisfaction and hotel competitiveness (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2008).

The limited number of scientific studies on Bukhara's hotels reveals a gap in knowledge in this field. This article aims to partially bridge that gap by providing an empirical assessment of the competitiveness of Bukhara's hotels based on survey data.

Table 1. Key Indicators for Assessing Hotel Competitiveness

Indicator	Description	Sources
Service Quality	Technical and functional quality of hotel services	Parasuraman et al. (1988)
Price Competitiveness	The degree to which the price corresponds to the services offered	Porter (1985)
Convenience of Location	Proximity to transport hubs and tourist attractions	Kim & Kim (2005)
Guest Satisfaction	The match between expected and actual experience	Gu & Ryan (2008)
Online Reputation	Ratings on Booking.com, TripAdvisor, and other platforms	Filieri et al. (2015)
Digital Marketing	Effectiveness of online hotel promotion	Leung et al. (2013)

The objective of this study is to measure the level of guest satisfaction at the principal hotels of Bukhara, identify the key factors influencing competitiveness, and develop corresponding recommendations. To achieve this objective, the study addresses the following research questions:

- Which factors are decisive in hotel selection?
- What are the key service quality indicators at Bukhara's hotels?
- How does the level of competitiveness differ across individual hotels?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey method. The questionnaire consisted of structured questions and comprised two parts: demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, citizenship, and purpose of visit) and an evaluation of hotel service quality (13 indicators measured on a scale from 1 to 10). In total, the questionnaire included 21 questions, the last of which was an open-ended item for additional suggestions. A 10-point rating scale developed on the basis of the SERVQUAL methodology was used as the assessment tool (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Data collection was conducted during the summer–autumn season of 2024. The sample was formed using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling approaches. Respondents were recruited at the principal hotels of Bukhara, as well as near historical centers and major tourist attractions. A total of 142 respondents completed the questionnaire (Table 2). The sample size was calculated using the Cochran (1977) formula and corresponds to a 95% confidence level with an 8% margin of error.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n=142)

Variable	Category	Number (n)	Share (%)
Gender	Female	76	53.5%
	Male	66	46.5%
Age	20–30 years	17	12.0%
	30–40 years	63	44.4%
	40–50 years	51	35.9%
	60 years and above	11	7.7%
Citizenship	Uzbekistan	71	50.0%
	Asian countries	29	20.4%
	European countries	25	17.6%
	CIS countries	17	12.0%
Purpose of Visit	Tourism	85	59.9%
	Business trip	21	14.8%
	Pilgrimage	20	14.1%
	Education and other	16	11.3%

The collected data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and Python (pandas and NumPy libraries). The analysis encompassed the following methods:

- descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies);
- comparative analysis across hotels;
- rating analysis of service quality indicators;
- factor analysis — distribution of selection criteria.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

A total of 142 respondents participated in the study. In terms of gender distribution, female respondents (53.5%, $n = 76$) slightly outnumbered male respondents (46.5%, $n = 66$). With respect to age, the majority of respondents were in the 30–40 age group (44.4%, $n = 63$) and the 40–50 age group (35.9%, $n = 51$). This finding suggests that hotel services are more frequently used by middle-aged and economically active individuals.

From the perspective of citizenship, half of the respondents (50.0%, $n = 71$) were citizens of Uzbekistan. Among foreign guests, representatives of Asian countries accounted for 20.4% ($n = 29$) and those from European countries represented 17.6% ($n = 25$). Guests from CIS countries comprised 12.0% ($n = 17$). The 50% share of foreign guests indicates that Bukhara is gradually strengthening its position as an international tourism destination.

Hotel Selection Factors and Sources of Information

When asked how they had learned about the hotel, the most frequently cited source was online booking platforms (Booking.com, Expedia, etc.), mentioned by 63 respondents (44.4%). Travel agencies were indicated by 38 respondents (26.8%), recommendations from friends and relatives by 29 respondents (20.4%), and search engines (Google, Yandex) by 12 respondents (8.5%). In the analysis of decisive factors influencing hotel selection, price (95 responses, 66.9%) and service quality (90 responses, 63.4%) ranked as the most important factors. Convenience of location was indicated by 68 respondents (47.9%), while guest reviews were identified by 63 respondents (44.4%). Many respondents reported that several factors simultaneously influenced their choice of hotel.

Table 3. Distribution of Hotel Selection Criteria

Selection Criterion	Number of Respondents	Share (%)
Price	95	66.9%
Service Quality	90	63.4%
Location	68	47.9%
Guest Reviews	63	44.4%

(Note: as respondents were able to indicate more than one criterion, the total percentage exceeds 100%.)

Ratings of Service Quality Indicators

Respondents assessed 13 service quality indicators on a scale from 1 to 10. The overall mean score was 7.65. The highest ratings were awarded to room cleanliness upon check-in (7.80/10) and food quality (7.80/10). The lowest rating was given to internet speed (6.99/10), which was noticeably below the overall mean score. Within the framework of the study, service quality indicators at Bukhara's hotels were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods based on respondents' ratings. The overall mean value of service quality indicators was 7.65, reflecting a medium-to-high standard of service at the hotels. A standard deviation of 1.63 indicates that, despite a certain degree of variation in respondents' opinions, the evaluation results demonstrate a relatively stable general trend.

In terms of individual indicators, the highest-rated service elements included room cleanliness (7.80), food quality (7.80), room comfort (7.77), convenience of the check-in process (7.70), and staff communication skills (7.70). These results indicate a high level of performance in core service components at the hotels, particularly operational services that are most significant to guests. In particular, cleanliness and food quality stand out as key factors shaping overall guest satisfaction.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Service Quality Indicators

Indicator	Mean (M)	Std. Dev.	Rating Level
Convenience of check-in (Q8)	7.70	1.62	High
Front desk staff performance (Q9)	7.61	1.64	Medium
Courtesy of staff (Q10)	7.70	1.61	High
Room cleanliness upon check-in (Q11)	7.80	1.55	High
Room comfort (Q12)	7.77	1.31	High
Daily housekeeping (Q13)	7.69	1.54	Medium
Food quality (Q14)	7.80	1.58	High
Internet speed (Q15)	6.99	2.05	Low

Indicator	Mean (M)	Std. Dev.	Rating Level
Overall hotel cleanliness (Q16)	7.59	1.59	Medium
Additional services (Q17)	7.41	1.82	Low
Staff overall (Q18)	7.65	1.60	Medium
Service level (Q19)	7.65	1.51	Medium
Likelihood to recommend (Q20)	7.68	1.77	Medium
Overall Mean	7.65	1.63	Medium-High

Other service quality indicators — front desk staff performance (7.61), daily housekeeping quality (7.69), overall hotel cleanliness (7.59), overall staff performance (7.65), service level (7.65), and the likelihood of recommending the hotel (7.68) — received medium-to-high ratings, indicating that the service quality system is consistently developed. At the same time, there remains potential for further improvement in these areas, which would contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of the hotels.

The analysis also identified relatively lower ratings for certain service elements. In particular, internet speed (6.99) and the quality of additional services (7.41) were noted as the lowest-rated dimensions. It is important to emphasize that the quality of internet services constitutes one of the key infrastructural factors in the modern hospitality industry, and its lower rating may negatively affect guest satisfaction, particularly among business travelers. Furthermore, the insufficient development of additional services — such as transfer services, excursion organization, spa services, and other supplementary offerings — may be considered one of the factors limiting the differential competitiveness of hotels in the market. An analysis of standard deviation values revealed that the greatest variation in respondents' opinions was observed for the following indicators: internet speed (2.05), additional services (1.82), and likelihood of recommending the hotel (1.77). This suggests that the quality of these service dimensions varies considerably across individual hotels.

Competitiveness Analysis by Hotel

In the analysis of overall mean scores across the principal hotels, Hotel Nodir Devonbegi (8.34/10) recorded the highest result. It was followed by Hotel Sahid Zarafshan (7.89/10) and Hotel Asia Bukhara (7.56/10). Hotel Malika (7.53/10) and Hotel Lyabi House (7.29/10) demonstrated a medium level of competitiveness, while Dunyo Palace Hotel (7.09/10) recorded the lowest result. Table 5 presents a comparative analysis of the competitiveness of Bukhara's leading hotels across a range of key service quality indicators. The results of the analysis enable the identification of the hotels' service levels, their responsiveness to guest needs, and their overall competitive strengths.

According to the table data, Hotel Nodir Devonbegi recorded the highest overall mean score (8.34 points), demonstrating strong results in service quality, room comfort, food quality, and additional services. In particular, room comfort (8.57 points) and food quality (8.43 points) stand out as the principal strengths of this hotel, indicating effective implementation of a guest-oriented service strategy. Hotel Sahid Zarafshan ranked second (7.89 points), consistently delivering strong results across virtually all indicators. Notably, room comfort (8.04 points), food quality (8.04 points), and likelihood of recommending the hotel (8.00 points) attest to a high level of guest satisfaction, confirming the effectiveness of the hotel's service quality system and internal management.

The scores of Asia Bukhara Hotel (7.56 points) and Malika Bukhara Hotel (7.53 points) are close to each other, both demonstrating a medium-to-high standard of service quality. In Asia Bukhara Hotel, room comfort (7.86 points) and food quality (7.96 points) received relatively high ratings, while internet speed (6.71 points) emerged as the weakest indicator. In Malika Bukhara Hotel, front desk staff performance (7.48 points) and additional services (7.48 points) were assessed as consistent, although certain service components still provide room for improvement.

Lyabi House (7.29 points) and Dunyo Palace Hotel (7.09 points) posted relatively lower overall results. In Lyabi House, front desk staff performance (7.00 points) and room comfort (7.17 points) were rated somewhat lower, although internet speed (7.25 points) was higher than at several other hotels. In Dunyo Palace Hotel, internet speed (5.23 points) was identified as a particularly critical indicator — the lowest recorded among all hotels — which may negatively affect guest satisfaction.

Table 5. Competitiveness Indicators by Principal Hotel

Indicator	Nodir-devonbegi	Sahid Zar.	Asia	Malika	Lyabi House	Dunyo Palace
Check-in	8.00	7.87	7.61	7.56	7.25	7.46

Indicator	Nodir-devonbegi	Sahid Zar.	Asia	Malika	Lyabi House	Dunyo Palace
Front desk performance	8.14	7.74	7.64	7.48	7.00	7.62
Room comfort	8.57	8.04	7.86	7.74	7.17	7.15
Food quality	8.43	8.04	7.96	7.67	7.17	7.08
Internet speed	8.00	7.30	6.71	7.07	7.25	5.23
Additional services	8.29	7.83	7.07	7.48	7.08	7.15
Likelihood to recommend	8.43	8.00	7.46	7.70	7.25	7.15
OVERALL MEAN	8.34	7.89	7.56	7.53	7.29	7.09

Overall, the research findings indicate that hotel competitiveness is directly associated with room comfort, food quality, front desk services, and the quality of additional services. At the same time, the necessity of intensifying modernization efforts in certain hotels — with respect to internet speed and the quality of additional services — has been identified. This will contribute to further improvements in service quality and a sustained enhancement of guest satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

The research results enabled the formulation of several important conclusions. First, the overall level of service quality at Bukhara's hotels was assessed as medium-to-high (7.65/10). In comparison with similar studies conducted in the Asian region, this indicator may be regarded as competitive (Kim & Kim, 2005; Tsang & Qu, 2000).

Second, internet speed (6.99/10) received the lowest rating among all indicators. This finding confirms that digital infrastructure is becoming increasingly important for contemporary guests. Xu and Gursoy (2015) noted in their research that internet quality is emerging as one of the primary requirements in hotel services. In addition, additional services (7.41/10) also fell below the overall mean score, pointing to the need for further investment in this area.

Third, Hotel Nodir Devonbegi (8.34/10) emerged as the most competitive hotel in the sample. Although relatively modest in scale, maintaining consistently high scores across all indicators is of fundamental importance. The success of small, specialized hotels confirms that the application of a niche strategy can strengthen competitive positioning (Barney, 1991).

The identification of price and service quality as the primary selection criteria (price 66.9%, service quality 63.4%) supports Zeithaml's (1988) concept of perceived value: guests evaluate not only price itself but the relationship between price and service quality. The prominence of online booking platforms as the leading source of information (44.4%) underscores the strategic importance of digital marketing and online reputation management (Filiari et al., 2015).

Based on the research findings, the following practical recommendations are proposed:

- Modernization of internet infrastructure: hotels should ensure high-speed and stable Wi-Fi connectivity, which can significantly enhance their competitiveness.
- Expansion of additional services: the development of animation programs, excursion organization, and spa and wellness services can improve overall guest satisfaction level.
- Strengthening the digital marketing strategy: given that 44.4% of respondents identified hotels through online booking platforms, it is essential to actively manage online reputation and strengthen positioning on platforms such as Booking.com and Expedia.
- Improving staff qualifications: respondents emphasized the importance of enhancing employees' foreign language proficiency and communication skills. Training programs based on international hospitality standards should therefore be implemented.
- Optimizing the price–quality ratio: since price is a primary selection criterion, hotels should ensure that pricing policies correspond to an appropriate level of service quality.

CONCLUSION

This study, aimed at assessing the competitiveness of Bukhara's leading hotels based on data collected from 142 respondents, yielded several important conclusions. The overall level of service quality at Bukhara's hotels was assessed as medium-to-high (7.65/10). Among all indicators, internet speed (6.99/10) and additional services (7.41/10) represent the most vulnerable service dimensions. Price (66.9%) and service quality (63.4%) remain the leading factors influencing hotel selection, while online booking platforms (44.4%) rank first among sources of information. This trend underscores the growing importance of digital infrastructure and online marketing strategies in the development of Bukhara's hotel industry. In the comparative hotel ranking, Hotel Nodir Devonbegi

(8.34/10) achieved the highest result, followed by Hotel Sahid Zarafshan (7.89/10). The 50% share of foreign guests indicates Bukhara's strengthening position in the international tourism market, which places increased demands on hotels to provide services in accordance with international standards, ensure multilingual communication, and offer a diverse culinary menu.

Future research is recommended to conduct a more detailed service quality analysis based on the SERVQUAL model, carry out longitudinal studies with larger samples, and perform comparative analyses across other tourist cities of Uzbekistan.

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