

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEA TRANSPORT PASSENGERS IN ISLAND GARDEN CITY OF SAMAL**Geraldine Sotto- Giangan****Orcid Id-**<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0120-2250>**Annie C. Macarambon****Orcid Id-**<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9150-9955>**Melvin Ronald S. Manuel****OrcidId-**<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7780-2967>

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ABSTRACT

The major intent of this study is to explore the experiences of seaport passengers of the Island Garden City of Samal, Davao del Norte in terms of service quality rendered by the seaport personnel during traversing Babak and Kinawitnon Wharves. Using the three (3) dimensions of Service Quality Theory of Brady and Cronin (2001), namely, the interaction quality or their attitude and/ behavior, and expertise of both passengers and personnel towards travelling the wharf or seaports; physical environment quality or the status of the two wharves in the contexts of ambient conditions, designs, and social factors of the area and vessels; and lastly, the outcome quality or the waiting time, tangibles, and valence. According to the survey, passengers on sea transport appreciate polite, transparent, and reliable interactions with service crews, especially for vulnerable populations like youngsters, the elderly, and those with disabilities. Ferry boats are preferred over motorboats due to their comfort and safety, but the results show that crew behavior, communication, and facilities—including gender-sensitive amenities—need to be improved. The report suggests routine crew training, the installation of feedback systems, and infrastructure improvements to allay these worries and enhance the overall traveler experience. The study concludes that passenger safety and comfort in maritime transportation are significantly increased by well-designed facilities, appropriate equipment, and professional personnel appearance. Knowledgeable service crews are particularly important in inclement weather.

Keywords:

Service Quality, Sea Transport Passengers, Local Facility

INTRODUCTION

Service quality has corroborated the intricacy of similarities and incapability to measure them across entities by comprehensive actions. According to Mangahas and Leyesa, (2003), despite the government involvement on public sector reforms, including the seafaring industry, shows that sustaining efforts are among the problems that the government has continuously faced. This is supported by Hetherington et al., (2005) that the shipping industry has a good safety record in some countries, though, shipping logistics have a high potential catastrophe across the world.

Soares and Pedro (2006) stated that the specific reasons and/ factors commonly existing that should be the utmost priorities in the maritime industry are the following; inadequate design of passenger ferry boats likely caused by radar failure, propulsion failure, steering failure, steer failure, engine failure, gearbox failure, coupling failure, generators, switchboards, accumulators, fuel system, hydraulic system, lack of onboard collision avoidance system, power loss, CCTV/VHP/GPS/DHP/ARPA failure which contributed to the increasing negative outcome in terms of vessel damage or casualties to the passengers and crew". This is supported by Degiuli, et.al (2015); that there is a need to maintain and monitor the overall status, not just the implementation but also the physical aspect of the vessel. This will serve as preventive dealings towards extreme weather creates pressure on the adjacent area of the vessel's frame tends to slant the vessel resulting to disturb the stability and capsize of the vessel. Further, Kiersten (2015); stated that the most considered critical causes are the following: overloading, lack of adequate safety gears for passengers, lacking safety awareness, unreliable regulatory and safety checks, poor inspection of safety requirements, insufficient of life jacks, inadequate maintenance and survey of vessels, complacency of harbor supervisors, lack safety officers and inadequate inspectors to survey the vessels operate in the and unethical practice of ship owners and operators, inadequate rescue response, lack of communication and human errors. Noted by Ibrahim and Ahmed, (2011) that the accessibility and great quality offices at the ferry terminal are referred to as one of the factors that influence the fast development of the service sector at this terminal. Drewry, (1998) stated that Security actions at the routinized shipping services have been a general attitude of taking an inward-looking view of safety regulation to the degree that current interchanges near a systematic method to safety and risk management may even be positioned at the nethermost of the company's agenda. Thus, according to Moscardo, (2001) these unstable and or lack of facilities, equipment, machinery/ vessel, and inconsistent safety measure standards, etc. will create an undesirable feeling and consequently invites dissatisfaction or complaint among travelers.

In the contexts of limitations and innovations in the implementations, Alamdari, (1999) stated that there should be a win-win situation to satisfy customer's needs and requirements, meet the objectives of the company, and at the same time to outperform competitors through product and services variation. This is supported by Wilkinson et. al (1998) that the lack of commitment from any group within the organization can be a crucial barrier in the management of quality. Drewry, (1998: 53) added that summing up factors as internal failures to product service, warranties and returns, direct costs and allowances, or product recall costs, liability, and costs failing to meet the quality requirements before delivering its services. This statement is supported by Schacht (2012) that the continuous neglect of the passenger ferry boat incident/ accidents in the context of the value of public safety still the negative turning point of ship operators and owners hungry for income. In the crew's viewpoint, Berget et. al, (2013) stated that the lack of a good safety climate, culture influenced the individual staff to engage in safe or unsafe behavior and coincidences deviate the entire system of implementation. Baker (2013), supported that notwithstanding increased safety and security alert, as the number of passenger ferryboats has full-grown, there had also been an increased rate of passenger ferry boat incidents across the world.

Chesnokova and Kobylatskiy, (n.d) supported that the above mentioned are mainly considered as anthropogenic alterations that greatly affects the seafaring industry, leading to a complex and diverse problem. On the other hand, according to MORI-SRI, (2002), the aspect of 'comfort' is highly emphasized and should be managed properly because it influences the traveler's level of satisfaction. This is supported by UNCTAD (1997) that 'Quality' focused on the customer, included its level of satisfaction in terms of services.

This phenomenological explorative study aims to provide data aiding in the policy formulation, or review and enhancement anchored to and serve as evidence in the implementations of the Republic Act (R.A.) No. 9295, otherwise known as the "Domestic Shipping Development Act of 2004". This is an act promoting the development of Philippine domestic shipping, shipbuilding, and ship repair and shipbreaking, ordaining and other reforms in government policies towards the shipping or maritime industry in the Philippines.

According to IGACOS City Planning and Tourism Office, 2016, aside from the existing government operated ports or wharves, there is a growing number of jetties, breakwaters causeways and similar structures around the coastline of Samal island. A port or wharf is the avenue of seaport accessibility crossing island to island and or coming in and going out of the island, while ferry boat and motorized Banca and launches are the usual media of sea transportations. The city has designated ten (10) official common entry points which currently having five main (5) existing entry and exit points/ports/ wharves located in Barangay Villarica, Kinawitnon, Poblacion Kaputian, Sta Cruz and Dadatan, to provide convenience in transportation activities to the public, to properly monitor the interchange of vehicle and people in and out of the city, and to curtail the issue on not-conforming locations of access areas.

This study is prelude through the following field interviews based on the identified objectives. In completing this research, exploring the experiences from the identified informants supported by literature or published information, the proper citation and/ in which this study is abiding by the research ethical standards.

OBJECTIVES

This study generally aims to explore service quality rendered by the seaport personnel of Island Garden City of Samal to seaport passengers traversing via Babak and Kinawitnon wharves. The study sought to answer the following specified research questions:

1. What are the interaction qualities in forms of attitude, behavior, and expertise delivered by the personnel towards the passengers?
2. What are the physical environment qualities featured by the vessel's ambient conditions, design and social factors in rendering services to passengers?
3. What are the outcome qualities in the context of waiting time, tangibles and valence in giving services to passengers?

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Procedure. This research is using purposive sampling in identifying informants. As accessibility and availability are concerned, the following criteria are considered and laid down as basic discretion by the researchers for them to become qualified as informants in the research: (i) all IGACOS residents; (ii) sea transport passengers traveling regularly going to Davao City and vice versa, regardless of/ from (iii) transaction purposes, (iv) sexual orientation, gender identity, and expressions; (v) aged 18 years old up and may belong to (vi) senior citizenship and or; (vii) differently-abled individuals but can travel alone and in good conditions; (viii) educational background, (ix) economic status; and (x) government or non-government entities.

After the conduct of the study, this research sorted the informants with the following: one (1) news writer, three (3) college students, five (5) barangay day-care worker, three (3) barangay officials, one (1) city councilor, four (4) IGACOS city employees, and three (3) provincial employees (nursing/ healthcare professionals) or a total of twenty (20) selected informants.

Research Instrument. Interview-guide was used for the in-depth interviews (IDI). This was formulated, tested and underwent a series of enhancements and validation. This tool is an explanatory sequential form translated to the local language to saturate in the thinking levels of the informants, to determine its effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness of the informants on the topic.

In attaining the parameters set by the researchers, there were three (3) preliminary questions having two (2) sub-questions on the third item, and eight (8) main questions having sub-questions that were answered by the informants. Also, support guided questions derived from the objectives were set in the study to saturate the purpose of the study.

Data Gathering and Collection Procedures. Following procedures were done: Before the conduct of the entire study, researchers secured first approved courtesy/permission letters from the local government unit (LGU) of the Island Garden City of Samal, and other seaport entities. The study commenced after the letter was secured and the seaport personnel was informed.

During the conduct of the study but before the in-depth-interview (IDI), first, the courtesy or permission and the intent of the study were introduced to the prospective informants, and it was done a couple of minutes hence, informants are on travel.

After securing the informants' approval, appointment details like venue, exact date and time, complete name, address, and mobile numbers and e-mail address through informed consent letter were shortly discussed and agreed by both prospect informants and researcher.

This study employed interviews strategies as supported by Patton, 1990, such; Interview guide method in where topics and issues are stated in advance but where the sequence is decided by the interviewer, Closed fixed response interview in where questions and response categories are fixed and determined in advance, Standard open-ended interviews in where the wordings and sequence of questions are resolute, and Informal conversational interviews in which questions arise from the instant background and are asked in the usual setting is also applicable.

During the in-depth interview (IDI), interview protocol as supported by Patton, 1990 was followed beginning with an introductory statement discussing the purpose of the study, duration and manner of the interview, and

the opportunity for questions. Each interview took an average time of ten minutes to thirty minutes using a semi-structured type of questionnaire. There were probes and impromptu questions to follow-up the informant's answers (see attached Questionnaire). Aside from instruments, interviews were recorded using an audio-video recorder, photo documentation and back-up notes by the other member of the research team to ensure when recording fails and non-verbal information were uncaptured.

The researcher engaged with the informants in the face-to-face exchange of ideas which is in-depth, personal, unhurried and it consists of brainstorming and drawing out the informant's feelings about the topic or question at hand. The guided questions helped to return the area of discussion every time the interview leads to new areas unintentionally explored. Strategies used in this study had permission from the authorities concerned.

Data Analysis Procedures. Gathered data were coded, analyzed/ interpreted, and clustered into themes. Using Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method, rigorous analysis with seven-step processes in staying close to the data resulting in a concise yet all-encompassing description of the phenomenon under study and validated by participants that created it.

According to Morrow, et.al. 2015, Descriptive phenomenology is concerned with revealing the "essence" or "essential structure" of any phenomenon under investigation- that is, those features that make it what it is, rather than something else.

Below are the seven-step processes (Figure.1) used by researchers in analyzing the collected data.

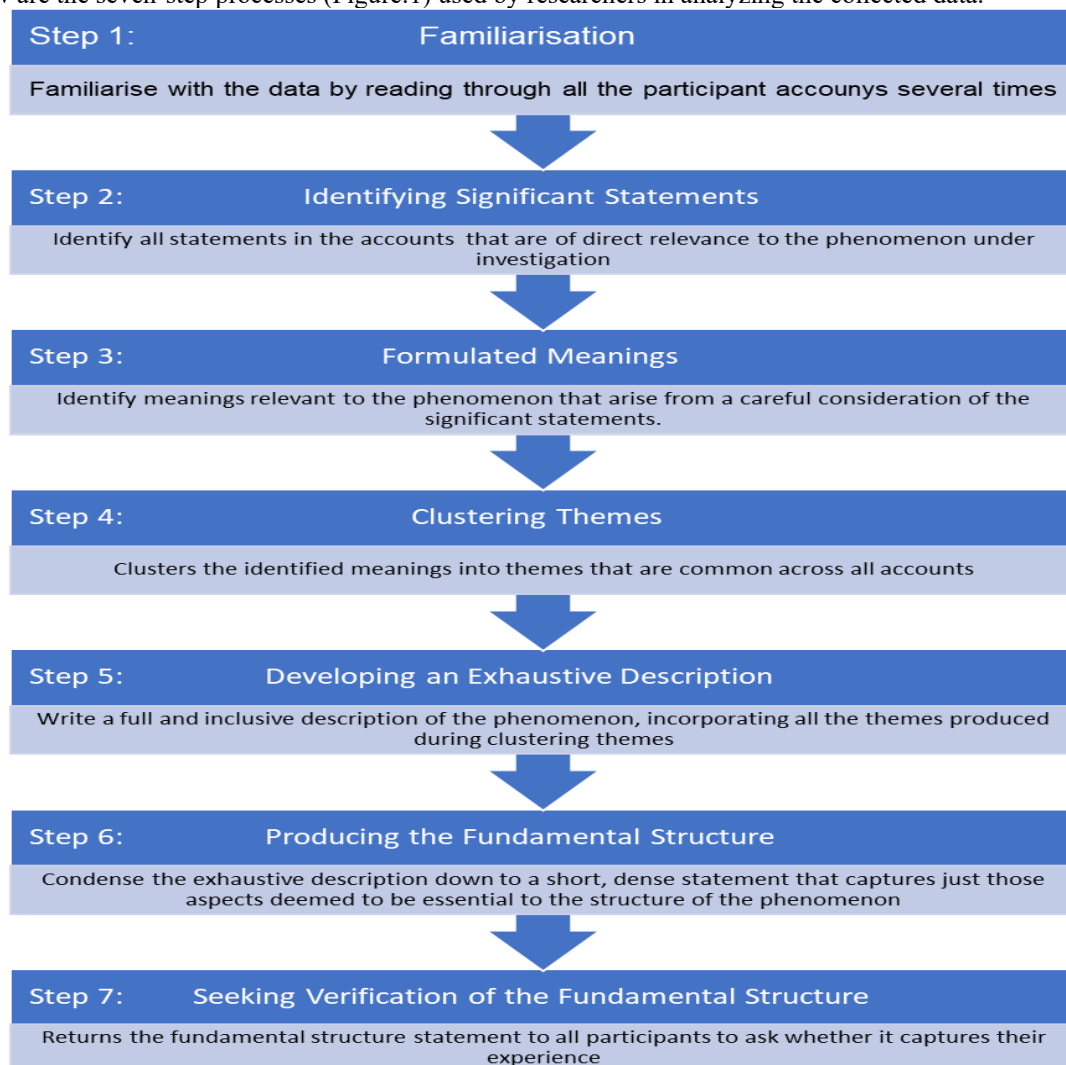


Figure 1. Colaizzi's descriptive phenomenological method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the experiences of sea transport passengers in the Island Garden City of Samal for service quality by Brady and Cronin (2001) which covers: interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality.

Theme.1. Sea Transport Passengers and Service Crew Interaction Quality. Interaction quality simply means the interplay between the sea transport passengers and the service crew of sea transportation. This study reveals the observations of informants on the manner in the workplace, attitude, and expertise of the service crew. According to the informants that the personnel services must be rendered wholly to assure the passengers' welfare and that there should have assistance from crew towards passengers. It was also finding out that persons with disabilities and senior citizens must be assisted and prioritized. For there are crews who assisted the passengers especially the children which assisting passengers are part of the rules and procedures in riding sea transport, while some of the service crews are friendly, others are not too interacting, like in explaining to the sea transport passengers, some of the service crews are not in low voice tone thus they will be interpreted by sea transport passengers as strict individuals. The study also revealed that in the motorboat, the service crew is willing to assist but some are asking for service fees to help, while others are not that visible to the sea transport passengers but somehow the service crews assistance to passengers are still felt in times that they are being needed. The study also revealed that the common comfort rooms, waiting sheds should be improved and provided with enhanced and safety measures for both users, and must be gender-sensitive. Seeking to find convenient alternatives in transportations, passengers preferred ferry boats than the motorboat. Because the ferry boat is bigger than the latter. In some cases that overloading is possible, and standards in arranging vehicles inside the boat should be one of the utmost considerations. The study further revealed that the pathway has a canopy, docking area and expansion and improvement and maintenance of the entire wharf area. In spite, some informants complain about the longest size of the wharf canopy contributing to the longest line of passengers waiting to cross to another side. Otherwise, both ports are considered by the traveller as comfortable about services, despite circumstances.

The service crew, being the service provider to sea transport passengers, must be equipped and oriented in the delivery of quality service. Further, the management should also undertake measures and strategies that would alleviate the gaps being identified by the customers by way of conducting trainings and seminars to service crews, establishing feedback mechanisms in order to address customer's critics, suggestions and recommendations, and providing projects that would enhance the facilities being the main structure where customers used to experience with.

Cluster-Theme 1.1: Manner in the workplace. The manner in the workplace is the action of the serviced crew towards the sea passengers. According to the informants, the service crew is friendly although not every service crew is, the assistance they rendered to the sea transport passengers is noted. Parasuraman et al., (1985) suggested 10 dimensions for measuring the gaps in their service quality model; reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding, and tangibles. Some researchers believe that measuring the gap between expectation and perception is not psychometrically able to obtain superior assessment of service quality (Brady & Cronin, 2001a). Service quality is a consumers' attitude and the performance (perceived service) of the service is the only measurement for service quality. In the hospitality industry, such as hotels, restaurants and sales on board passenger ships, service personnel tend to emotionally transfer their perceived work situation to the guests, thus meeting the very essence of the business (Gazzoli et al., 2010). This should primarily be considered a value in the service production, rather than a problem – a satisfied service crew provides satisfied customers. In this way, the service personnel's spontaneously communicated well-being becomes part of the experience that the customer pays for (Pantouvakis and Bouranta, 2013). The presence of the crew, in their working uniforms, acting professionally install a sense of trust and greatly affects passengers' perceptions of safety (Ahola et al., 2014). For instance, Larsen et al. (2012) studied the impact of employees' perception on their organizational commitment and job satisfaction, showing that the perceived respect, social atmosphere and living quarters were related to job commitment and job satisfaction.

Cluster-theme 1.2. Service Crew's Behavior. Behavior implies the actions, moves, conduct or functions of an individual or group towards other persons or the situation. In this study, the informants described the outward expression of the service crew's attitude.

According to informant, the service crew has willingness to assist sea transport passengers. Although generally, the informant's impression of service crew is having that willingness to assist sea transport passengers, there is also some service crew who are not.

As cited by informants, some service crew are not friendly and are not fully implementing the safety measures practices. Literature suggested that the customer's needs and expectation help to drive development of new service offering since customers determine the quality level of service delivered (Jablonski, 1992; Muffatto&Panizzolo, 1995), as the consumer satisfaction is the key point of customer purchase purpose and confidence, and the most gathered point in marketing results (Kotler, 2000). Furthermore, consumer satisfaction means the information inside associations, the accumulation, investigation, and spread of this information to communicates something specific about the implication of keeping an eye on clients and ensuring that they have a positive connection in the organization's products and ventures (Kotler, 2000).

The outward expression of the service crew's attitude implicates the wholeness of service provider's eagerness to serve its customers. Thus, a positive expression of service crew's attitude is highly needed towards the sea transport passengers and of his fellow service crews.

Cluster-theme 1.3. Service Crew's Expertise. Expertise in this study refers to whether the service personnel is knowledgeable or competent enough for their job. The competence of the service crew in this study is noted by informants as being able to respond to the sea transport passengers' transactions efficiently and patiently. The study revealed that service crews in different wharves have its style and system in dealing with sea transport passengers.

In the context of public safety, informant revealed that safety equipment compliance in the presence of life vests that are prepared in ratio to the allowable number of the capacity of passengers in the boat every travel, police visibility and mandatory writing in passengers manifest assured the sea transport passengers on their travel safeties'.

Informants also revealed that service crew are obviously knowledgeable enough on their job if they are well-trained on their nature of work as reflected on their training certificates.

The management has complied with the security requirements as to the provision of safety materials and gears, but, it should be noted that those safety gears must be updated and not worn-out. It is also the duty of the management to conduct information-orientation to sea transport passengers so to impart knowledge and make themselves ready on-times of emergency.

Theme 2. Quality of Physical Environment. Physical Environment Quality simple means designing service scape and providing physical evidence of service performances such as furnishings or interior designs, motorboat/ ferryboat/machinery/equipment, and staff personnel clothing. In this study, informants revealed their observations on the environment conditions, the architecture of facilities, and the social factors of the service crew. According to the informants, the service crew assured the safety of sea transport passengers during the duration of their travel especially during those times of having typhoons wherein the island is covered with the warning signal. It is stipulated that the 'security' aspect refers to a guarantee that the facility is safe to be used by tourists (MORI-SRI, 2002).

In the delivery of services, a knowledgeable service provider would mean efficiency and security towards the sea transport passengers especially on voyaging during weather disturbances.

Cluster-theme 2.1. Environment conditions. Environment Conditions pertain to non-visual features such as sea atmosphere. In this study, the informant revealed that travel convenience involves the functionality of facilities as its accessibility affects much on the comfort of sea transport passengers.

The assurance of sea transport passengers that they are safe during their travel has contributed to the good ambiance experienced. In the crew's viewpoint, lack of good safety climate, culture influenced the individual staff to engage in safe or unsafe behavior and coincidences deviate the entire system of implementation (Berget al, 2013; Hetherington et al, 2005).

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Cluster-theme 2.2. Architecture of Amenities. Design Facility refers to the design or architecture of the environment and can be either functional or aesthetic. The informants revealed in this study that the availability of improved facilities subsidized to the accessibility and comfort of the sea transport passengers.

In the availability of facilities, the informant noted that it is not enough to accommodate sea transport passengers. This supports the aspect of 'comfort' is highly emphasized and should be managed properly because it influences tourists' level of satisfaction (MORI-SRI, 2002). This is supported by UNCTAD of 1997 that 'Quality' focused on the customer which included its level of satisfaction in terms of services.

Cluster-theme 2.3. Sea Transport Passengers and Service Crew Social Factors. Social factors refer to the various types of sea transport passengers and number of types of service crew apparent in the service setting as well as their behavior. In this study, informants revealed that the interaction of sea transport passengers and service crew should be harmonious as to the extent of delivering services with patience, care and responsibility. Further, one informant mentioned that serving sea transport passengers with patience and smile would positively motivate person to start daily activity.

The quality of communication that the service provider has given to sea transport passengers is highly revealed in this study. This confined with the literature which states that 'Quality' is a set of minds that must saturate the entire top management, middle management and the workforce (UNCTAD, 1997).

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CONCLUSION

The study concludes that passenger pleasure and safety are greatly influenced by the physical environment and the quality of interactions, according to a study on the experiences of sea transport passengers in the Island Garden City of Samal. Accessible, gender-sensitive facilities and polite, well-trained service staff are crucial, particularly for vulnerable populations including children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Ferry boats are preferred over motorboats, which further emphasizes the need for more secure and comfortable modes of transportation. It is essential to have an informed staff and well-maintained infrastructure, especially in inclement weather. All passengers can have a safer and more enjoyable sea voyage if these factors are improved through training, feedback mechanisms, and facility upgrades.

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