CRITICAL FACTORS OF SERVICE QUALITY, CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

Tourism quality is a contribution of many stakeholders with a professional approach to meet customer expectations. Numerous studies have indicated a positive correlation between service quality & customer satisfaction. Similarly, past research has indicated a positive correlation between customer satisfaction & customer loyalty. The current research paper measures the service quality latent factors in tourism, including Amenities, Food, Hospitality, Hygiene, Safety & Security, and the latent factors of Customer Satisfaction & Customer Loyalty. The study undertaken in India uses convenience sampling to survey regular tourists across the states in India. The research methodology encompasses developing latent factor scale, questionnaire, data collection & data analysis using regression models to demonstrate the relation between the Critical Factors of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction & Customer Loyalty in the Tourism Industry.

Keywords: Services Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Amenities, Food, Hospitality, Hygiene, Safety & Security

Introduction

WTO (2003) summarized six standards for tourist services: Safety & Security, Hygiene, Accessibility, Transparency, Authenticity & Harmony.

Tourism is a complex value chain with individual elements that includes travel agents, travel & tour operators, hotel chains, & restaurants, which together determine tourist experiences & appreciation of service quality. The essential tourism product includes natural resources, common facilities for customers, communication facilities like internet, emergency telephone numbers, hotel accommodation & dining restaurants. Tourist attraction includes landscapes for viewing, activities to follow, and experiences to remember. Tourism quality includes safety & security.

Quality is a philosophy for guiding tourism organizations. Given the competitive business environment of the tourism industry, quality offers a competitive advantage. Customer care, benchmarking, staff training is essential for survival & competition. Quality management correctly applied will benefit the tourism industry. Service quality positively contributes to market share, ROI, & corporate success (Burch et al., 1995). Tourism services should determine the needs of the customer & improve the service offerings. Exploring the customer's expectation of Service Quality's critical factors provides a management tool to improve the tourism organization's service quality. Service Quality helps in retaining existing customers & also attracts new customers by positive word of mouth. Ritz-Carlton fosters a diverse work environment, enhanced life quality & fulfilment of individual aspiration. Customization plays a vital role in the tourism industry. Service quality measurement is essential & models have been developed (Cronin, 1992). Hwang and Lockwood (2006) emphasize the importance of customer focussed goals. Managers would benefit by measuring service quality from the customer's perspective.

Moore et al. (1998) reported that customer satisfaction is essential for business success. Customer satisfaction determines the success & continued existence of the tourism business (Gursery, 2007). According to Baker (2000), customer satisfaction in tourism is the tourist state of emotion after experiencing their tour. According to Chen (2007), customer satisfaction is the overall enjoyment that the tourist feels from the tour experience & is an antecedent to customer loyalty. Tourist experiences are essential for revisits & loyalty. In the tourism industry, loyalty can be defined as customers utilizing the same organization's same services, making referrals, and offering positive word-of-mouth publicity.

Literature Review

Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

Various Authors have reported different factors related to service quality for tourism. Pizam et al. (1978) identified beach, cost, hospitality, food, accommodation, environment & commercialization as factors of

tourist satisfaction. Saleh and Ryan (1991) suggested SERVQUAL 33 item scale model developed by Parasuram et al. (1998). Eraqi (2006) reported accommodation, transport, prices & desire to revisit.

Poon and Low (2005) stated food, hospitality, safety & security, accommodation, entertainment, innovation, location & pricing. Millan (2004) informed empathy, reliability, environment, & additional attributes. Olorunniwo et al. (2006) identified tangibles, responsiveness, knowledge & recovery. Burns et al. (2003) suggested amenities, information, sightseeing & ambiance. Tribe and Snaith (1998) identified amenities, landmarks & prices.

Arli and Cehyun (2014) stated amenities, food, hospitality, hygiene, safety, & logistics. Suanmali (2014) described amenities, hospitality, sightseeing, empathy & responsiveness. Mohamad et al. (2011) informed amenities, hospitality, transportation & information. Salleh et al. (2014) reported amenities, food, hospitality safety & security. Ciek (2014) suggested amenities, food, hygiene, safety & security. Panton (1999) reported food, responsiveness, empathy & logistics. Alampay (2003) identified food, empathy, sightseeing & transportation.

Sureshchandar et al. (2002) opined that service quality & customer satisfaction is closely related construct & we can use the antecedents of service quality to measure customer satisfaction. Anderson (2004) observed a positive correlation between customer satisfaction & profitability. Kotler (1991) has reported strong evidence of a correlation between customer satisfaction & customer loyalty. Denizci and Li (2009) reported that customer satisfaction is essential for business growth.

Studies have indicated a difference in the concept & understanding of customer satisfaction for tourism than other industries. Bitner (2003) defines customer satisfaction as evaluation of service in terms of meeting their needs & expectation. Czepiel et al. (1985) suggest that tourism satisfaction is a functional element like food & performance elements like services. Zeithaml et al. (1996) define customer loyalty as customers with favorable attitudes, committed to repurchase company services & recommend services to others. To improve customer satisfaction & customer loyalty, tourism companies need to concentrate on the product & services. Yuningsih et al. (2014) have reported that customer satisfaction influences customer loyalty in tourism. Oliver (1997) has reported that customer satisfaction influences customer loyalty. The following table summarizes the studies related to the latent factors which we have selected for our research.

Latent Variable	,						
Amenities	Burns et al. (2003)	Tribe and Snaith (1998)	Yuksel (2001)				
Amenities Arli and Cehyun (2014)		Suanmali (2014)	Mohamad et al. (2011)				
Amenities	Kozak (2001)	Al-Abaneh (2013)	Salleh et al. (2014)				
Food	Pizam et al. (1978)	Poon and Low (2005)	Panton (1999)				
Food	Al-Abaneh (2013) Arli and Cehyun (2014)		Salleh et al. (2014)				
Food	Yuksel (2001)	Alampay (2003)	Cicek (2014)				
Hospitality	Pizam et al. (1978)	Poon and Low (2005)	Yuksel (2001)				
Hospitality	spitality Arli and Cehyun Suann (2014)		Mohamad et al. (2011)				
Hospitality	Kozak (2001)	Al-Abaneh (2013)	Salleh et al. (2014)				
Hygiene	Yuksel (2001)	Kozak (2001)	WTO (2003)				
Hygiene	Arli and Cehyun (2014)	Cicek (2014)	Al-Abaneh (2013)				
Safety/ Security	Poon and Low (2005)	Yuksel (2001)	Weiermair and Fuchs (1999)				
Safety/ Security	Arli and Cehyun (2014)	Salleh et al. (2014)	Cicek (2014)				
Safety/ Security	Kozak (2001)	WTO (2003)					
Customer Satisfaction	Anderson et al. (2004)	Kotler (1991)	Denizci and Li (2009)				
Customer Satisfaction	Salleh et al. (2014)	Corte (2014)	Morgan et al. (2005)				
Customer Loyalty	Kotler and Keller (2013)	Foumier and Mick (2003)	Bowen and Chen (2001)				
Customer Loyalty	Zeithaml et al. (1996)	Salleh et al. (2014)					

Current Research

Research Objective

The current research paper attempts to establish the interrelation between critical factors of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction & Customer Loyalty for Tourism Services in India. The following are the Research Questions (Fig. 1):

- Is there a positive relationship between the critical factors of Service Quality (Amenities, Food, Hospitality, Hygiene, Safety & Security) and Customer Satisfaction?
- Is there a positive relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty?

Research Hypothesis

Based on the research literature, the study has framed the following hypothesis.

- H1: Service Quality factors significantly influence Customer Satisfaction.
 - H1a: Service Quality Factor Amenities significantly influences Customer satisfaction.
 - H1b: Service Quality Factor Food significantly influences Customer satisfaction.
 - H1c: Service Quality Factor Hospitality significantly influences Customer satisfaction
 - H1d: Service Quality Factor Hygiene significantly influences Customer satisfaction
 - H1e: Service Quality Factor Safety/Security significantly influences Customer satisfaction.
- H2: Customer Satisfaction significantly influences Customer Loyalty.

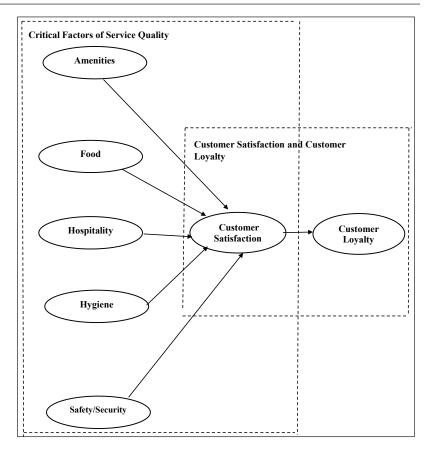


Fig. 1: Integrated Framework of Critical Factors of Service Quality, **Customer Satisfaction & Customer Loyalty**

Sample Selection

The study chose All - Indian tourist destination using self-administered or self-reported instruments. We distributed Questionnaires through executive education participants studying at the School of Business Management, NMIMS University, who have traveled for leisure in the last five years. Respondents were identified amongst regular users using Convenience Sampling. Due to high levels of missing data (exceeding 8%), the study eliminated some of the responses that were incomplete & inadequate. The study uses Three hundred ninety-four valid responses for analysis. The respondents demographic comprises 76% male and 24% female, all traveling for holiday & leisure.

Variables and Indicators

Critical Factors of Service Quality

Amenities: Some of the guest's essential items are internet service, telephone services, money withdrawal services & medical services. Tourists also desire in-house sightseeing & transportation services for popular local tourist spots.

Food: Tourists desire to experience local cuisine. Some tourist wants the food of their town. The taste of the food & also the availability of specific special requirements makes food a critical factor of service quality.

Hospitality: Refers to the behavior of the tour operators & other staff during the vacation period: tourist desire courtesy, trust, reliability & friendly behavior from hotel staff. Also, the resident's attitude towards guests &, in particular, their outlook towards women are essential components of hospitality as a factor of service quality.

Hygiene: Refers to cleanliness at travel spots, restaurants, travel services & streets. The hygiene factor relates to food & services in restaurants & tourist spots. In the Indian context, beggars & hawkers indulge in unhygienic activities, resulting in unpleasant tourist experiences.

Safety/Security: Tourists want to be safe & secured both at the accommodation & also tourist spots. Tourist locations which are infested with terrorist & are prone to attacks on civilians due to law & order situation become essential factors for tourist choice of location. Thefts & robberies at the accommodation, during travel & at the tourist spots, are also essential requirements for the choice of location.

The following are the measurement variables for the latent variable for Service Quality based on the literature survey.

Latent Variable	Measurement Variables
Amenities - AMN	(1) Telecom Connectivity, (2) Money Exchange facilities,
Amenities - AMN	(3) Internet connectivity, (4) Entertainment facility
Food - F.D.	(1) Availability of food of choice, (2) Taste of food,
Food - F.D.	(3) Freshness of food, (4) Value for money
Hospitality - HOS	(1) Courtesy of Staff, (2) Trustworthiness of Staff,
Hospitality - HOS	(3) Responses of Staff, (4) Attitude of Staff

Latent Variable	Measurement Variables
Hygiene - HYG	(1) Hygiene of Restaurants, (2) Hygiene at places of visits,
Hygiene - HYG	(3) Hygiene of food, (4) Hygiene at Accommodation
Safety/Security - SS	(1) Safety at accommodation, (2) Security at the accommodation,
Safety/Security - SS	(3) Safety at place of visit, (4) Security at the place of a visit

Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

Customer Satisfaction is essential for survival in fierce competition. Tourists often compare the services of the tour operator with other tour operators they have experienced. Very often, the customers map their satisfaction with their expectations. Satisfied customers with customized services often result in customer loyalty. Loyal customers are willing to recommend the services of the tour operator to others & also will continue to avail the services of the tour operator in the future. Also, poor word of mouth will not negatively influence loval customers. ACSI (American Customer Satisfaction Index Model) recognizes the different types of customer evaluations that cannot be measured directly in the service industry. For the tourism industry, ACSI recommends measurement variables like overall satisfaction level, benchmarking, customization & satisfaction versus expectation. Customer satisfaction is directly related to customer loyalty. Satisfied customers are willing to pay premium prices. Customer loyalty refers to repeated visits by tourists. Some customers remain loyal due to a lack of alternate service providers, while other customers remain loyal due to satisfaction with the services provided.

In the tourism context, loyalty & satisfaction are two sides of the same coin. We measure Tourist loyalty by the intention of tourists to review & recommend & measured by word of mouth, recommending the services to others. Chi (2005) states that customer satisfaction is a reliable indicator of tourist loyalty. Repeat visitors are most likely to recommend destinations to friends & relatives using positive word of mouth (Li et al., 2008). Saleh et al. (2014) reported that satisfaction affects tourist loyalty. Kotler and Keller (2013) reported that customer loyalty comes from fulfilling customer expectations. The following are the measurement variables for the latent variable for Customer Satisfaction & Customer Loyalty based on the literature survey.

Latent Variable	Measurement Variables
Customer Satisfaction - CS	(1) Overall Satisfaction level, (2) Benchmarking
	with the best,
Customer Satisfaction - CS	(3) Satisfaction versus expectations, (4)
	Customization experience
Customer Loyalty - CL	(1) Resilience to negative influence, (2)
	Willingness to revisit,
Customer Loyalty - CL	(3) Willingness to recommend, (4) Referral
	behavior

Construct Validity and Reliability Assessment

Safety/Security - SS

Customer Satisfaction - CS

Customer Loyalty - CL

Reliability Testing was employed using Cronbach alpha. The table shows that Cronbach's alpha value exceeds the cut-off value.

Latent Variable Cronbach's Alpha Amenities - AMN 0.698 Food - FD 0.625 Hospitality - HOS 0.709 Hygiene - HYG 0.664

0.757

0.730

0.640

Table 1: Scale Reliability

To	h	Δ	2:	V	7 a]	li	o h	tin	n	Λf	Sc	·al	ما
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Latent Variable	Loading Range	ESSL %
	Component Matrix	Variance
Amenities - AMN	0.696-0.777	52.98
Food - FD	0.540-0.752	47.20
Hospitality - HOS	0.699-0.744	54.13
Hygiene - HYG	0.417-0.827	50.36
Safety/Security - SS	0.608-0.830	58.02
Customer Satisfaction - CS	0.698-0.854	55.47
Customer Loyalty - CL	0.505-0.788	48.67

Model Fitting and Hypotheses Testing

The study tested for the following two equations:

Equation 1: Regression of Customer Satisfaction on Service Quality Factors (Amenities, Food, Hospitality, Hygiene, Safety & Security).

Equation 2: Regression of Customer Loyalty on Customer Satisfaction.

Variables

AMN = Amenities

FD = Food

HOS = Hospitality

HYG = Hygiene

SS = Safety/Security

CS = Customer Satisfaction

CL = Customer Loyalty

Equation 1: Regression of Customer Satisfaction on Service Quality Factors (Amenities, Food, Hospitality, Hygiene, Safety & Security)

$$CS = \beta_{11} + \beta_{21} * AMN + \beta_{31} * FD + \beta_{41} * HOS + \beta_{51} * HYG + \beta_{61} * SS$$

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.728a	.531	.525	.54092

a. Predictors: (Constant), S.S., HOS, HYG, F.D., AMN

	ANOVA									
	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.				
1	Regression	128.308	5	25.662	87.702	.000b				
	Residual	113.528	388	.293						
	Total	241.836	393							

a. Dependent Variable: C.S.

b. Predictors: (Constant), S.S., HOS, HYG, F.D., AMN

	Coefficients									
	Model	Unstan	dardized	Standardized	t	Sig.				
		Coef	ficients	Coefficients						
		В	Std. Error	Beta						
1	(Constant)	.359	.310		1.158	.247				
	AMN	.119	.038	.139	3.169	.002				
	FD	.219	.042	.225	5.202	.000				
	HOS	.190	.049	.151	3.903	.000				
	HYG	.186	.034	.232	5.514	.000				
	SS	.228	.046	.236	4.985	.000				

a. Dependent Variable: C.S.

Equation 2: Regression of Customer Loyalty on Customer Satisfaction

$$CL = \beta_{12} + \beta_{22} * CS$$

Model Summary							
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R	Std. Error of			
			Square	the Estimate			
2	.435a	.189	.187	.8314			

a. Predictors: (Constant), CS

ANOVA									
Model		Sum of	df Mean		F	Sig.			
		Squares		Square					
2	Regression	63.115	1	63.115	91.310	.000b			
	Residual	270.957	392	.691					
	Total	334.072	393						

a. Dependent Variable: CL b. Predictors: (Constant), C.S.

	Coefficients									
Model			dardized ficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.				
		В	Std. Error	Beta						
2	(Constant)	2.602	.318		8.194	.000				
	CS	.511	.053	.435	9.556	.000				

a. Dependent Variable: CL

Results and Inferences

Based on the SPSS Regression outputs, the study infers the following:

Equation 1: Regression of Customer Satisfaction on Service Quality Factors

$$CS = \beta_{11} + \beta_{21} * AMN + \beta_{31} * FD + \beta_{41} * HOS + \beta_{51} * HYG + \beta_{61} * SS$$

H1: All Service Quality factors significantly influence Customer Satisfaction.

H1a: Service Quality Factor Amenities significantly influences Customer satisfaction.

H1b: Service Quality Factor Food significantly influences Customer satisfaction.

H1c: Service Quality Factor Hospitality significantly influences Customer satisfaction.

H1d: Service Quality Factor Hygiene significantly influences Customer satisfaction.

H1e: Service Quality Factor Safety/Security significantly influences Customer satisfaction.

R Square = 0.531 is an indication of good regression fit.

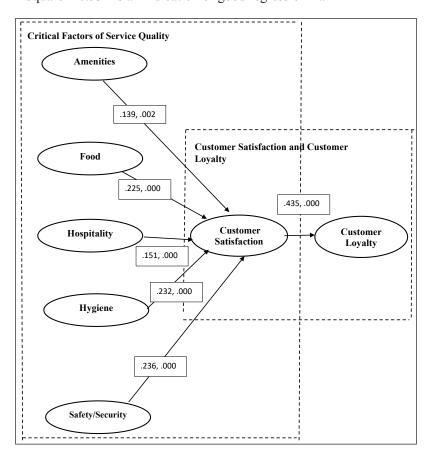


Fig. 2: Integrated Framework of Critical Factors of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty (Standardized Coefficients and Significance Value)

Equation 2: Regression of Customer Loyalty on Customer Satisfaction

$$CL = \beta_{12} + \beta_{22} * CS$$

H2: Customer Satisfaction significantly influences Customer Loyalty.

R Square = 0.189 is an indication of moderate regression fit

Implications of the Study

The five dimensions: Hospitality, Food, Safety & Security, Amenities & Hygiene, that the study selected for service quality will help the managers to prioritize their limited resources for better customer satisfaction. The five dimensions of Service Quality defined in the present study are in agreement with past studies. Yuksel (2001) reported amenities, food, hospitality, hygiene, safety & security, and price. Kozak (2001) described amenities, hospitality, hygiene, safety & security & information. Al-Abaneh (2013) reported amenities, food, hospitality, hygiene & safety. The Model can be used by practicing managers to measure service quality in tourism, customer satisfaction & customer loyalty. It will enhance the understanding by various stakeholders of customer perception on service quality factors & how they influence customer satisfaction & customer loyalty. Salleh et al. (2014), Corte (2014), Morgan et al. (2005) have reported a high correlation between service quality & customer satisfaction. Kotler and Keller (2013), Fournier and Mick (2003), Bowen and Chen (2001) have reported the importance of customer satisfaction & customer loyalty for the long-term growth of the organization. A tourist destination that can take care of the essential factors can build longlasting relations with its customers. Tourism quality strategy should include the role of information, competent & motivated human resources, tourism promotion & networking of stakeholders for smooth implementation of all recommendations.

A value-added approach to tourism quality management is necessary because different elements influence tourist satisfaction, such as food, accommodation, hygiene & others. Service quality management needs to consider tourist business, tourist interest, local population & environment for influencing customer satisfaction & customer loyalty. It will be beneficial for tourism service providers to develop indicators for measuring the quality improvement process, benchmarking, non-financial support, flora & fauna, proper dissemination of information across the supply chain.

Limitations and Scope for Future Research

One of the limitations of this type of study is defining the latent factors. We have used the existing literature survey to define Hospitality, Food, Safety & Security, Amenities & Hygiene. The labels could have been called differently, like culture, information. Also, since our Model assumes a singular path between service quality factors, customer satisfaction & customer loyalty, a regression model was adequate. However, we could use alternate models like structural equation models for establishing both path & measurements & the results could be different.

The study can be extended to other countries to assess the differences in customer expectations across the globe. It might be worthwhile defining the overall service quality latent factor & apply structural equation models for both path & measurement analyses.

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