

Customer Perception and Application of Gap Model in Service Quality of Star-Category Hotels in Varanasi

Sujay Vikram Singh*

Abstract

Accommodation being the integral part of tourism plays an important role in offering customer satisfaction through its Hospitality Service Quality. Guests are the judges of Service Quality and expectations greatly influence the resulting level of satisfaction. To meet or exceed the customer expectations, organisations must fully understand all service attributes that contributes to customer value and lead to satisfaction and loyalty. The study attempts to analyse the study of service quality in Hotels of Varanasi to check degree of customer's needs and expectations comparing results with perceived quality. Varanasi covers large number of tourists from all over the globe making it microcosm of world having flavour of 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam'. The research presents and discusses a comprehensive analysis of the expectations and perceptions of key stakeholders, the customers, managers and employees of hotels, along with a service performance analysis, using both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The research will aim at testing of Gap Model, i.e. identification of gaps when the hotel services quality in particular observation sample is concerned. The finding would help the hotel managers of Varanasi to recognize guests needs, wants in a better way and consequently improving their quality of Services.

Keywords: Service Quality, Expectations, Perceptions, Gaps

Introduction

Tourism and Hospitality industry has witnessed many changes over a period of time due to global expansion of tourism, changing patterns in customer preferences, industrialization, revolution in transport and aviation, etc. It has brought paradigm shifts in the operations of hospitality industry. The demanding customers and increased sense of customer satisfaction led to the use of the new

service parameters making hoteliers to implement quality management as an effective aid. Quality is meeting or exceeding customer expectations. To meet or exceed customer expectations, organizations must fully understand all service attributes that contribute to customer value and lead to satisfaction and loyalty (Evans & Lindsay, 1996). During the last few decades there is phenomenal change experienced in the hospitality industry and the reason being is Service Quality. A customer's expectation of a particular service is determined by factors such as recommendations by peers, personal needs and past experiences. The expected service and the perceived service sometimes may not be equal, thus leaving a gap. The service quality model or GAP model developed by authors-Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry at Texas and North Carolina in 1985, highlights the main requirements for delivering high service quality. A basis for a scientific description is connected with the methods to the notion of quality from two main stances - of a manufacturer - quality represents harmonization with technical rules in the coordinating of production and service offer, and of a customer - quality stands for the entire characteristics of products and services which have the competences of satisfying the needs of consumers (Kosar, Rašeta, 2005).

The increased sagacity of customer satisfaction led to the use of high standards of service in industry. The new service parameters made the hoteliers to implement quality management as an effective aid. Hotel which chose the application of quality concept as a key factor of success should experience the growth in the satisfaction of customers (guests), i.e. successfully position on the market and thus gain larger profit. However, trying to reach the high level of the quality of hotel services, hotel managers very often meet with problems of an adequate

* Research Scholar, Department of History of Art and Tourism Management Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India. Email: sujayvikramsingh@gmail.com

measuring of the service quality. The empirical research in development of service quality theory suggests that improved service quality plays important role in overall customer satisfaction. It has significantly affected hotels' ability to control and adapt to changing environments. The use of new techniques began with the simple motive of sophistication and precise activities in the given field of operation which may result in high standards of service in global economy and has allowed the rise of a leisure class.

Guests' perceptions of service quality vary widely. Likewise, guests' perceived satisfaction with performed services also varies widely. Two distinct variables influence their perceptions: customer expectations and service standards/performance is the primary indicator of overall service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithmal, and Leonard, 1994b). Guests are the judges of service quality (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). Their expectations of services greatly influence their resulting level of satisfaction. Lewison (1997) categorizes service expectations in three levels: essentials, expected, and optional. Zeithmal, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) include three similar levels in their conceptual model of customer service expectations: predicted, adequate, and desired.

Varanasi, the holy city of India, also known as "Kashi", "City of Light", "Anandvan", "Eternal City" is one of the oldest city of the world. A place where Goddess Ganga river flows South to North, giving half-moon shape view, adorning Lord Shiva forehead. It occupies prominent place since ancient time due to trade, pre-eminent religious position for Hindus & pilgrimage routes, Important center of Knowledge and Historical, Mythological tales describes prosperity and opulence. Varanasi is an eclectic mix of the Tangible and Intangible, manifested in its rich Cultural Landscapes. Varanasi is the 2nd most visited tourist city in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Total Inflow of Tourists in the year 2013 is 52,51,413; in which domestic tourists inflow is 95% of the total. Month-wise statistics of tourist shows that the peak season for tourist inflow is between October to March, as all the important fairs and festivals occur within these months. 'Education and research' is the first priority by International Tourists, and 'pilgrimage/spiritual tour' is the main reason that attracts maximum percentage of domestic tourists. The tourist inflow has had an annual growth of 6.3% per year and their average stay is two days and one night, i.e. around 28,000 beds are needed per day to accommodate the

inflow of tourists. But the total number of beds within the city is 13340, which is insufficient for the tourists. Uttar Pradesh has the potential to attract over 2.8 million foreign tourists by 2017 compared to over 2 million overseas backpackers in 2013 (business-standard.com). Due to increase in tourism every year, the better Quality Services can play an important role in attracting more customers and ensuring overall high satisfaction levels along with repetitive visits. However, an insufficient service provide will lead to dissatisfaction thereby generating 'GAPS' which is needed to be addressed and framework is to be adopted so as to provide an experiential visit for guests.

This paper is organized as follows: the introductory section gives a brief depiction of the service quality and a background of the Varanasi accommodation sector. This is followed by significant literature review pertaining to service quality. The methodology of the research paper is explained, followed by the results of the empirical analysis. Conclusions and managerial implications are noted, and limitations and future directions are discussed. Finally, recommendations for improving service quality within the accommodation sector based on the findings of the study are provided.

Literature Review

Service Quality

The study of Service quality management in hospitality industry is an attempt to understand the presence of quality improvement process in hospitality industry and effectiveness in making it sustainable business enterprise. It is a survey of the presently adopted quality management tools which are making the hotels operations safer, focused and reliable and meet the customer expectations. As the hospitality industry becomes more competitive there is an obvious need to retain clientele as well as increasing profitability and hence management professionals strive to improve guest satisfaction and revenues.

The competitive environment in which hospitality businesses survive, the quality of service is an imperative mechanism used to achieve a competitive benefit. The quality is a difficult construct to quantify however the ability to measure quality is a key to assessing whether or not the industry provides the service consumers desire as consumers hold the key to business survival and success. Various studies have reconnoitred the quality

of the service in different backgrounds and its impact on other variables (Cronin, Brady, and Hult 2000; Ko et al., 2011). It has attracted the consideration of researchers and specialists as it has an important impact on customer loyalty and business profitability (Seth et al., 2005). Numerous studies have analysed the conceptualization, description, dimensions, measurement and influence of service quality on customer satisfaction, behaviour purpose, brand loyalty and other variables (Akbaba, 2006; Ladhari, 2008; Olorunniwo and Hsu (2006); Malhotra et al., 2005) while they still call for other ones in order to offer a deep understanding of these important factors. It becomes even more important to recognize how to offer constantly high quality in the service sector because of the typical features of services.

Based on the conceptualizations of service quality there are some representations in the literature that have been used to measure the quality of the services. Gronroos (1984) stated that the technical and functional aspects are significant components of evaluating and determining the service. He recognised three dimensions of service quality: technical quality, functional quality and image. Technical quality is associated to the quality of what consumers accept from the contact with the company/service provider and has an significant part on assessing service quality. Functional quality is associated to the way how the service is distributed while image is built up by technical and functional quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985) proposed that service quality is a function of the variance between the expectations and perceptions of the service. Created on the grounds gap analysis and on the 5 dimensions of quality, they developed the gap model called SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Parasuramn, Zeithaml & Berry (1985) pointed out that consumers' perception of service quality is the gap between the expectation of universal level service provider's service performance and the real performance perception of a specific enterprise. It can be expressed by the formula:

Service quality = Perceived performance - Expectation of Service

The five major dimension of customer service quality: (Yingsheng Du & Youchun Tang, (2014)).

1. Tangibles: Service place, facility and the appearance of service staffs;
2. Reliability: The ability of providing promised service to customers reliably and correctly;
3. Responsiveness: The will of service staffs to help customers and to provide real-time service;
4. Assurance: Service staffs are professional, polite and reliable;
5. Empathy: Companies care customers and provide some other special attentions.

Gap Model

From the result of the research organised in the companies of four different service sectors: banking, telecommunications, insurance companies and repair and maintenance of appliances (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, in a number of works explained in the duration between 1985 and 1994, established a so- GAP models which evaluates "gaps" between quality service expectations among the service process and perception of service quality later the service process.

The basic feature of the Gap model is that it places an accent upon the oversights in the quality between the guest and service provider and are straight associated with the opinions to the perception and expectations. This model demonstrates the procedure of the progress of the service quality (Ljubojević, 2004).

The first model was presented in 1985, where the service quality was explained as a difference between the way a costumer experienced a service (perception) and expectations which a costumer created before using the service. The variations in the process of service offer according to this model are as follows (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Table 1: Definition of the SERVQUAL Gaps (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Gap 1 (the positioning gap)	managers' perceptions of consumers' expectations and the relative importance consumers attach to the quality dimensions.
Gap 2 (the specification gap)	the difference between what management believes the consumer wants and what the consumers expect the business to provide.
Gap 3 (the delivery gap)	the difference between the service provided by the employee of the business and the specifications set by management the promises communicated by the business to the consumer do not match the consumers' expectations of those external promises
Gap 4 (the communication gap)	the difference between the consumers internal perception and expectation of the services

The service quality is the function of expectations and perception and can be presented as (Nitin et al., 2005):

$$SQ = \sum_j^k (P_{ij} - E_{ij})$$

Where, SQ (service quality) – overall service quality,

k – number of attributes,

P_{ij} (perception) – perception of performances of stimulus i under the influence of attribute j , E_{ij} (expectation)– expected service quality for attribute j compared to standards for stimulus i .

The lower the mean score, the larger the gap in service quality and on the other hand the higher the mean score, the smaller the gap in service quality. Gaps 1 to 4 are within the mechanism of an company and need to be investigated to regulate the sources and variations to be employed which can reduce or eliminate Gap 5, which is the gap reflecting the difference between customers perceptions and expectations of the company's level of service. Surveying of employees can help to measure the extent of Gaps 2 to 4 (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Reasons for GAP in Hotels

Every specific gaps influences the entire perception of service quality and customer satisfaction.

Gap 1 represents the general incompatibility between company management and customers.

The basic reason of its appearance does not understand the real customers' expectations.

The first gap is actually the result of Wrongly inferred information concerning guests expectations., Non-

existence of demand analysis and inadequate perception of the relationship between the company and its customer, Not understanding the customers' expectations can be as well the result of a bad management of customers' complaints (Veljković, 2009).

Example, management can adequately evaluate the time that guests are willing to spend when checking in at the reception of a hotel, but do not have enough staff to fulfil those expectations.

Gap 2 occurs due to variation between perceptions of the management about the expectations of customers and specifications of service quality are the following:

Badly designed services, Unclear, undefined service design, badly designed service design, Unsystematically process of new service development.

Moreover, problems can be caused by the lack of resources, too growing demand and inadequate engagement of company management (Veljković, 2009; Ćosić, 2007).

Possible emergence of Gap 3 is the following:

Oversights in the human resources management, Unclear roles and conflict of interests, Poor system of evaluation and praising, Lack of team work, inadequate jurisdiction.

This gap generates when guest do not understand or do not know what their role and responsibility in the service process, Problems with servicing agents and control of quality and consistency; Example, management of a restaurant orders that a specific dish needs to be delivered within 20 minutes while the waiter delivers the same dish after the period demanded.

The reason for occurrence of GAP 4 is due to:

Lack of integrated service marketing communications i.e. Interactive marketing not in part of communication plan; Lack of a developed programme of internal marketing, Lack of the management of customers' expectations through all forms of communication, Customers are not educated in an adequate way, Unreasonable promises in marketing activities, personal sale etc; Poor communication between people responsible for promotional campaign and people responsible for operational activities.

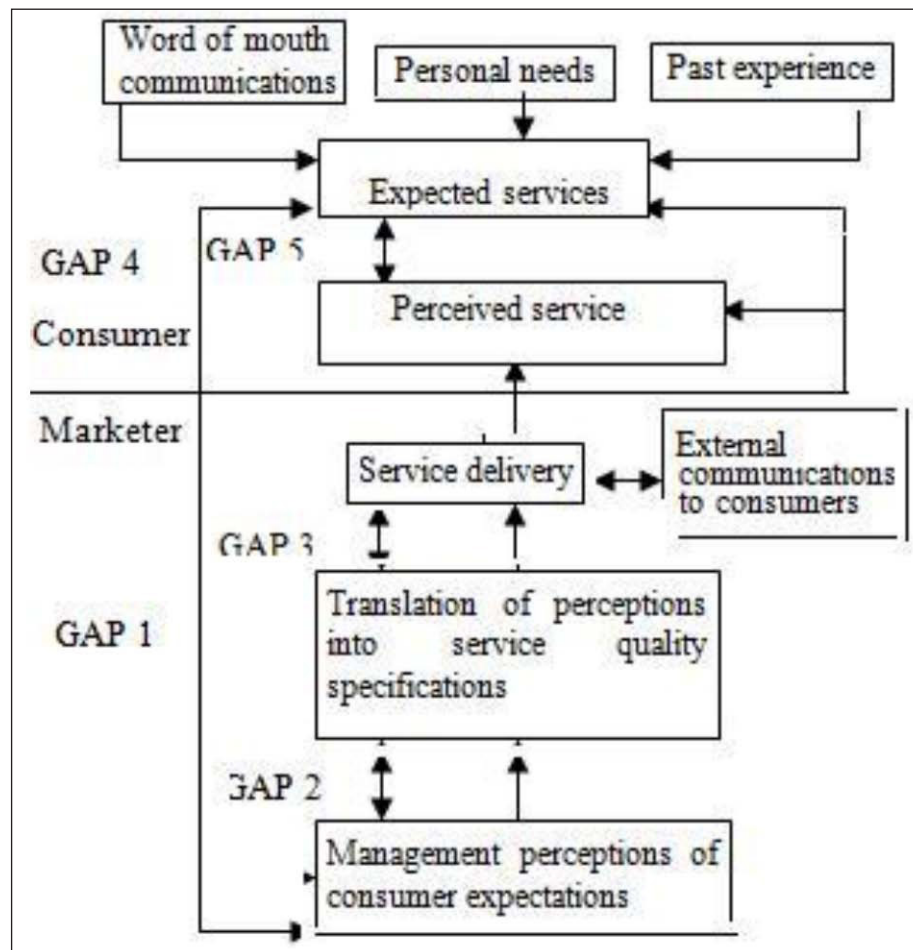
Unreasonable promises and inadequate management of customers' expectations lead to the appearance of too demanding expectations which leads to Formation of GAP 4.

Gap 5 occurs as difference between the expectations of customers concerning the services and their perception of the service received in the company itself which is an outcome of any of the above mentioned or combination of GAPs.

Revisions in GAP Model

Gap model was later modified by formation of SERVQUAL scale for evaluation of expectations and perception of service quality that Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry developed through a number of researched in the period between 1985 and 1994 (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988, 1991, 1991a, 1994). Model consists of five dimensions of quality:

- Perceptibility – presence of physical elements;
- Reliability – capability of a promised service to be delivered in a specific manner;
- Responsibility – carefulness, willingness to help and offer a fast service;
- Safety – knowledge and politeness of the employees and their capability to be trusted at;
- Empathy – offer of a personalised service, observing a customer as an individual.



Source: Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., Berry L.L. 1985. A Conceptual of Service Quality and its Implications for Future Research. *Journal of Marketing* 49, 41-50.

According to this model, consumers' quality assessment will be influenced by a series of five distinct "gaps" in this co-service process. Quality Management Systems must attempt to close the five gaps in the model and to improve the quality of service as experienced by means of comparison between expected and perceived quality after the customer has received the service.

Limitations of the SERVQUAL Model

One of the obvious limitations of the SERVQUAL model is that it is suitable only for service provision businesses therefore it doesn't apply appropriate to businesses which provide tangible goods (Hill and Alexander, 2006). Secondly, looking at the implementation of the SERVQUAL model to the restaurant industry it could be argued that customer expectations and perceptions can be compared only after the customer finishes their meal. Potential issues might occur as expectations are formed before the meal is served therefore the measurement of service quality in terms of this situation does not appear reliable (Palmer, 2005). Expectations are only created according to previous service experiences (Kahneman and Miller, 1986; Palmer, 2005). Customer perceptions can change toward the same service delivery in the light of previous experiences because the new expectations can be created for the same service (Oh, 1999). Therefore the validity of the measurement can decrease over time. The model does not also recognise the technical aspect of service as an important part of process (Lenka et al, 2009) aiming to measure functional aspect of service process. This affects the measurement of whole quality aspects of service process.

Methodology

A self-administered questionnaire, an adapted/modified version of SERVQUAL, LODGSERVE Scale (Knutson, Stevens, Wallaert, Patton, & Yokoyama, 1990) was used in this study to analyze the service quality expectations and perceptions of the hotel's guests. A total number of 26-item measuring five dimensions of service: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. The items were measured on 7-point Likert -type scale from 7='strongly agree' to 1='strongly disagree'. Internal

Consistency and parallelism, and performed calculations of coefficient (α) of the Scale. A pilot test was undertaken to assess the reliability of the attributes, and to ensure that the wordings of the questionnaire were clear. Twenty questionnaires were completed by the guests in accompaniment of researcher. Some problems were identified with the wordings and implications of some questions, so some minor revisions were made to avoid confusion. The study was conducted in star category hotels situated in a city during 6 weeks in December-January. The target population of the survey was all travellers who stayed in the various star category hotel selected for this study during the data collection period. A convenience sampling approach was employed and 150 questionnaires were distributed to the guests who inclined to take the questionnaires. Of these 150 questionnaires, 13 were not included in the analysis because of incompleteness, and 137 were usable for further analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 14.0 was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics analysis was used to measure guests' expectation and perception scores. Paired t-test was carried out to test the significant difference between the two means of expectations and perceptions.

According to Knutson, Stevens, Wallaert, Patton, & Yokoyama (1990), the final version of LODSERVE comprises of total of 26 items undertaking five dimensions as under:

S.No.	Dimensions	No. of Attributes	Attributes Ranging from
1	Reliability	04	1 to 4.
2	Assurance	05	5 to 9.
3	Responsiveness	03	10 to 12.
4	Tangibles	06	13 to 18.
5	Empathy	08	19 to 26.

Findings

Statistics

length of stay		Age	gender	occupation	no. of visits
N	Valid	137	137	137	137
	Missing	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Total No. of Respondents

	<i>Length of Stay</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	less than 3 days	78	56.9	56.9	56.9
	3 - 5 days	33	24.1	24.1	81.0
	5-7 days	26	19.0	19.0	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	less than 24	18	13.1	13.1	13.1
	24 - 40	53	38.7	38.7	51.8
	40 - 60	51	37.2	37.2	89.1
	more than 60	15	10.9	10.9	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	MALE	86	62.8	62.8	62.8
	FEMALE	51	37.2	37.2	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	

	<i>no. of visits</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	First Time	82	59.9	59.9	59.9
	2 or 3 Times	49	35.8	35.8	95.6
	More than 3 Times	6	4.4	4.4	100.0
	Total	137	100.0	100.0	

	<i>occupation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>	<i>Cumulative Percent</i>
Valid	student	16	11.7	11.7	11.7
	business man/ business woman	39	28.5	28.5	40.1
	government service	35	25.5	25.5	65.7
	Private jobs	35	25.5	25.5	91.2
	retired	4	2.9	2.9	94.2
	unemployed	3	2.2	2.2	96.4
	others	5	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	137	100.0		

Table 3: Profile of Respondents (n=137)

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
Gender	Males	86	62.8
	Females	51	37.2
Age	Less than 24	18	13.1
	24 - 40	53	38.7
	40 - 60	51	37.2
	More than 60	15	10.9
Occupation	student	16	11.7
	business man/ business woman	39	28.5
	government service	35	25.5
	Private jobs	35	25.5
	retired	4	2.9
	unemployed	3	2.2
	others	5	3.6
No. of Visits	First Time	82	59.9
	2 or 3 Times	49	35.8
	More than 3 Times	6	4.4
Length of Stay	Less than 3 days	78	56.9
	3 - 5 days	33	24.1
	5-7 days	26	19.0
	More than 7 days	0	0

Table 3 shows the demographics of the respondents. As can be seen from Table 2, from the total 137 valid samples, Gender distribution was 37.2% female, 62.8% male. The highest proportion of the respondents (38.7%) fell into the 24–40 year age group, followed by the 40–60 year age group (37.2%). A variety of occupations were reported by the respondents. The highest frequencies were Business man/Business woman (28.5%), followed by Govt. jobs (25.5) and Private job (25.5%).

Regarding the respondents' frequency of stay at hotels, a major part of the respondents reported that they stayed at hotels for first time (59.9%). Majority of respondents were staying for period less than 3 days (56.9) followed by 3-5 days (24.1). Descriptive statistical methods were used to research guests' expectations and perceptions. The means, standard deviations, and the difference scores were computed.

Table 4: Values for Each Attribute Obtained through Analysis (n =137)

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Expectation</i>		<i>Perceptions</i>		<i>Gap</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>–</i>
							<i>value*</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>			
The hotel serves consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	6.10	.740	4.82	.737	-1.08		13.525
The equipment of the hotel works properly without causing breakdowns	6.07	.709	4.89	.764	-1.14		13.119
The hotel provides the services at the time it promises to do so	6.13	.684	4.97	.795	-1.25		14.422
The hotel resolves guest complaints and compensates for the inconveniences guests suffer	6.09	.742	4.96	.736	-1.22		14.514

Attribute	Expectation		Perceptions		Gap	t – value*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Employees have knowledge to provide information and assistance to guests in areas they would require (shopping, museums, places of interest, etc.)	5.96	.695	4.82	.663	-1.19	12.205
Employees have in-depth occupational knowledge (professional skills, foreign language, communication skills, etc.)	5.82	.644	5.01	.772	-1.25	14.180
The hotel and its facilities have operating hours convenient to all their guests	5.97	.685	4.95	.770	-1.43	14.996
Employees are always available when needed to support guests	5.99	.686	5.10	.742	-0.89	10.302
The hotel keeps accurate records, guest records bills, (reservations, orders, etc.)	6.01	.737	4.65	.682	-1.35	16.041
Employees provide prompt service	6.28	.661	4.85	.775		13.260
Employees are always available when needed	6.18	.644	4.74	.748	-0.81	9.120
The hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands	6.26	.597	4.91	.736	-1.02	12.899
The hotel has visually appealing buildings and facilities	5.85	.674	4.77	.653	-1.01	10.904
Employees of the hotel appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	5.98	.658	4.84	.730	-1.36	13.975
The hotel has modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, furniture, elevator, communication devices, etc.)	6.04	.599	4.79	.732	-1.28	13.394
The atmosphere and equipment are comfortable and appropriate for purpose of stay	6.04	.716	4.82	.716	-1.18	13.195
Food and beverages served are hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	6.07	.671	4.88	.768	-1.16	12.915
The service units of the hotel have adequate capacity (dining rooms, meeting rooms, swimming pools, business center facilities, etc.)	6.15	.617	4.90	.750	-1.13	13.164
Employees of the hotel understand the specific needs of guests	5.98	.712	4.93	.797	-1.05	11.802
Employees give guests individualized attention that makes them feel special	6.01	.717	4.85	.803	-1.16	12.967
Guests feel and valued in the hotel.	6.01	.767	4.88	.732	-1.13	13.937
The Hotel provides Complementary services.	6.03	.813	5.02	.790	-1.01	10.836
No Red Tape	6.04	.756	4.90	.825	-1.14	12.249
The hotel performs the services right the first time	5.91	.785	5.08	.796	-0.83	8.540
Provides Healthful Menus	5.90	.770	4.93	.810	-0.97	10.289
Employees instils confidence in guests	6.01	.743	4.95	.770	-1.06	11.438
Overall mean for 26 attributes	6.03	.109	4.88	.094	-1.15	

Remark: t – test (2 tailed Sig.) $p < 0.01$ for all attributes.

From the above Table 4, it is clear that the mean score of expectation ranges from 5.82 to 6.28. The lowest expectation item was “Employees have in-depth occupational knowledge (professional skills, foreign language, communication skills, etc.)”. This implies that guest is not much concerned about the type of

communication skills from the staff in order to perform their task. On the other hand, the highest expectation was regarding “Employees provide prompt service”. This indicates that the guests are crucial regarding time and want the work done by staff as quick so as to enjoy the services provided. Therefore, they anticipate that demand should be placed to them at the time assured. Other items

which score high in “The hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands”, “Employees are always available when needed, The service units of the hotel have adequate capacity” (dining rooms, meeting rooms, swimming pools, business center facilities, etc.) Thus guests anticipate to be cared and variety of tasks to be done error-free by multitasking personnel. The score also shows the same as overall mean for expectation was 6.03 representing high expectation from guest corner.

The mean score of customer perception range from 4.65 to 5.08, the lowest being “The hotel keeps accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)”, which shows that the guest perceives lack of proper record-keeping which can cause various problems both to hotel and guests. On the other hand, guests had higher perceptions regarding “The hotel performs the services right the first time”. This infers that error in services from hotel personnel were less perceived by the guest and hoteliers were well prepared to perform the right services at right time.

The overall mean score for the guest perception was 4.88, which is less than the expected mean score depicting that guests in the hotels of Varanasi requires more proper services and accurate record-keeping so as to get satisfied from services of Hotels.

As per the results obtained in Table 4, the expectations are higher than the perceptions of service. Therefore, we obtained that LODGSERV gap is negative for all mentioned attributes. From the results obtained, it is inferred that narrowest gap was -0.81 which is “Employees are always available when needed”. Employees were keen to help and ready to service although expectations were more from guest point of view. The widest gap was observed in the attribute “The hotel and its facilities have operating hours convenient to all their guests” -1.43 indicating guests dissatisfaction towards operating hours and other facilities which were having high expectations. The Hotels should focus on providing better accessibility and operating hours. The overall LODGSERV scale indicated -1.15 score which infers the hotel to improve the service quality and standards to the guests.

Suggestions

Lodging managers should make quality service top priority both for them and their staff. Recommendations for superior guest services towards successful and profitable results include: focus on quality service and guest

satisfaction; retention of existing guests by exceeding their expectations; continuous quality improvement; employment, regular training and empowerment of service-oriented staff; search for best practices through benchmarking; pursuit of quality accreditation through the various schemes, such as the eco-labels, ISO, etc.

Conclusion

Designing service quality for hotels is an important issue in today's highly competitive world. Thus it is essential to evaluate the service quality for a particular service provider. Therefore, it was reasonable to apply the modified form of SERVQUAL, LODGESERV for the investigation which was concentrated on Accommodation perspective to check the level of Satisfaction and also analyse various GAPS occurring in performance of Services. The overall mean score for perception was 4.88 which visibly specifies that hotels of Varanasi are not performing well and need improvement in the quality of service being presented to the guest. This study has contributed to the theoretical and methodological advancement of service quality and hotel industry literature by analysing some pivotal service quality issues in a specific class of accommodation sector of Varanasi. Future studies should consider this point and include such questions as dependent variables. The sample of respondents in this study was dominated by male (62.8%) and first time staying (59.9%) guests. So respondent bias could have been created. Future studies could enlarge the scope of the study by covering more hotels to generate segment-specific data.

To sum up, this article tends to clarify the GAP model as not only provider to the managers with a clear picture of the quality of the provided service, but also helping in discovering the needs, wishes and expectations of the guests. It can be said that it helps managers in setting the criteria for the delivery of services in the hospitality industry.

References

- Akbaba, A. (2006). Measuring service quality in the hotel industry: A study in a business hotel in Turkey. *Hospitality Management*, 25(2), 170-192.
- Berry, L., & Parasuraman, A. (1991). *Marketing services: Competing through quality*. New York: The Free Press.
- Cronin, J. J. Jr., Brady, M. K., & Hult, G. T. (2000). Assessing the effects of quality, value, and customer

- satisfaction on consumer behavioural intentions in service environments. *Journal of Retailing*, 76(2), 193-218.
- Evans, J. R., & Lindsay, W. M. (1996). *The management and control of quality* (3rd ed.). Minneapolis, West.
- Hill, N., & Alexander, J. (2006). *The handbook of customer satisfaction and loyalty measurement*. Gower publishing Ltd, Farnham.
- Kahneman, D., & Miller, D. T. (1986). Norm theory: Comparing reality to its alternatives. *Psychological Review*, 93(2), 136-153.
- Knutson, B., Stevens, P., Wallaert, C., Patton, M., & Yokoyama, F. (1990). LODGSERV: A Service Quality Index for the lodging industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 14(2), 277-284.
- Kosar, L. J., & Rašeta, S. (2005). *Challenges to quality - Quality management in hospitality industry*. College of Hotel Management, Belgrade.
- Lenka, U., Suar, D., & Mohapatra, K. J. (2009). Service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty in Indian commercial banks. *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 18, 47-64.
- Ladhari, R. (2008). Alternative measures of service quality: A review. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 18(1), 65-86.
- Lewison, D. M. (1997). *Retailing* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Ljubojević, Č. (2004). *Marketing of services*. Faculty of Service Business, Novi Sad.
- Malhotra, N. K., Ulgado, F. M., Agarwal, J., Shainesh, G., & Wu, L. (2005). "Dimensions of service quality in developed and developing economies: Multi country cross cultural comparisons. *International Marketing Review*, 22(3), 256-278.
- Oh, H. (1999). Service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer value: A holistic perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18(1), 67-82.
- Olorunniwo, F., & Hsu, M. K. (2006). A typology analysis of service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in mass services. *Managing Service Quality: An International Journal*, 16(2), 106-123.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., & Berry, L. (1994b). Reassessment of expectations as a comparison standard in measuring service quality: Implications for further research. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(1), 111-124.
- Palmer, A (2005). *Principles of service marketing*. The McGraw-Hill Companies, London.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(4), pp. 41-50.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implication for service quality research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49, Fall, p. 44.
- Parasuraman, A. (1998). Communication and control processes in the delivery of service quality. *Journal of Marketing*, 52, April, 1998, p. 36., in: Tourism and hospitality management, no. 1., Faculty for Tourism and Hospitality Management Opatija, Opatija.
- Parasuraman, A., Berry, L. L., & Zeithaml, V. A. (1991a). Refinement and reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale. *Journal of Retailing*, 67(4), 420-450.
- Ramasaran-Fowdar, R. R. (2007). Developing a service quality questionnaire for the hotel industry in Mauritius. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 13(1), 19-27.
- Seth, N., Deshmukh, S. G., & Vrat, P. (2005). Service quality models: A review. *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, 22(9), 913-949.
- Veljković S. (2009). Marketing of services, Faculty of Economics, Belgrade.
- Du, Y., & Tang, Y. (2014). A literature review on the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. *Business and Management*, 3(3).
- Zeithaml, V., Berry, L., & Parasuraman, A. (1993). The nature and determinants of customer expectations of service. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, 21(1), 1-12.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A., & Berry, L. L. (1990). *Delivering quality service*. The Free Press, New York, N.Y.

Questionnaire

Dear Madam / Sir,

I am a research scholar undertaking research into Customer Perception and Application of Gap Model in Service Quality of Star- Category hotels in Varanasi. I would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire which will take you approximately 10 minutes. It is confidential and your co-operation is appreciated.

Yours' sincerely,

Sujay Vikram Singh

Ph.D. Research Scholar.

Banaras Hindu University.

Section- I (Background Information Of Respondent)

About yourself (confidential)

1) I am....

- a) MALE ☐
- b) FEMALE ☐

2) My Age group is

- a) Less than 24 years ☐
- b) 24 years – 40 years ☐
- c) 40 years – 60 years ☐
- d) More than 60 years ☐

3) My Occupation is.....

- a) Student ☐
- b) Business man/ Business woman ☐

- c) Government service ☐
- d) Private jobs ☐
- e) Retired ☐
- f) Unemployed ☐
- g) Others ☐

4) This is my Number of visit in hotel.

- a) First Time ☐
- b) 2 or 3 Times ☐
- c) More than 3 Times ☐

5) I am staying for number of days.

- a) Less than 3 days ☐
- b) 3 - 5 days ☐
- c) 5-7 days ☐
- d) More than 7 days ☐

Section-II (Service Quality Perception)

How To Answer?

We want to know how you feel about the hotel you have just stayed in. There is no right or wrong answer - all we are interested in is a number that best shows your perceptions about the quality of hotel.

Please rate each statement from (1) to (7) where circling (1) means you **Strongly Disagree** with the statement and (7) means you **Strongly Agree** with it. You may **square** any of the numbers in the middle that show how strong your feeling is. Please answer all questions.

Thank You for Completing this Questionnaire.

For example:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4 ⁴	5	6	7

S.No.	Hotel Quality Statements	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	The hotel serves consistent services (providing the same services and associated materials every time)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2.	The equipment of the hotel works properly without causing breakdowns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3.	The hotel provides the services at the time it promises to do so	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4.	The hotel resolves guest complaints and compensates for the inconveniences guests suffer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5.	Employees have knowledge to provide information and assistance to guests in areas they would require (shopping, museums, places of interest, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6.	Employees have in-depth occupational knowledge (professional skills, foreign language, communication skills, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7.	The hotel and its facilities have operating hours convenient to all their guests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8.	Employees are always available when needed to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9.	The hotel keeps accurate records (reservations, guest records, bills, orders, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10.	Employees provide prompt service	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11.	Employees are always available when needed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12.	The hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13.	The hotel has visually appealing buildings and facilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14.	Employees of the hotel appear neat and tidy (as uniforms and personal grooming)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15.	The hotel has modern-looking equipment (air conditioner, furniture, elevator, communication devices, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16.	The atmosphere and equipment are comfortable and appropriate for purpose of stay	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17.	Food and beverages served are hygienic, adequate, and sufficient	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18.	The service units of the hotel have adequate capacity (dining rooms, meeting rooms, swimming pools, business center facilities, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19.	Employees of the hotel understand the specific needs of guests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20.	Employees give guests individualized attention that makes them feel special	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21.	Guests feel special and valued in the hotel.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.	The Hotel provides Complementary services.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23.	No Red Tape	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24.	The hotel performs the services right the first time				1	2	3	4
25.	Provides Healthful Menus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26.	Employees instils confidence in guests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7