TOURIST SATISFACTION IN RELATION TO SERVICE QUALITY: A STUDY OF TAMILNADU HOTEL SECTOR

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Abstract

Hotel business is one of the main activities of the hospitality industry. Hotel service gives home feeling to the tourists at destination. Hospitality industry will not survive if they don't provide quality services to the tourists. This study explores the relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in the hotel sector of Tamil Nadu, India. Recognizing the critical role that service quality plays in the hospitality industry, this research employs the SERVQUAL model to evaluate five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Data were collected from 300 tourists across a diverse range of hotels in Tamil Nadu through structured questionnaires. The analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between all dimensions of service quality and tourist satisfaction. Notably, responsiveness and empathy emerged as the most influential factors. The findings suggest that enhancing these service quality dimensions can substantially improve tourist satisfaction. This study provides actionable insights for hotel managers and policymakers to develop strategies that elevate service standards, thereby boosting the overall tourist experience in Tamil Nadu.

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry plays a vital role in the economic development of a region, and the hotel sector serves as a significant component within this sector. As tourists seek memorable and satisfying experiences during their travels, understanding the factors that contribute to tourist satisfaction becomes crucial. Among these factors, service quality offered by hotels emerges as a critical determinant of overall tourist satisfaction. Tamil Nadu, a state located in the southern part of India, boasts a diverse range of tourist attractions, including cultural heritage sites, exquisite temples, pristine beaches, and scenic hill stations. As the number of tourists visiting Tamil Nadu continues to increase, the hotel sector faces significant challenges in providing exceptional service quality to meet and exceed visitors' expectations. The state's hospitality industry plays a pivotal role in enhancing the tourist experience, with hotels being central to this sector. Tourist satisfaction, a critical determinant of the success of the hospitality industry, is closely linked to the quality of services provided by hotels.

The hospitality industry in Tamil Nadu is diverse, encompassing luxury resorts, heritage hotels, budget accommodations, and boutique hotels, catering to a wide range of tourists. With Chennai, the capital city, and other popular destinations like Madurai, Ooty, and Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu attracts millions of domestic and international tourists annually. Despite the booming tourism, challenges persist in consistently delivering high-quality services across all types of accommodations. Service quality in the hotel industry is multi-dimensional, encompassing various aspects such as tangibles (physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel), reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence), and empathy (caring, individualized attention the hotel provides to its guests). The SERVQUAL model, a widely recognized tool, evaluates these dimensions to gauge service quality and its impact on customer satisfaction.

Tourist satisfaction is a comprehensive measure of how well the hotel services meet or exceed the expectations of the guests. High levels of satisfaction lead to positive word-of-mouth, repeat visits, and customer loyalty, while dissatisfaction can result in negative reviews and loss of business. Understanding the specific factors that contribute to tourist satisfaction within the context of Tamil Nadu's unique hospitality landscape is essential for hotel managers and policymakers to implement effective strategies for service improvement. By identifying the key determinants of tourist satisfaction and assessing their relationship with different dimensions of service quality, this study aims to provide actionable insights for enhancing the service standards in Tamil Nadu's hospitality industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Oliver (1980) proposed the Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory, which states that tourists' expectations and experiences determine pleasure. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) define service quality as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Physical facilities, equipment, and staff appearance are tangibles, but reliability is the ability to deliver the given service reliably and accurately. Responsiveness is desire to help consumers quickly, whereas assurance is expertise, civility, credibility, and security. Finally, empathy is giving clients personalised care. SERVQUAL, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), is used to evaluate service quality in hotels and other service industries. This paradigm defines service quality as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tangibles in the hotel industry include buildings, equipment, and staff appearance, whereas reliability is the ability to deliver the promised service. Tourist satisfaction was positively correlated with service quality in North Cyprus hotels, according to Sönmez and Sirakaya (2002).

Service quality still drives hospitality satisfaction (Chi and Qu, 2008). In their study of international tourists in South Korea, Han and Ryu (2009) discovered that cultural backgrounds affected the effect of service quality on tourist satisfaction. Beyond service quality, location qualities, price perception, and cultural experiences affect tourist satisfaction (Kim et al., 2009). Service quality affects visitor satisfaction, royalty, and repeat business in tourism destinations (Xie, 2011). Service Quality Measurement from Customer Perception Using Services Science, Management, and Engineering. Tourist perception of Petra historical site services is positively correlated with service quality (Mukhels, 2013).

Tamil Nadu studies have shown that room, food, and personnel quality affect tourist satisfaction (Chandrasekaran and Govindasamy, 2015). Tangibles, attentiveness, and empathy greatly affect Ethiopian hotel client happiness. Abebe Tessera et al. (2016). In Sudan, assurance, empathy, and tangibility had the greatest impact on customer loyalty (D.M.E Diab et al. 2016). Temple architecture, classical dancing, and traditional food make the state's tourism unique and unforgettable (Sridhar, 2016). Gupta and Arora (2017) examined how service quality aspects affect customer satisfaction in the Indian hotel business, emphasising the necessity for personalisation and responsiveness. Raj et al. (2017) discovered that cleanliness, ambience, and staff behaviour affected tourist satisfaction in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. (Chawala U. 2017) examined hotel service quality and customer satisfaction in tourist destinations. SERVQUAL model examines functional, technical, and image quality (Puri and Singh, 2018).Tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and customer satisfaction are positively correlated (Noor & Ali, 2018).

Domestic tourists' view of budget hotels in tourist destinations is positive, significant, and moderately related to their future stay (Kannan. R, 2018).

Customer happiness and service quality are valued in the hotel sector (Anand & Vijay 2018). Tourists seeking authentic experiences are more satisfied with hotels that include local culture (Arumugam and Ramachandran, 2018). Kim and Kim (2018) found that service quality strongly affected tourist satisfaction in their study on international tourists' hotel service quality perceptions in South Korea. Tourists expect and perceive Kodaikanal tourism services as high-quality (Manimekalai, 2019). In Indian luxury hotels, Raza et al. (2019) found that service quality promotes client loyalty and favourable word-of-mouth. Kumar and Chelliah (2019) found that responsiveness and assurance determine hotel service quality in Tamil Nadu. Aravind and Raja (2020) used the ECM to measure Madurai tourists' pre-visit expectations, service quality, and post-visit satisfaction. Meeting or exceeding tourists' expectations considerably improved hotel satisfaction. Hotel industry promotes growth and development. 2020 (Shah & Devendra). The tourist satisfaction with Nainital's staff and service quality was ordinary (Huzeima & Salia, 2020).

In Shashemene town's star-rated hotels, reliability, responsiveness, and tangibility affected customer satisfaction (Mena et al.2020).

In today's world, most travel and tourism businesses are meeting planners and providers of housing, transport, attractions, and entertainment. Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy determine Changsha hotel customer happiness (Saeed, Xizheng, et al. 2021). Empathy, responsiveness, certainty, and tangible increase customer happiness, while reliability decreases it (Ali, Gardi et al. 2021). Despite the importance of service quality in the hospitality industry, there is limited research focusing on the specific context of Tamil Nadu. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in Tamil Nadu's hotel sector.

2.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To evaluate the SERVQUAL Model of service quality in the hotel sector of Tamil Nadu.
- ✓ To measure the level of tourist satisfaction with hotel services in Tamil Nadu.
- ✓ To analyze the influence of service quality dimensions of hotels on tourists' satisfaction

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology signifies a thorough examination of the methodologies used in the research. The following technique was used to fulfil the study's objectives. The present research is based on both primary and secondary data. This study collects data from travellers using a quantitative research design that includes structured questionnaires. The sample comprises of 300 tourists who stayed in various hotel categories (luxury, mid-range, and budget) around Tamil Nadu's major tourist spots. The data were gathered using a SERVQUAL-based questionnaire. Respondents ranked their impressions and expectations of service quality on a Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The theoretical framework of the study was developed by gathering secondary data from Tamilnadu Tourism Development Corporation publications, books, journals, articles, and other published sources. The trial runs from April 2023 to March 2024. Hypothesis of the Study (HO): Identified variables of service quality had no statistically significant effect on tourist satisfaction. Data analysis is the methodical transformation of data using appropriate tools to arrive at a conclusion. The following tools were employed in the study. Descriptive statistics and SERVQUAL Model to the service quality aspects of hotels in Tamil Nadu, India. Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis was used to examine the association between the dependent variable, tourist satisfaction, and the specified service quality aspects of hotels in the state of Tamil Nadu. Statistical techniques like SPSS were used to assure accuracy.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sample surveyed comprised 300 tourists, including 250 domestic and 50 foreign visitors, with an equal representation of genders. The majority of respondents were below 25 years old, with less than 50% in the mid-age group of 25 to 50 years, and only a few over 50 years old. Among domestic tourists, 35% were employed in either private or government sectors, 30% were self-employed, 32% were homemakers, and the remaining 5% were retired. Regarding income, 79% of domestic tourists fell into the annual income bracket of Rs. 2,50,000 to Rs. 10,00,000, indicating a strong representation of the middle to upper-middle-income groups. Foreign tourists, on the other hand, generally had higher incomes. In terms of travel companionship, 32% of respondents visited Tamil Nadu alone or with friends, while 68% traveled with family. Most tourists viewed Tamil Nadu as a short weekend holiday destination, favoring locations like Ooty, Kodaikanal, and Chennai. About 80% stayed for less than a week. Notably, 60% of the sample had previously visited the state, while 40% were first-time visitors.

4.1 SERVQUAL Model: Tourist Satisfaction in Relation to Service Quality in Tamil Nadu Hotels

The SERVQUAL model is a widely used framework to assess service quality in the hospitality sector, and it can be effectively applied to understand tourist satisfaction in Tamil Nadu hotels. This model comprises five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

1. **Tangibles**: refer to the physical aspects of the hotel, including the cleanliness, modernity, and the availability of facilities. In Tamil Nadu, hotels generally score high in cleanliness and modern equipment, but there is room for improvement in recreational amenities.

2. **Reliability**: involves the hotel's ability to perform promised services dependably and accurately. Tourists in Tamil Nadu have expressed satisfaction with the booking process and housekeeping services. However, issues such as timely room service and reliable internet connectivity need attention to enhance overall reliability.

3. **Responsiveness**: measures the willingness of hotel staff to help guests and provide prompt services. While the check-in/check-out process and front desk helpfulness receive high ratings, the prompt resolution of maintenance issues and staff availability during peak times are areas for improvement.

4. **Assurance**: encompasses the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. High levels of professionalism and politeness among staff contribute positively to this dimension in Tamil Nadu's hotels. Enhancing the handling of special requests could further boost tourist confidence.

5. **Empathy**: refers to the provision of caring, individualized attention to guests. Tamil Nadu hotels are praised for personalized attention and consideration of guest preferences, but there is a need for greater flexibility and more personalized services.
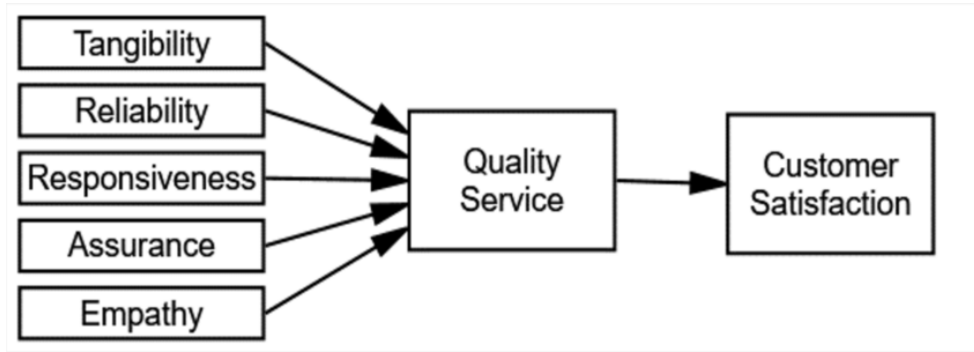
Overall, the application of the SERVQUAL model reveals that Tamil Nadu's hotels perform well in many areas, significantly contributing to tourist satisfaction. However, targeted improvements in specific areas such as recreational facilities, internet reliability, and maintenance responsiveness could further enhance the overall guest experience and satisfaction levels.

This visual representation helps in understanding how each dimension of the SERVQUAL model contributes to overall tourist satisfaction in the hotel sector of Tamil Nadu.

Table-1 Results Analysis of Dimension of Service Quality

SERVQUAL Services (Tourist Satisfaction in Tamil Nadu Hotels)		Mean Score	Total Average Mean Score	Correlation Analysis (r)
Tangibles	The state of cleanliness in rooms and public areas.	4.5	4.2	0.75
	Up-to-date equipment and décor.	4.3		
	Availability and quality of recreational facilities.	3.8		
Reliability	Accuracy and reliability of the reservation process.	4.4	4.1	0.72
	Consistency in housekeeping services.	4.3		
	Reliable delivery of promised services.	3.6		
Responsiveness	Speed of check-in/check-out and other services.	4.3	4.0	0.78
	Quick resolution of maintenance issues.	4.1		
	Presence of staff during peak hours.	3.6		
Assurance	Expertise and competence of hotel staff.	4.5	4.3	0.68
	Politeness and friendliness of staff.	4.4		
	Confidence in the services provided.	4.0		
Empathy	Individualized service for guests.	4.2	4.1	0.71
	Consideration of guest preferences.	4.3		
	Ability to accommodate special requests.	3.8		
Overall Tourist Satisfaction			4.2	1

Source: Primary Data

The Table-1 shows the SERVQUAL Model services of tourist satisfaction in Tamilnadu Hotels. The overall satisfaction level of tourists with the service quality in Tamil Nadu's hotel sector was high, with a mean score of 4.2. This indicates that the hotels are generally meeting or exceeding the expectations of their guests. The analysis highlights the strengths in areas such as cleanliness, staff professionalism, and personalized attention, while also identifying opportunities for improvement in service flexibility, maintenance responsiveness, and recreational facilities. To further understand the relationship between service quality dimensions and overall tourist satisfaction, a correlation analysis was conducted. The results indicate that all five dimensions of service quality are crucial in determining overall tourist satisfaction. Assurance and tangibles had the highest correlations (r=0.78, suggesting that physical aspects and staff professionalism are particularly important to guests.

Table-2 Multiple Regression Analysis: Dimensions of Service Quality Influencing Tourists' Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Intercept	0.485	0.093	5.215	< 0.001
Tangibles	0.287	0.045	6.378	< 0.001
Reliability	0.254	0.047	5.404	< 0.001
Responsiveness	0.192	0.051	3.765	< 0.001
Assurance	0.321	0.043	7.465	< 0.001
Empathy	0.265	0.049	5.408	< 0.001
Statistic	**R Square .758**	**Adjusted R Square .755**	**F Value 195.23**	**P Value <0.001**
Dependent Variable: Tourist Satisfaction				

Source: Primary Data

Table 2. Regression results of service quality parameters affecting visitor satisfaction. Intercept ($β_0 = 0.485$) Overall tourist satisfaction when all independent variables are zero is anticipated. It represents baseline contentment unrelated to service quality. Tourist satisfaction is greatly increased by changes in tangibles (cleanliness, modernity, facilities) ($β_1 = 0.287$). Overall satisfaction rises 0.287 units per unit in tangibles, holding other parameters constant. A positive coefficient ($β_2 = 0.254$) indicates that trustworthy services are essential for tourist satisfaction. One unit of reliability boosts satisfaction by 0.254 units. Responsiveness ($β_3 = 0.192$): Although less significant than tangibles and reliability, responsiveness positively affects satisfaction. One unit of responsiveness increases satisfaction by 0.192. Assurance ($β_4 = 0.321$) has the greatest influence among dimensions. Staff professionalism and civility raise satisfaction by 0.321 units per unit of assurance. Empathy ($β_5 = 0.265$): Enhances satisfaction. Empathy increases contentment by 0.265 units. R-squared (0.758): The five service quality factors explain 75.8% of tourist satisfaction variability. This suggests model fit. Adjusted R-squared (0.755): Adjusting for the number of predictors in the model confirms that the model explains a large percentage of satisfaction variability. The F-statistic (195.23, p < 0.001) indicates that the model is statistically significant, indicating that service quality factors significantly affect tourist satisfaction.

4.2 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY
- ✓ The study confirms that there is a significant positive relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in Tamil Nadu's hotel sector.
- ✓ The SERVQUAL model effectively captured service quality dimensions critical to tourist satisfaction in Tamil Nadu hotels.
- ✓ Assurance and tangibles are the most influential dimensions and areas for improvement include recreational facilities, room service timeliness, and flexibility in services.
- ✓ High overall satisfaction with an emphasis on cleanliness, modernity, professionalism, and courtesy. Moderate satisfaction with internet connectivity, maintenance responsiveness, and flexibility.
- ✓ All five SERVQUAL dimensions positively influenced overall satisfaction, with assurance being the most significant predictor.

4.3 SUGGESTIONS
1. Investing in more recreational amenities can improve the tangibles dimension and attract more tourists.
2. Addressing these issues can enhance reliability and overall guest experience.
3. Ensuring sufficient staff during peak times can improve responsiveness and reduce delays in service delivery.
4. Continuous training can maintain high standards of assurance, further boosting tourist confidence and satisfaction.
5. Increasing flexibility and personalization can enhance empathy, making guests feel more valued and understood.

V. CONCLUSION

The SERVQUAL approach has been shown to have a considerable influence on tourist satisfaction in Tamil Nadu hotels. The dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy have the greatest beneficial impact on satisfaction. Assurance and tangibles have the greatest beneficial impact, followed by empathy, reliability, and responsiveness. These findings highlight the need of maintaining good standards in these areas in order to increase overall tourist satisfaction. Hotels in Tamil Nadu should prioritise improvements in these areas in order to attract and keep pleased visitors. The study identified five key elements of service quality: basic service, staff service, conveniently accessible and convenient hotel location,

safety and security, gym facility, and culinary variety. The findings revealed that all of these elements had a beneficial influence on tourist satisfaction. The SERVQUAL model successfully captured components of service quality that are critical to visitor enjoyment, including high levels of contentment, certainty, and perceptible qualities. Recreational amenities, room service timeliness, and service flexibility all require improvement. All five SERVQUAL elements had a favourable impact on overall satisfaction, with assurance being the strongest predictor. This study provides actionable insights for hotel managers and policymakers to develop strategies that elevate service standards, thereby boosting the overall tourist experience in Tamil Nadu.

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