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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SERVICE QUALITY: AN ASSESSMENT OF GAPS IN RESTAURANTS OF BILASPUR CITY.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to assess the service quality gaps lies in the restaurants of Bilaspur city with respect to expectation and experience of the customers'. SERVQUAL scale is adopted and modified to suit the requirement of the study and survey in four well-known restaurants offering variety of cuisines was done. Mean score analysis was performed to identify the persists gaps with respect to expectation and experience of the customers'. This study reveals that only services with respect to willingness to help customers and prompt services (Responsiveness) exceeds the expectation of customers' and gaps were identified in all other service dimensions which indicates poor service quality of the restaurants. Multiple regression analysis is performed to assess the impact of these service quality dimensions on satisfaction of customers and intention of their revisit. Significant but low impact was found on the satisfaction of customers (31%) and very low influence on intention of revisit was revealed (11%). Findings of this study helps the owners of restaurants to understand the gaps and take corrective actions for improving satisfaction of the customers', thereby intending them for revisiting the restaurants and recommending the restaurants to others based on their positive experience.

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Introduction:-

India is a land of different cultures and cuisines where a specialty has been seen in the food habits across different cultures. When we talk about food, habit of taking different taste and variety is a common plethora in the modern world. With the gradual change in income and education and also change in social class, has developed a tendency of eating outside among the peoples, where they will able to taste different cuisines, not only of Indian origin but also foreign cuisines like Italian, Chinese, Continental etc. Many organizations has taken this habit as opportunity of business and started providing different variety of the foods to the consumers. These organizations have to build up their reputation and brand among their target consumers. According to Lovelock (2011), restaurant business falls under a category of 50% product and 50% services. For instance, if a restaurant provides very tasty and variety of food items but did not focuses on the services given to the consumer than consumer rejects such restaurants and vice versa. Hence maintaining quality in every aspect is must for businesses operating in food segment.

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A restaurant has to continuously assess and evaluate its services with respect to the expectation of customers. Assessment of service quality in restaurants depends upon number of factors. Susskind and Chan (2000) has consider the other three elements of service mix i.e. people, physical evidence and process along with the quality and variety of food provided by restaurants for assessment of service quality. Sulek and Hensley (2004) emphasis on better quality of food as more important factor rather than above mentioned elements.

Restaurants worldwide continuously investigate the satisfaction of their customers by evaluating their services with respect to expectation of the customers towards them, for enhancing and maintain their quality of services (Bashirian & Majdpoor, 2011). Marković et al. (2010) says that service quality evaluation in restaurants is more crucial and challenging task as service outcome is not the only important variable; delivery of those services is effective, efficient and pleasant manner also plays a significant role in overall service quality assessment.

From this discussion it is evident that quality of services provided at restaurants significantly impacts the satisfaction of customers which generates word of mouth publicity about the attributes of the restaurants. Emerging tendency of eating outside and its acceptance as social prestige and status encourages new restaurants to come up and this makes the competition among the sector fierce. It is also evident that customers' often complaint's about the poor services in many restaurants which obviously means there is something wrong in customer strategies of these restaurants. Also it is well accepted that there is a relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction and word of mouth communication, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, customer loyalty and sustainable profitability. So in the light of above construct, this study is purposed to determine the level of service quality delivered as a whole and on selected service quality dimensions in restaurants of Bilaspur city.

Objectives Of The Study:-

1. To assess the service quality with respect to customers expectation and experience at restaurants in Bilaspur city.
2. To find the impact of different dimensions of service quality offered by restaurants over consumers satisfaction.
3. To suggest possible courses of action that can help the restaurants to improve their service delivery in Bilaspur city.

Service Quality:-

According to Parasuraman et al. (1991), companies achieve competitive advantage by using the technology for improving their service quality and to tapping the opportunity in terms of market demand. Chang (2008) describes that the concept of service quality should be generally approached from the customer's point of view because they may have different values, different ground of assessment, and different circumstances. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990) mention that service quality is an extrinsically perceived attribution based on the customer's experience about the service that the customer perceived through the service encounter. According to the work of Kumra (2008), service quality is not only involved in the final product and service, but also involved in the production and delivery process, thus employee involvement in process redesign and commitment is important to produce final products or services.

Parasuraman defines service quality as "the differences between customer expectations and perceptions of service" (Parasuraman, 1988). He argued that measuring service quality as the difference between perceived and expected service was a valid way and could make management to identify gaps to what they offer as services. The aim of providing quality services is to satisfy customers. Measuring service quality is a better way to dictate whether the services are good or bad and whether the customers will or are satisfied with it.

Service quality is the expected and perceived quality of all the services an organization offers. An assessment of how well a delivered service conforms to the client's expectations. Service business operators often assess the service quality provided to their customers in order to improve their service, to quickly identify problems, and to better assess client satisfaction. Service quality (SQ) is a comparison of expectations (E) about a service with performance (P) $SQ = P - E$. A business with high service quality will meet customer needs whilst remaining economically competitive. Improved service quality may increase economic competitiveness.

SERVQUAL Model:-

SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry in 1985, 1988 used as method to assess customer loyalty for service industries. In the scale, they used the following five generic dimensions:

Tangibility:-

Physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel and written materials.

Reliability:-

Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness:-

Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

Assurance:-

Knowledge and courtesy of the employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

Empathy:-

Caring and individualized attention that a service provider provides to its customers.

The Gaps Model Of Service Quality:-

They identified five potential discrepancies or gaps associated with the delivery of service:

GAP 1:-

Customer expectations – management perception gap: the difference between management perceptions of customer expectations and actual customer expectations;

GAP 2:-

Management perception- service quality specification gap: the difference between understanding the customer expectations and development of service quality specifications;

GAP 3:-

Service quality specifications-service delivery gap: the difference between service quality specifications and actual service delivery;

GAP 4:-

Service delivery- external Communications Gap: the difference between actual service delivery and what is communicated about the service to consumers.

GAP 5:-

Expected Service- Perceived gap: the difference between customer expectations and customer perceptions.

Importance Of Service Quality:-

Business Promotion:-

When customers receive satisfactory and quality services from an organization, they tend to discuss it in their social network, which leads to direct publicity and increased popularity of an organization.

Increased Business Growth:-

Quality service can boost your business growth. Quality services can help you expand your client base

Critical Learning Experience:-

Customer service can provide business owners a critical learning experience to understand the dynamics of the corporate world and keep up with the latest business trends.

Reduced Risk of Business Failures:-

Understating the expectations and mindset of consumers can considerably reduce the risk of business failures and losses.

Consumer Satisfaction:-

If your customers are happy, your investors and business partners will be happy as well, and this ultimately leads to higher profits. With a strong client base you can win the trust of investors and make the most of every viable business opportunity.

Research Methodology:-

This study is aimed assessing the quality of services offered by restaurants in Bilaspur city and its effect on consumer satisfaction. Researcher has selected four very famous restaurant of Bilaspur city as study area to assess the service quality. The restaurant selection was based on the offered menu and it only those restaurants were selected for the study where both international and Indian variety of food was served. SERVQUAL scale is adopted and modified to suit the aim of this study and a survey among customers of the restaurants was done. Researcher has selected 100 sample customers randomly which comprises 50 male customers and 50 female customers. Division of sample in male and female customers is done so that more participation of female dispora can be recorded which will generalize the result of the study. Data collected from survey is analysed with the help of SPSS 21.0.

Data Analysis & Discussion:-

Table 1 reflects the demographic profile of the respondents. The results of descriptive analysis for demographic information indicated that among the analyzed samples (n = 100), 50% of the respondents were female and 50% were male (as per sampling plan). In terms of age group, the ages of the respondents ranged from upto 20 years to above 40 years old, with the majority of respondents falling between the age group of “21-30” (47%), followed by the age group “31-40” (29%), upto 20 years (19%), “> 40” (5%). Majority of respondents were married (54%) and have education upto post graduate level (54%) followed by graduate 23% and others (12%). About 61% of the respondents were working people (salaried or self-employed), followed by 20% from others category and 19% were students. Majority of the respondents have an monthly income of 25,001 – 75,000 (88%). On the frequency of their visit to the restaurant at which they were surveyed, 92% ate at the restaurant from 20 to 10 times in a month and used to spend an amount upto 10,000 on eating in restaurants (85%).

Table 1:-Respondent Demographics (n = 100)

Demographic		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	50	50.0
	Female	50	50.0
Age	Upto 20 Yr	19	19.0
	21-30 Yr	47	47.0
	31-40 Yr	29	29.0
	Above 40 Yr	5	5.0
Marital Status	Married	54	54.0
	Unmarried	46	46.0
Education	Upto Higher Secondary	11	11.0
	Graduate	23	23.0
	Post Graduate	54	54.0
	Others	12	12.0
Occupation	Salaried	43	43.0
	Self-employment	18	18.0
	Student	19	19.0
	Others	20	20.0
Income	Upto 25,000	4	4.0
	25001-50,000	61	61.0
	50001-75,000	27	27.0
	Above 75,000	8	8.0

Table 2:-Respondent Expenditure in Restaurants (n = 100)**How much do you spend on eating/dine in restaurants (Monthly)**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Upto 5,000	54	54.0	54.0	54.0
5,001 - 10,000	31	31.0	31.0	85.0
10,001 - 15,000	9	9.0	9.0	94.0
Above 15,000	6	6.0	6.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Table 3:-Respondent Frequency of visit (n = 100)**How often would you dine out (Monthly)?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Once in a Month	7	7.0	7.0	7.0
2 - 5 times	51	51.0	51.0	58.0
5 - 10 times	41	41.0	41.0	99.0
More then 10 times	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

First a Mean score analysis is performed among all the attributes of service quality dimensions to assess the gap between expected service and actual experience of the services in the restaurant.

Table 4:-Gap Analysis of Perceived and Experienced Service Quality Dimensions (n = 100)

	Expectation		Experience	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibles				
Usage of modern equipment's	2.2700	.64909	3.1100	1.24637
Physical facilities are visually appealing	3.5400	1.34405	4.4900	.65897
Employees are neat in appearance	3.1500	1.12254	2.3200*	1.06249
Materials are visually appealing	3.1000	1.27525	2.2200*	1.03064
Reliability				
Promises will be fulfill within certain time	1.1400	.37659	2.4700	.62692
Problems of customers will be resolved with interest	1.9700	.90403	2.6900	1.03177
Performance of service right the first time	2.7700	1.14464	2.3400*	.89013
Services provided as the time they promised	2.1600	1.05141	2.5200	.89307
Error free records were maintained	1.9400	.95155	2.7300	1.44848
Responsiveness				
Customers will notified about the delivery of services	2.3200	.78983	2.8000	1.31809
Prompt services given by employees	1.1200	.32660	3.2900	1.10367
Employees willing to help customers	2.2800	1.24787	2.6200	1.17877
Employees were never too busy to respond request	1.2500	.75712	1.9300	.87911
Assurance				
Employees behavior intils confidence	3.3200	.78983	2.5600*	1.04756
Feeling of safety in transactions	2.3900	1.09078	1.6400*	.55994
Employees are consistently courteous	2.5900	1.12002	2.8200	1.29006
Employees are knowledgeable to answer questions	4.3500	.74366	2.9600*	1.60126
Empathy				

Individual attention is provided	2.3900	1.09078	3.5600	1.04756
Convenient operating hours	2.4000	1.25529	3.0700	1.12146
Employees gives personal attention	3.1300	1.28437	3.1700	1.16389
Best interests at heart	2.2200	1.03064	2.1400*	1.08265
Employees understand specific needs	2.3700	1.25251	3.0700	1.12146

The above given table indicates the mean score of each attributes of service quality dimensions with respect to Expected service and Experienced services. With respect to the Tangibles dimension of the service quality, a gap with respect to neatness and cleanliness of the employees and visually appealing materials used in the restaurants was found. This shows that on the whole, restaurants were lacking behind in using different visually appealing materials in their restaurants and also need to give more emphasis on neatness and cleanliness of the employees. Well defined and neat uniform is required for the employees in majority of restaurants. Apart clothes, personal neatness and cleanliness of the employees should also be ensured by the management of restaurants.

With respect to the Reliability dimension of the service quality, a gap found with respect to performing right services in the very first time. This shows that some mistakes have been happened in performing the services right for the very first time and same thing has to be repeated when customers makes a complaints, results not only in rework but also irritation and dissatisfaction of the customer. Management of restaurants were recommended to provide sufficient training to their employees so as to improve their performance so that rework in cases of faulty service delivery can be checked and delivering the right service in the very first time will also makes customer satisfied.

It was noted that consumer were found satisfied with all the attributes of responsiveness related aspects where their experience of services exceeds their expectations. With respect to the Assurance related aspects, customers were found highly dissatisfies employees behavior, safe feeling about transactions of money and employees knowledge about queries made by the customers. It was noted that consumer feels that employees do not serve them by their heart and just performing their duty and job with respect to empathy related dimension of service quality. With the promotion of cashless transactions by government, it becomes primary duty of the management of restaurants to ensure financial safety of their customers in transactions. Also proper behavioural and service related training related to hospitality, need to be imparted to the employees, which will encourage them to provide better services and handling queries and complaints of the customers in effective manner and make customers feel that they were special and treated best from the heart of the employees.

Table 5:-Predicting customer satisfaction, intention to revisit.

Dependent	Independent	b-value	Beta	t-value
Customer satisfaction	Tangibles	-.083	-.164	-1.875
	Reliability	.011	.025	.288
	Responsiveness	.117	.265	2.852
	Assurance	.104	.279	2.589
	Empathy	.042	.126	1.167
R2 = 0.318, F = 8.778, p<0.05				
Intention to revisit	Reliability	.100	.238	2.475
	Responsiveness	-.114	-.267	-2.780
R2 = 0.114, F = 6.268, p<0.05				

Multiple regression analysis was carried out to assess the impact of various service quality dimensions on satisfaction of customers and intention to revisit at the restaurants. In identifying those significant variables accounting for customers' satisfaction, it is found that all the service quality dimensions have a significant influence on satisfaction. The adjusted R2 of this model is 0.318, which indicates that these service quality dimensions create 31.8 % of the variation in customer satisfaction. Highest variation in customers' satisfaction was created by Responsiveness (at 22.8%) and lowest by Tangibles (at 12.9%). The significant F-ratio (F = 8.778, p = 0.000) indicates that the results of the regression model could hardly have occurred by chance. Thus, the goodness-of-fit of the model is satisfactory. All the 5 dimensions of service quality significantly and positively influenced satisfaction among the restaurant customers. Based on the beta coefficient of each independent variable, it is possible to assess the impact of each variable on the dependent variable, satisfaction. According to Table 5, the variable

“Responsiveness” was the most important determinant of customers’ satisfaction; it had the standardized coefficient value, 0.265, and the highest t-value, 2.852, followed by Assurance with highest beta = 0.279.

Separate regression analysis was conducted to investigate the influence of the service quality dimensions on revisit intention of the restaurant customers. Table 5 provides the results of the regression analysis with intention to revisit as the dependent variable. It was noted that among 5 service quality dimensions, only 2 dimensions (Reliability and Responsiveness) has a significant influence on customers’ intention to revisit the restaurant. The adjusted R² of this model is 0.114 which indicates that these service quality dimensions influences the decision of customers’ for revisiting the restaurants by only 11.4 %. This low percentage of variance shows poor quality of services offered by the restaurants in Bilaspur city. According to Table 5, Reliability was found most determinant with respect to intention of revisit the restaurant by customer with highest standardized coefficient value, 0.238 and highest t-value of 2.475.

Conclusion:-

The main objective of this study was to identify the gap persists regarding various service quality dimension in restaurants of Bilaspur city with respect to expectation and experience of the customers’. The current study used a modified SERVQUAL instrument to investigate customers’ perceptions of restaurant service quality and their experience. The result of this study suggests that Responsiveness is the only dimension where customers’ experience exceeds their expectations and all rest dimensions need to taken care by the management of the restaurants. When analyzing customer satisfaction with likelihood of repeat patronage, the results showed that customer satisfaction is positive but very average and but very poor with respect to intention of revisiting the restaurant. The success of restaurant businesses relies on providing superior service quality, value, and customer satisfaction, which in turn enhances customer behavioral intentions with respect to revisit at the restaurants. The customer’s post-dining decision whether to return or not to return to the restaurant is the moment of final truth for the restaurant manager. This study has been the first attempt to assess the importance of quality dimensions that influence service quality in restaurant services in Bilaspur city. Theoretically, this study has confirmed the importance of service quality in restaurants of India as of west.

It is important for restaurant operators in Bilaspur to pay more attention to providing friendly services that makes customers feel valued and cared for. Improvement of visual appeal, food taste, freshness and provision of accurate and reliable service might help restaurant operators meet or exceed customer expectations and improve repeat patronage and willingness to recommend. More emphasis on neatness, cleanliness and behavioural aspects of the employees is recommended along with proper training of the employees with respect to hospitality sector. Improving service quality will not only strengthen customer loyalty, but also improve the restaurant’s reputation, and result in more sales and greater revenue in the long term.

Limitations And Future Research:-

This study has several limitations. First, the results of this study cannot be applied conclusively to the whole restaurant sector in Bilaspur as it was conducted in only restaurants providing variety of cuisines and other fast food joints and traditional restaurants with Indian or regional foods were excluded from this study. To generalize the findings for the restaurant sector, a study that would include all types of restaurants in different geographic locations could be conducted. Secondly, service quality dimensions employed in this study were adapted from the existing scales created in the context of the United States; the minor modification might not be enough when applying them to suit a specific city in Indian culture, hence an exploratory study is required which works on the service quality dimensions suited to Indian customers’. In addition, omission of other factors such as price, perceived value and waiting time, related to the service quality in restaurant service could be considered in future research.

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