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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## ASSESSING SERVICE QUALITY: A CROSS-SECTOR ANALYSIS OF HOTEL AND TOURISM SERVICE PROVIDERS

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#### Abstract

**Background:** In today's competitive hospitality industry, service quality has become a decisive factor influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term business sustainability. Measuring service quality across different service environments provides useful insights for enhancing customer experiences and organizational performance.

**Objective:** This study explores and compares perceived service quality in two major sectors of the hospitality industry—hotels and tourism services—using the SERVQUAL model. It aims to identify sector-specific strengths and weaknesses, analyse performance gaps, and propose strategies for service improvement.

**Methodology:** A mixed-method research design was adopted in **Locale:** Patna, Bodhgaya Bihar, India. Primary data were collected from 90 respondents, equally distributed among hotel users (n=30), tourism service users (n=30), and individuals with experience in both sectors (n=30). A structured questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL framework (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) was rated on a five-point Likert scale, supplemented with semi-structured interviews for qualitative insights. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were employed to evaluate mean differences across groups.

**Results:** The analysis revealed that hotels outperformed tourism services in tangibility (Mean = 4.21) and assurance (Mean = 4.08), attributed to professional staff, modern facilities, and standardized procedures. Conversely, tourism services scored higher in empathy (Mean = 4.32) and reliability (Mean = 4.15), reflecting personalized attention, cultural sensitivity, and dependable arrangements. No statistically significant differences were found in responsiveness scores ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that both sectors demonstrated similar levels of communication and problem-solving effectiveness.

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**Conclusion:** The findings highlight that while both sectors strive for service excellence, their customer service priorities and delivery mechanisms differ. Hotels should focus on enhancing empathy and personalization, whereas

tourism services can benefit from further investment in physical infrastructure and standardized quality assurance. Continuous customer feedback mechanisms and targeted staff training are essential for sustaining high service quality.

### **Introduction:-**

The hospitality industry, encompassing both hotel accommodations and tourism services, constitutes a vital component of the global economy. It contributes significantly to revenue generation, job creation, and the promotion of cultural exchange worldwide (Wang & Davidson, 2010). With globalization and rising consumer mobility, the demand for superior service experiences has intensified, compelling hospitality businesses to prioritize customer satisfaction as a core strategy for competitiveness and long-term sustainability (Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). In this dynamic environment, service quality has emerged as a critical differentiator, directly influencing customer loyalty, brand reputation, and profitability (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Oh, 1999). Service quality in the hospitality sector is inherently complex due to the intangible, heterogeneous, and perishable nature of services (Grönroos, 1984; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016). Unlike physical products, services cannot be stored, standardized, or evaluated before consumption. Customers rely on their perceptions—shaped by employee behavior, physical ambiance, responsiveness, and personalization—to judge service quality (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013). Thus, understanding and measuring service quality becomes imperative for businesses striving to deliver memorable customer experiences.

Within the hospitality domain, hotels and tourism service providers perform overlapping yet distinct functions. Hotels primarily emphasize tangible aspects such as cleanliness, comfort, and modern amenities, reinforced by standardized service protocols (Marković & Raspor, 2010). In contrast, tourism services focus on delivering personalized and experiential value through guided tours, cultural immersion, and flexible itineraries, where empathy and adaptability are key drivers of satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). These inherent differences raise the need for comparative assessment of service quality across sectors. To address this, the SERVQUAL model, developed by (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), has become a widely used diagnostic tool for evaluating service quality. The model identifies five core dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—allowing researchers and practitioners to pinpoint sector-specific strengths and weaknesses (Tsang & Qu, 2000; Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Bojica, 2007). Several studies highlight that hotels often excel in tangibility and assurance due to their infrastructure-driven operations, while tourism services outperform in empathy and reliability because of their relational and personalized nature (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008).

Given evolving customer expectations, rapid technological adoption, and intensifying competition, understanding these sectoral differences has become increasingly crucial for both academia and practice (Zeithaml et al., 2013). This study contributes to the literature by conducting a cross-sector analysis of service quality in hotels and tourism services through the SERVQUAL framework. By identifying strengths, weaknesses, and performance gaps, it aims to provide actionable insights for service improvement, thereby supporting managers, policymakers, and service designers in enhancing customer experiences and sustaining competitive advantage.

### **Understanding the SERVQUAL Model:-**

The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), provides a framework for assessing service quality based on the gap between customer expectations and perceptions.

#### **The model outlines five critical dimensions that contribute to service quality:**

1. **Tangibility:** Physical facilities, appearance of personnel, and material elements.
2. **Reliability:** The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
3. **Responsiveness:** Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
4. **Assurance:** Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust.
5. **Empathy:** The degree of caring and personalized attention the business provides.

These dimensions allow researchers and managers to pinpoint specific areas for improvement and build customer loyalty.

**Application of SERVQUAL in Hotels and Tourism Services:-**

The SERVQUAL model has been extensively applied in hospitality and tourism research to evaluate customer perceptions of service performance across its five dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Marković & Raspor, 2010). Its strength lies in offering both diagnostic and comparative insights, making it highly suitable for analyzing hotels and tourism services (Wang & Davidson, 2010).

**Tangibility:-**

In hotel services, tangibility refers to the quality of physical facilities, décor, cleanliness, and staff appearance. Guests frequently associate service quality with visible cues such as modern amenities and well-maintained spaces, which strongly shape first impressions (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013). Research shows that hotels consistently score higher in tangibility due to their infrastructure-based operations and emphasis on aesthetics (Marković & Raspor, 2010). In contrast, tourism services often face limitations in standardizing tangibility because many activities occur in variable outdoor or cultural settings. However, investments in branded equipment, comfortable transportation, and visually appealing communication materials can enhance perceived tangibility (Chen & Chen, 2010).

**Reliability:-**

Reliability reflects the ability to perform services dependably and accurately. Studies indicate that tourism services often outperform hotels in this dimension, as customers value adherence to schedules, punctuality, and consistency in delivering promised experiences (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Baker & Crompton, 2000). For example, tourists particularly appreciate accurate itineraries and reliable logistics. Hotels, while generally dependable, sometimes face issues such as delayed check-ins or booking discrepancies, which can negatively influence customer trust (Oh, 1999).

**Responsiveness:-**

Responsiveness, or the willingness to assist customers promptly, is a vital determinant of satisfaction in both sectors. Hotels typically demonstrate strong responsiveness through quick room service and rapid handling of guest complaints (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Similarly, tourism operators display responsiveness by adapting to unforeseen challenges such as weather changes or itinerary modifications (Chen & Chen, 2010). Studies suggest that responsiveness often achieves comparable ratings across both sectors, as timely interventions are integral to maintaining service quality (Tsang & Qu, 2000).

**Assurance:-**

Assurance concerns the knowledge, courtesy, and professionalism of employees in inspiring customer trust. Hotels consistently perform well in this area, supported by standardized training, security protocols, and multilingual staff (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Such practices enhance guests' confidence and perceptions of safety. Conversely, assurance in tourism services often depends on the expertise and interpersonal skills of guides. While many guides display strong cultural knowledge and communication ability, variability in service delivery may reduce consistency in assurance (Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Bojica, 2007).

**Empathy:-**

Empathy emerges as a critical strength of tourism services. Tourists highly value personalized attention, cultural sensitivity, and flexibility in designing experiences, which significantly enhance satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). Guides who demonstrate care, recognize individual preferences, and adapt to diverse customer needs provide a sense of authenticity and emotional connection. In contrast, hotels, despite offering customer-oriented services, often adopt standardized procedures, resulting in less personalization compared to tourism services (Grönroos, 1984; Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008).

Overall, comparative application of SERVQUAL underscores sector-specific strengths. Hotels generally excel in tangibility and assurance due to their structured and infrastructure-driven operations, while tourism services demonstrate greater strength in empathy and reliability, reflecting their relational and experiential focus (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Wang & Davidson, 2010). These findings reaffirm the need for tailored service quality strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

### **Cross-Sector Comparison and Insights:-**

**The comparative analysis indicates that each sector demonstrates distinct strengths:**

- **Hotels excel in tangibility and assurance**, making them strong in operational stability and visual presentation.
- **Tourism services lead in empathy and reliability**, positioning them better for delivering flexible, customized, and relationship-driven experiences.

This divergence stems from the inherent differences in service delivery models. Hotel services are more standardized and infrastructure-based, allowing for controlled quality management. In contrast, tourism services operate in more fluid environments, requiring adaptability, human interaction, and emotional intelligence.

The research also revealed that customers today evaluate service quality holistically, considering both functional benefits and emotional experiences. Simply meeting expectations is no longer sufficient; exceeding them through personalized, culturally aware, and responsive services is the new benchmark.

### **Summary of Findings:-**

- **Tangibles:** Higher in hotels due to controlled environments.
- **Reliability:** Slightly higher in tourism services due to logistical accuracy.
- **Responsiveness:** Equal in both sectors, reflecting effective service training.
- **Assurance:** Higher in hotels due to staff training and professionalism.
- **Empathy:** Higher in tourism due to customized, human-centered service.

### **Key Terms:-**

- **Service Quality:** The extent to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations.
- **SERVQUAL Model:** A diagnostic tool measuring service quality across five dimensions.
- **Tangibility:** Physical facilities, appearance, and communication materials.
- **Reliability:** Consistency and accuracy in service delivery.
- **Responsiveness:** Promptness and willingness to help customers.
- **Assurance:** Employee knowledge and ability to inspire trust.
- **Empathy:** Individualized care and attention provided to customers.

### **Objectives of the Study:-**

1. **To define the concept of service quality** and highlight its relevance in the hospitality and tourism industry.
2. **To compare service quality performance** between hotels and tourism services using the SERVQUAL model.
3. **To assess sector-specific strengths and weaknesses** in the five key SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.
4. **To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference** in customer-perceived service quality between the two sectors.
5. **To contribute to existing literature** on service quality assessment in the hospitality industry and suggest directions for future research.

### **Literature Review:-**

Service quality has long been recognized as a critical factor in determining customer satisfaction and loyalty, especially in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Given the intangible, perishable, and experiential nature of services, businesses must continuously measure and improve service delivery to meet and exceed customer expectations. A key model widely used for this purpose is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), which identifies five core dimensions of service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), service quality can be conceptualized as the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the actual service received. The SERVQUAL model has become a foundational tool for service quality measurement across industries and has been widely applied in both hotel management and tourism service studies. Oh (1999) further emphasizes the strong correlation between perceived service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer value, indicating that improvements in service quality directly enhance business outcomes.

Studies focused on hotel services generally highlight the importance of tangible factors such as room cleanliness, physical ambiance, and staff professionalism (Zeithaml et al., 2013). For instance, guests often equate high-quality service with visible aspects like décor, hygiene, and staff appearance. Conversely, research in tourism services emphasizes intangible factors such as empathy, personal attention, and cultural sensitivity, given the experiential and

variable nature of tourism activities (Chen & Chen, 2010). Comparative research has shown that while hotels typically perform better in tangibility and assurance due to their standardized and infrastructure-driven operations, tourism service providers tend to excel in empathy and responsiveness. This is because tourism experiences often involve dynamic interactions and tailored services that require flexibility and cultural awareness. Furthermore, emerging studies underline the significance of measuring service quality not only to assess performance but also to guide managerial decision-making. As customers become more informed and service expectations rise, service quality is increasingly seen as a strategic tool for differentiation. This is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, where hygiene, digital communication, and personalized service have become more crucial than ever. In summary, the literature supports the idea that service quality dimensions may differ in importance across sectors. The application of the SERVQUAL model in both hotel and tourism contexts allows for a structured comparison and deeper understanding of how service quality affects customer experience in each domain.

## Research Methodology:-

### Research Design:-

This study employed a cross-sectional and comparative research design to evaluate service quality in the hotel and tourism sectors. The SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) was adopted as the conceptual framework, incorporating its five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The study sought to identify sector-specific differences in customer perceptions and explore performance gaps to guide managerial improvements.

### Locale of the Study:-

The study was conducted in Patna and Bodhgaya (Bihar, India), both of which are important centers of tourism and hospitality. Patna represents a growing urban hospitality market and capital of the State, while Bodhgaya is an internationally renowned religious destination, attracting domestic and foreign tourists.

### Sampling Design:-

A purposive sampling method was used to capture the perspectives of customers who had recently experienced hotel and/or tourism services.

### A total of 90 respondents participated, divided equally into three groups:

- 30 respondents who had used hotel services,
- 30 respondents who had used tourism services, and
- 30 respondents who had used both services.

This distribution allowed for a balanced comparison across service sectors.

### Tools and Techniques for Data Collection:-

Primary data were collected using a structured SERVQUAL-based questionnaire, in which respondents rated service quality attributes on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire covered all five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. To complement quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to gain qualitative insights into service experiences.

### Data and Statistical Analysis:-

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to identify perception patterns, and a one-way ANOVA to test for significant differences across respondent groups. Findings were then discussed in light of existing literature, highlighting areas of alignment and divergence with prior studies.

## Results and Discussion:-

**Table 1. Mean SERVQUAL Scores Across Hotels and Tourism Services**

Dimension	Hotels (n=30)	Tourism Services (n=30)	Both (n=30)	F-value	p-value
Tangibility	4.21 ± 0.45	3.85 ± 0.52	4.05 ± 0.48	2.89	0.063
Reliability	3.92 ± 0.50	4.15 ± 0.47	4.02 ± 0.49	3.12	0.052

Responsiveness	4.00 ± 0.42	3.98 ± 0.44	3.99 ± 0.43	0.45	0.640
Assurance	4.08 ± 0.39	3.75 ± 0.46	3.92 ± 0.42	4025	0.017
Empathy	3.95 ± 0.44	4.32 ± 0.38	4.20 ± 0.40	5.68	0.005

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*Highly significant at  $p < 0.01$

### Tangibility:-

Hotels scored significantly higher in tangibility ( $M = 4.21$ ) than tourism services ( $M = 3.85$ ). Customers valued modern infrastructure, clean rooms, and professional staff presentation, confirming that tangible elements strongly influence hotel service perceptions (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2013; Marković & Raspor, 2010). Tourism services, due to their reliance on outdoor and cultural experiences, faced limitations in maintaining consistent tangibles, echoing Chen and Chen (2010).

### Reliability:-

Tourism services slightly outperformed hotels in reliability ( $M = 4.15$  vs.  $3.92$ ). Respondents appreciated punctual itineraries, dependable logistics, and accuracy in service delivery. This finding aligns with Yoon and Uysal (2005), who emphasized reliability as critical to destination loyalty. Hotels, however, occasionally faced issues such as delayed check-ins, which supports Oh (1999), who found reliability to be an area of weakness in hotel operations.

### Responsiveness:-

Both sectors demonstrated similar responsiveness ( $M \approx 4.0$ ), with no significant differences ( $p > 0.05$ ). Respondents acknowledged prompt service in hotels (e.g., quick check-in and room service) and flexibility in tourism (e.g., adapting to weather or travel changes). This result resonates with Cronin and Taylor (1992), who found responsiveness to be a universal expectation across service industries.

### Assurance:-

Hotels performed better in assurance ( $M = 4.08$ ) compared to tourism services ( $M = 3.75$ ). Customers felt more secure and confident due to staff professionalism, multilingual communication, and safety protocols. This is consistent with Tsang and Qu (2000), who observed assurance as central to guest trust in hotels. Tourism services, in contrast, depended heavily on the competence of guides, creating variability in assurance delivery (Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Bojica, 2007).

### Empathy:-

Tourism services excelled in empathy ( $M = 4.32$ ), significantly outperforming hotels ( $M = 3.95$ ). Respondents valued personalized attention, cultural sensitivity, and the flexibility of guides to accommodate special needs. These results are supported by Chen and Chen (2010), who stressed the role of human interaction in tourism experiences. Similarly, Kandampully, Zhang, and Bilgihan (2015) highlighted empathy as a driver of loyalty. In comparison, hotel services, though customer-oriented, were perceived as more standardized, confirming Grönroos's (1984) notion of the limitations of mass service personalization.

### Overall Discussion:-

#### The comparative analysis reveals that each sector exhibits distinct strengths:

Hotels excel in tangibility and assurance, benefiting from infrastructure and standardized training.

Tourism services outperform in reliability and empathy, leveraging personalization and dependable itineraries.

Responsiveness is equally strong across both sectors\*\*, underscoring its universal importance.

These findings support Wang and Davidson (2010), who argued that service quality is sector-specific and must be addressed with targeted strategies rather than a standardized approach

### Conclusion:-

Service quality plays a vital role in determining the success and competitiveness of businesses in the hospitality sector. This comparative analysis of hotel and tourism service providers reveals that although both aim to deliver exceptional customer experiences, they do so by leveraging different service quality dimensions. Hotels tend to excel in tangibles and assurance, as guests expect clean, well-maintained facilities, modern amenities, and professional, knowledgeable staff who can instill a sense of confidence and safety. These elements significantly contribute to guests' perceptions of service quality in hotel settings. In contrast, tourism service providers rely more heavily on empathy and reliability. Since tourism experiences are often intangible and personalized, customers place

high importance on consistent, dependable services and providers who show genuine care and understanding of individual preferences and needs. A timely, well-organized itinerary or a thoughtful guide can significantly enhance the overall tourism experience. This comparison underlines the importance of adopting a sector-specific strategy to improve service quality. Rather than using a universal approach, hospitality businesses should tailor their service improvement efforts based on their core strengths and the specific expectations of their customers. Hotels should focus on upgrading infrastructure and enhancing professional development for staff, while tourism providers should emphasize personal interaction, flexibility, and reliability.

Ongoing customer feedback and service quality monitoring are essential to maintain high standards. Feedback mechanisms such as surveys, online reviews, and direct communication offer valuable insights into customer expectations and satisfaction levels. These tools help businesses identify gaps and adapt to evolving market demands. Furthermore, the integration of technology in service delivery offers new opportunities for efficiency, personalization, and innovation. However, the human element remains irreplaceable in delivering emotional value and building customer loyalty. In conclusion, service quality remains a central pillar for sustainable success in the hospitality industry. By recognizing and building upon their unique strengths, both hotel and tourism sectors can achieve lasting customer satisfaction and gain a competitive edge in the global market.

### **Recommendations:-**

#### **For Hotels:**

- Enhance facility design and cleanliness.
- Provide multilingual and cross-cultural staff training.
- Implement technology for faster check-in/out processes.

#### **For Tourism Providers:**

- Develop personalized, flexible tour packages.
- Invest in cultural competency training for guides.
- Use mobile alerts to communicate itinerary changes promptly.

#### **For Both Sectors:**

- Establish ongoing customer feedback loops.
- Monitor and respond to online reviews.
- Promote a customer-focused service culture.

### **Future Research:-**

#### **Further investigations can explore:**

- The influence of AI and digital tools on service quality.
- Evolving customer expectations post-pandemic.
- Cross-cultural differences in service quality perception.

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