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# Effect of Demographic Variables on Service Quality Dimensions: An Empirical Assessment of Hotel Industry

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**ABSTRACT**

*A research study was conducted with an objective to understand customers' perception towards hotel services. Collected data was analyzed. In this article researcher highlights the impact of demographic variables on five service quality dimensions. The outcome of this research provides diagnostic insight into how different demographic variables influences service quality dimensions in hotel services industry.*

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer perception, Demographic variables, Hotel Industry Services and Service Quality Dimensions.

## INTRODUCTION:

Tourism and hospitality industry in India is a key growth driver and important source of foreign exchange earnings. In India, the sector's direct contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow at 7.8 per cent per annum during the period 2013-2023. The total market size of the tourism and hospitality industry in India was at US$ 117.7 billion in 2011 and is expected to touch US$ 418.9 billion by 2022 N. Nguyen and G. Leblanc (2001). The foreign direct investment inflows in hotel and tourism sector during the period April 2010–March 2016 was at US$ 7,348.09 million, as per the data announced by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion. According to a study conducted by SRI International, India is plan to be number one for growth globally in the wellness hospitality sector in the next five years, clocking over 25 per cent gains annually through 2020. The tourism and hospitality sector in India is prosperous due to an increase in foreign tourist arrivals (FTA) and a larger number of Indians travelling to domestic destinations. According to statistics available with the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), income gained from domestic tourism rose by 7.1 per cent in 2016 and is anticipated to increase by 8.2 per cent in the present year. Hotels are also an extremely significant component of the tourism industry. The Indian hospitality sector has been growing at a cumulative annual growth rate of 15 per cent every year, adding required amount of foreign exchange to the economy. On part of the Indian government, which has provided policy and infrastructural support, has been instrumental in the promotion and development of the industry. The tourism policy of the government objective is to speed up the implementation of tourism projects, development of integrated tourism circuits, unique capacity building in the hospitality sector and new marketing strategies.

The Indian hospitality industry has emerged as one of the key industries driving the growth of the services sector and, thereby, the Indian economy. The delivery of high-quality customer service plays an important role in the success of the hospitality business. By providing high quality services, hospitality procedures are more likely to attract both first time and repeat visitors. Hotel guests who have a quality experience are likely to revisit and to communicate favorable reports to friends and relatives. This creates both repeat business and potential for new business. Unfortunately reverse is also possible, if quality hospitality services are not provided. As a result, the unhappy/dissatisfied customers/hotel guests will not return the same hotel again and express negative comments about the hotel and damage its market reputation. Moreover, past researches have

revealed that service quality is clearly linked to customer satisfaction, increased willingness to pay higher prices for high quality services, profitability, repeat purchase behavior and positive word of mouth and increased customer loyalty (Berry, et.al., 1994; Scheneider and Chung, 1996; Magi and Julander, 1996; Lee, et. al., 2000). Providing high quality services to customers depends on the hotels ability to exceed the expectations of the guests. Measuring service quality perceived by customers helps in initiating quality improvement areas in a hotel, correcting quality problems and seeking new ways of innovation (Raghu, 2009). Therefore, it becomes vital for hospitality industry to study the quality of service the hotels are offering to its guests from the customers' perspective.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

### Dimensions of Service Quality:

As service quality is known to be based on multiple dimensions (Gronroos, 1982, 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1985), there is no general agreement as to the number of dimensions (Brady and Cronin, 2001). Gronroos (1984) identified two service quality dimensions, the technical aspect and the functional aspect. The functional aspect explains "how" service is provided while the technical aspect is concerned with "what" is provided. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991), proposed two approaches to analyze service quality and its dimensions. The first approach contains three dimensions consisting of physical quality, corporate quality and interactive quality. Physical quality refers to the tangible aspects of the service. Corporate quality refers to how current and potential customers, as well as other public views (image) the service provider. Interactive quality concerns the interactive nature of the service and refers to a two-way flow that occurs between service provider and the customer, or his/her representative, including both animated and automated interactions. However, in the second approach service quality was comprised of two dimensions labeled as: process quality and output quality. Process quality is the customer's personal and subjective judgment of his/her participation in the service production process. Output quality is the customer's evaluation concerning the result of the service.

Gronroos (2001), also emphasized the importance of corporate image in the experience of service quality, similar to the idea proposed by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991). The author mentioned that customers bring their earlier experiences and overall perceptions of a service firm to each encounter because customers often have continuous contacts with the same service firm. Therefore, the image concept was introduced as yet another important component in the perceived service quality model, so that the dynamic aspect of the service perception process was considered as well. Yet, Rust and Oliver (1994) proposed a three-component model in which the overall perception of service quality is based on a customer's evaluation of three dimensions of the service encounter: the customer-employee interaction (i.e., functional or process quality), the service environment, and the outcome (i.e. technical quality). Brady and Cronin (2001) also identified three dimensions viz., interaction quality; physical environment quality; and, outcome quality. Interaction quality refers to the perceptions of the customer concerning the interpersonal interactions that take place during service delivery. Physical environment quality focuses on the influence that the surrounding environment or physical facilities have on the perceptions of the customer. Outcome quality refers to a customer's perceptions of what he/she is left with after the service is rendered.

However, Parasuraman et. al. (1985) offered the most widely accepted set of ten service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, credibility, communication, security and understanding. After subsequent investigations and testing, these ten dimensions were reduced to five: 'tangibles' – physical facilities, equipments, 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 and individualized attention, the firm provides to its customers (Parasuraman, et. al., 1988). Johnston et al. (1990) identified twelve dimensions while carrying out empirical research, some of which were similar to the ten determinants of Parasuraman et. al., (1985) and include: Access; Appearance/aesthetics; Availability; Cleanliness/tidiness; Comfort; Communication; Competence; Courtesy; Friendliness; Reliability; Responsiveness; and Security. But, these were based on management perceptions only and not from customers' perspective. Therefore, Johnston and Silvestro (1990) added five more dimensions latter viz., Attentiveness/helpfulness; Care; Commitment; Functionality; and Integrity. However, one more dimension namely 'flexibility' was also added later on (Johnston, 1995), after carrying out further research on these 17 determinants. This was used to describe "a willingness and ability on the part of the service worker to amend or alter the nature of the service or product to meet the needs of the customer".

The above cited literature brings to light that there is no consensus among the marketing scholars regarding the

dimensionality of service quality construct. However, the five dimensional construct of Parasuraman, et. al., (1988) has been widely acknowledged in various research studies (Knutson, et. al., 1990; Blanchard and Galloway, 1994; Stevenes, et.al., Lassar, 2000; Brysland and Curry, 2001; Khan, 2003; Lau, et.al., 2005; Markovic and Raspor, 2012.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study and understand how different demographic variables impact customers perception towards hotel service quality.
2. To know the relationship between demographic variables and their impact on service quality dimensions.

## HYPOTHESIS:

**H1:** Service Quality in hotels varies significantly across Length of Stay days.
**H2:** Service quality in hotels varies significantly across number of visits.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This study aims to understand customers' perception towards hotel industry with special reference to northern India (Jammu and Kashmir, Chandigarh and Amritsar). This study is based on primary data through well structured questionnaire. The relevant secondary data have been collected from various journals magazines groups and websites.

### Sample Size:
The sample size is 663 and data were collected from guests who were staying in hotels of northern India.

### Statistical Tools:
Descriptive analysis and Correlation technique have been used by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences and Amos).

### Sampling Method:
Stratified Random Sampling Technique

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS:

### Service Quality Variation and Length of Stay:
With a view to measure service quality variation and length of stay in sample organization, respondents were divided into four groups, viz., 1st group 1-6days, 2nd group for 7-12 days, 3rd group 13-18 days, and 4th group more than 19 days. The comparative SERVPERF scores are reported in Table 1 which reveals better scores in hotels among all four groups. Further F-test, post hoc test and effect size were calculated to test the significant differences, if any, and to test the research hypothesis.

The data on Table 1 clearly reveals that there is significant difference ($p<0.05$) in the overall quality of services as per length of stay group, thus accepting the hypothesis H1. In other words, it brings to light that hotels differentiate their quality of services as per the length of stay days. However, respondents whose stay was 7-12 days reported relatively better service quality (3.29) followed by 13-18 days (3.26) while as respondents whose stay was 1-6 days reported relatively low service quality scores (3.09) followed by the respondents whose stay days were more than 19 days (3.12).

Dimension-wise analysis shows significant differences ($p<0.05$) on tangibility dimension. However, service quality scores on tangibility as reported by the respondents whose stay was 1-6 days is relatively high (3.37) followed by 13-18 days (3.23). Relatively low service quality scores have been reported by respondents whose stay was more-than 19 days (3.16) followed by 7-12 days (3.19). Again significant differences ($p<0.05$) in the quality of services on reliability dimension are reported by the respective respondents. The observed differences as per the effect size (0.212) is small in size (refer Table 5.7 for threshold limits). Respondents whose stay was 13-18 days have reported relatively higher service quality scores (3.22) followed by the respondents whose stay days were 1-6 days (3.20). Comparatively low service quality scores has been reported by the respondents whose stay days were 7-12 days (2.98) followed by respondents who stayed for more-than 19 days (3.17). On responsiveness dimension, respondents reported significant variances ($p<0.05$). Relatively higher scores (3.35)

on said dimension have been reported by respondents who stayed for 1-6 days followed by 13-18 days (3.26). While as this dimension is reported relatively low by the respondents whose stay days were more-than 19 days (2.78) followed by 7-12 days (3.25) and the observed differences is (0.321) medium. Significant differences ($p<0.05$) in the quality of hotel services have been reported on assurance dimension and the observed differences is of small size as reflected by the effect size (0.112). Data on empathy dimension brings to fore significant differences ($p<0.05$) in the quality of hotel services as reported by the respective respondents. The value of size effect (0.503) shows that observed differences is of medium size (Refer Table 5.7 for threshold limits). Relatively better service quality scores (3.97, 3.41) has been reported by the respondents whose stay days were 7-12 and more-than 19 days respectively. While as low services (3.26, 3.36) have been reported by the respondents whose stay days were 1-6 days and 13-18 days respectively.

**Table 1: Comparative SERVPERF Scores as per Length of Stay**

| Service Quality Dimensions | Length of Stay | Mean Scores | Variance | | | 'P' Value* | Effect Size Eta$^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Between Hotels | Total | Percent Explained | | |
| Tangibility | 1-6 days | 3.37 | 4.10 | 8.91 | 46.01 | 0.030* | 0.047 |
| | 7-12 days | 3.19 | | | | | |
| | 13-18 days | 3.23 | | | | | |
| | More than 19 Days | 3.16 | | | | | |
| Reliability | 1-6 days | 3.20 | 5.12 | 9.18 | 55.77 | 0.000* | 0.212 |
| | 7-12 days | 2.98 | | | | | |
| | 13-18 days | 3.22 | | | | | |
| | More than 19 Days | 3.17 | | | | | |
| Responsiveness | 1-6 days | 3.35 | 1.97 | 5.13 | 38.40 | 0.031* | 0.321 |
| | 7-12 days | 3.25 | | | | | |
| | 13-18 days | 3.26 | | | | | |
| | More than 19 Days | 2.78 | | | | | |
| Assurance | 1-6 days | 2.25 | 3.32 | 5.92 | 63.84 | 0.044* | 0.112 |
| | 7-12 days | 3.10 | | | | | |
| | 13-18 days | 3.24 | | | | | |
| | More than 19 Days | 3.01 | | | | | |
| Empathy | 1-6 days | 3.26 | 6.11 | 9.12 | 66.99 | 0.000* | 0.503 |
| | 7-12 days | 3.97 | | | | | |
| | 13-18 days | 3.36 | | | | | |
| | More than 19 Days | 3.41 | | | | | |
| **Overall** | **1-6 days** | **3.09** | **5.41** | **9.99** | **54.15** | **0.002*** | **0.410** |
| | **7-12 days** | **3.29** | | | | | |
| | **13-18 days** | **3.26** | | | | | |
| | **More than 19 Days** | **3.12** | | | | | |

*Significant ($p< 0.05$) at 5% level

**Table 2: Shows homogeneity based on length of stay Tukeys' b**

| Length of Stay | Subset for alpha = 0.05 |
|---|---|
| | **1** |
| **1-6 days** | 3.205 |
| **7-12 days** | 3.253 |
| **13-18 days** | 3.290 |
| **More than 19 days** | 3.309 |

Moreover the importance of the length of stay also gets reflected in the F value (Table 1). As such medium differences (F value = 9.99, p value = 0.002, size effect = 0.410) obtained in the quality of hotel services have been observed. The differences in the assessment of service quality of four groups were affirmed by medium (0.410) effect size. Holistically, these finding demonstrate guests time of stay has substantial influence on service quality perceptions, which suggests that longer the stay better is the quality of hotel services.

**Service Quality Variation and Number of Visits:**

To study service quality variation, if any by the number of visits, the respondents were categorized into four groups' viz, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th visit. Mean value of each group were calculate separately as shown in Table 3 followed by F-test, post hoc test and calculation of effect size to test the significant differences, if any, and to test the research hypothesis.

The data on Table 3 clearly reveals that there is insignificant differences ($p>0.05$) in the overall quality of services as reported by the number of visits, thus, negating the hypothesis H2. Further, the insignificant difference in the quality of hotel services is medium size in nature as reflected by the size effect (0.321). In other words, it brings to light that hotels do not differentiate amongst their customers based on number of visits while delivering their services. However respondents who came for 1st time have relatively better service quality scores (3.31) followed by 2nd time (3.21). While as respondents who came for 3rd time have relatively low service quality scores (3.13) followed by 4th time (3.19).

Dimension-wise analysis shows insignificant differences ($p>0.05$) on tangibility as reported by the respondents having paid multiple visits to the hotel. . However, service quality scores on tangibility as reported by the respondents who came for 1st time is relatively high (3.35) followed by 4th time visitors (3.29). Relatively low service quality scores has been reported by the 2nd and 3rd time visitors (3.12 and 3.23) respectively. Insignificant differences ($p>0.05$) in the quality of services on reliability dimension are reported by all respondents. Respondents who came for 1st time have reported relatively high service quality scores (3.21) followed by 4th time respondents (3.20). Comparatively low service quality scores have been reported among the respondents who came for 3rd time (3.10) followed by respondents who came for 2nd time (3.16). On responsiveness dimension, respondents of all the four groups reported insignificant variance ($p>0.05$). Relatively high sores (3.39) on said dimension have been reported by the 1st time visitors followed by 2nd time visitors (3.25). The said dimension is reported relatively low by 4th time visitors (3.13) followed by 3rd time visitors (3.23). Insignificant differences ($p>0.05$) are reported in the quality of hotel services on assurance dimension. The respondents who came for 1st time have reported relatively high service quality scores (3.28) followed by the respondents who came for 4th time (3.23). Data on empathy dimension brings to fore significant differences in the quality of hotel services. ($p<0.05$) as reported by all the four time visitors. Relatively better quality of services has been reported by the respondents who came for the 1st time (3.34). Relatively low services have been reported by the respondents who came for the 4th time (3.14). The results are complemented with the effect size (0.321) which signifies medium differences in the mean value across all the visits.

**Table 3: Comparative SERVPERF Scores as per Number of Visits**

| Service Quality Dimensions | Number of Visits | Mean Scores | Variance | | | 'P' Value* | Effect Size Eta$^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Between Hotels | Total | Percent Explained | | |
| Tangibility | 1st | 3.35 | 2.34 | 8.97 | 26.08 | 0.434 | 0.111 |
| | 2nd | 3.23 | | | | | |
| | 3rd | 3.12 | | | | | |
| | 4th | 3.29 | | | | | |
| Reliability | 1st | 3.21 | 2.12 | 7.99 | 26.53 | 0.890 | 0.021 |
| | 2nd | 3.16 | | | | | |
| | 3rd | 3.10 | | | | | |
| | 4th | 3.20 | | | | | |
| Responsiveness | 1st | 3.39 | 1.98 | 5.98 | 33.11 | 0.112 | 0.132 |
| | 2nd | 3.25 | | | | | |
| | 3rd | 3.23 | | | | | |
| | 4th | 3.13 | | | | | |
| Assurance | 1st | 3.28 | 3.31 | 8.71 | 38.00 | 0.732 | 0.210 |
| | 2nd | 3.21 | | | | | |
| | 3rd | 2.90 | | | | | |
| | 4th | 3.23 | | | | | |
| Empathy | 1st | 3.34 | 2.04 | 9.82 | 20.77 | 0.051* | 0.312 |
| | 2nd | 3.22 | | | | | |
| | 3rd | 3.28 | | | | | |
| | 4th | 3.14 | | | | | |

| Service Quality Dimensions | Number of Visits | Mean Scores | Variance | | | 'P' Value* | Effect Size Eta$^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Between Hotels | Total | Percent Explained | | |
| Overall | 1st | 3.31 | 3.21 | 11.13 | 28.84 | 0.941 | 0.321 |
| | 2nd | 3.21 | | | | | |
| | 3rd | 3.13 | | | | | |
| | 4th | 3.19 | | | | | |

Insignificant (p>0.05) at 5% level

**CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS:**

In view of the growing importance of service quality, in hotel services, the present investigation in-to an unexplored area was undertaken to measure effects of service quality dimensions on demographic variables in hotel industry in northern India and probe objectivity into the factors that help or obstruct in achieving quality services in hotel industry with a view to offer policy recommendations, on the basis of the findings of the study, for increasing service quality. The research approach employed consisted of both primary and secondary data. Secondary data was obtained from books, journals, magazines, published reports and the official records of the J&K Tourism Department, Punjab Tourism Department Chandigarh. Journals, like journal of marketing, journal of retailing, journal of service research, emrald, sage etc. and books, like delivering service quality, managing service quality, services marketing etc. were of great help for the present study. The study relied much on primary data which was collected with the help of self developed questionnaire that was especially designed to achieve the study goals as outlined. Two widely known models, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, et.al., 1988) and SERVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) are used by researchers to measure service quality. However, Cronin and Taylor (1992) objected on measurement of services quality in terms of expectations and perceptions. They provided empirical evidence across four industries to corroborate the superiority of their 'performance only' instead over disconfirmation-based SERVQUAL scale. Several other researchers were in line with Cronin and Taylor (1992) about the use of performance based scale (Greathous et al., 1996; Lee, et.al, 2000). As such performance based scale was chosen as an ideal scale for the present study. Some modifications were made to SERVPERF in order to suit the context of hotels for measuring service quality construct. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was designed to measure the guest perceptions regarding their service quality in hotels and the second part contained questions related to demographic variables of the respondents. To measure service quality, responses were obtained on a 5-point Likert-type scale where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree. The study was conducted in the hotels of northern India for five months during the summer of 2016. A stratified random sampling approach was employed in which two hundred seven (207) respondents were taken from Jammu and Kashmir and four hundred fifty six (456) respondents were taken from Punjab (Chandigarh and Amritsar) hotels representing 5 categories of hotels namely A, B, C D and E category. Guests completed the questionnaires in presence of the researcher. The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS-20 and Amos-20) was used to analyze the data. To explore the dimensionality of twenty six (26) item scale, factor analysis was performed which extracted five dimensions of service quality grouped as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy with average variance extracted for each dimension 0.542, 0.538, 0.540, 0.579 and 0.560 respectively. The forth factor contained most of the variance (0.579) and thus assurance is an important determinant of perceived service quality. The reliability of service quality construct showed on a score of 0.858 which is above the suggested cut off of 0.70 (Tabachnick and Fidel, 2002). The test was performed on each dimension which showed an α score of 0.916 on tangibility, 0.829 on reliability, 0.734 responsiveness, 0.867 on assurance and 0.935 on empathy. This finding was in line with the study of Rousan and Badaruddin (2010). The reliability (α score) of satisfaction construct was 0.854 and repurchase intention 0.954 which is above the suggested cut off value 0.70 (Tabachnick and Fidel, 2002). The study further concluded that hotel services vary significantly (p<0.05) among respondents whose stay vary from 1-6 days (3.09). Longer the stay better is quality of service reported by respondents whose stay exceeded 7-12 days and 13-18 days. However, those stayed for more than 19 days reported relatively low services (3.12) and Insignificant (p>0.05) service quality has been observed by repeat visitors. However, those who were 1st and 2nd visitors reported relatively better service quality (3.31, 3.21) as against those who were frequent visitors (3rd and 4th time visitors).

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