The User Gap in Service Provided by Travel Agents in Punjab:
The Customers View Point

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper provides valuable insights into the service provided by travel agents in Punjab. SERVQUAL model was used to measure GAP among customer expectations and customer perceptions. A sample of 1000 customers from different cities of Punjab was surveyed by using well structured questionnaire. Hypothesis related to RATER dimensions were formulated and tested by using paired sample t – test with the help of IBM – SPSS 20 software. The findings of the study revealed the existence of significant differences between expectations and perceptions related to all the RATER dimensions.

Keywords: Punjab, GAP, SERVQUAL, RATER, travel agents.

INTRODUCTION:

Punjab, the state of five rivers recognized as the cradle of civilization. It reflects the rich heritage culture with historical sites like forts, palaces, ancient monuments and other religious places. Despite conflicting reports of many private research agencies, customers' expectations are still not fulfilled by the service provided by the travel agents. The detailed understandings of the customers' expectations and customers' perceptions would help the travel agents to close or minimize service quality gap. Business of the travel agents is largely influenced by the service quality provided by them. It is necessary for the travel agent to stay touch with the customers for better execution of their services as per needs and wants of the customers. The gap analysis provides the powerful insights for betterment of the service quality. Ample number of research studies (Bharwana, Bashir, & Mohsin, 2013; Daniel & Berinyuy, 2010; Handrinos, Folinas, & Rotsios, 2015; Hanson & Sigman, 2013; Haywood-Farmer, 1988; Philip & Hazlett, 1997) interested in investigating the relationship between expectations and perceptions related to RATER dimensions in the past literature. Providing excellent service quality is a major challenge for service providers. It is the main reason that closing gap becomes an important subject area of marketers. This research paper aims to indentify the discrepancies' among customers' expectations and perception. The SERVQUAL model was used to measure the GAP in level of service quality.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

(Service, Expectation, Servqual, & Analysis, 2015) measured both perceptions and expectations of the service quality by using SERVQUAL model with objective to understand the level of gap exists. Gap score was calculated by subtracting the perceptions of the customers from the expectations of the customers. (Komvux, 2010) focused on customers' expected perceptions and original perceptions to measure service quality gaps and suggested that closing service quality gap provides value to customers and helps the service providers to retain and make new customers. (Dhanalakshmi, Rajini, & Kanimozhi, 2003) defined service quality as a comparison of customer expectations and performances. In current competitive environment, the quality of the service is the

key to success which may be achieved by improving operationalprocess. (Maass & Systems, 2012) critically examined different service quality models and found out that gap model as one of the most influential models in measuring service quality. (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2006) illustrated that measure and evaluate service quality is must to gain competitive advantage and pinpoint importance of SERVQUAL model to measure of service quality. The primary goal of the gap model (Bitner & Gremler, 2010) is to meet or exceed operational, technology based or human recourse related customer expectations.

OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH:

Toidentify the service quality gap between customers expectation and perceived service quality with respect to RATER service quality dimensions.

Accordingly, the hypotheses were:

Ha0: There is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for reliability.

Hb0: There is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for assurance.

Hc0: There is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for tangibility.

Hd0: There is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for empathy.

He0: There is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for responsiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The 21 item modified SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) was used to measure the RATER dimensions of service quality expectations having Cronbach's alpha 0.910 with service quality perceptions having Cronbach's alpha 0.875. All measures were reliable (Cronbach, 1951). A non probability sampling technique was used in this research study. Total of 1000 conveniently selected customers of travel agents from different cities of Punjab were requested to participate and fill the well structured questionnaire available in travel agent office. Paired comparison t-test was used to analyse the valid results obtained by the primary data collection method.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS:

Paired samples t – test was performed by using IBM SPSS 20 software as presented in table 1, It was revealed that the gap between expectations and perceptions of the customers related to reliability service quality dimension was significant (t = 7.713, p < 0.05) and our null hypothesis Ha0: there is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for reliability was rejected. This clearly indicates that the service quality gap among expectations and perception regarding reliability service quality provided by travel agents.

Table 1: Paired Samples t - test for reliability service quality dimension

GAP (Expectations – Perceptions)	Paired Differences			t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Null Hypothesis
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. E Mean			
Reliability	0.35525	1.45649	0.04606	7.713	.000	Rejected

The following table 2 shows the results of paired sample t – test for assurance service quality dimension. The p value for the assurance dimension was less than 0.05. Thus it was concluded that our null hypothesis Hb0: there is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for assurance was rejected. This clearly indicates the service quality gap among expectations and perception regarding assurance service quality provided by travel agents.

Table 2: Paired Samples t - test for assurance service quality dimension

GAP (Expectations – Perceptions)	Paired Differences			t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Null Hypothesis
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. E Mean			
Assurance	0.29925	1.65930	0.05247	5.703	.000	Rejected

Again paired sample t – test was performed on the responses given by the respondents on seven point semantic differential scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to measure gap between expectation and perceptions of the customers related to tangibility service quality dimension. The results of this test were

presented in table 3. While considering the statistical level of significance at 5%, it was revealed from the output table that there was significant difference as p value was 0.00 and t value was 7.964. Null hypothesis Hc0: there is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for tangibility was rejected again rejected.

Table 3: Paired Samples t - test for tangibility service quality dimension

GAP (Expectations – Perceptions)	Paired Differences			t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Null Hypothesis
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. E Mean			
Tangibility	0.38750	1.53866	0.04866	7.964	.000	Rejected

From table number 4, it was easily observed that (t = 7.588, p < 0.05). The average level of expectations of the customers was greater than that of the actual level of perceptions of the customers in case of empathy service quality dimension. Thus our null hypothesis Hd0: there is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for empathy was rejected. This indicates the significant gap (expectations – perceptions) with respect to empathy service quality dimension.

Table 4: Paired Samples t - test for empathy service quality dimension

GAP (Expectations – Perceptions)	Paired Differences			t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Null Hypothesis
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. E Mean			
Empathy	0.36460	1.51944	0.04805	7.588	.000	Rejected

In last table 5, results related to paired samples t - test for responsiveness service were presented. By looking at the 'sig' column p < 0.05, it was revealed that p value is statistically significant. The null hypothesis He0: there is no significant difference between expectations and perceptions of the customers for responsiveness was rejected. It provides us sufficient information that there is a gap between expectations and perceptions of the customers related to responsiveness service quality dimensions.

Table 5: Paired Samples t - test for responsivenessservice quality dimension

GAP (Expectations – Perceptions)	Paired Differences			t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Null Hypothesis
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. E Mean			
Responsiveness	0.39800	1.60921	0.05089	7.821	.000	Rejected

CONCLUSION:

The statistical tests were performed for the entire hypothesis and revealed the differences between expectations and perceptions of the customers with respect to all the RATER dimensions related to service quality provided by travel agents in Punjab. Thus the entire null hypothesis Ha0, Hb0, Hc0, Hd0 and He0 were rejected and significant differences among the expected and actual perceptions were found towards service quality provided by travel agents in Punjab. The research study revealed the considerable service gap in terms of reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness dimensions of the service quality provided by travel agents in Punjab. Travel agents should improve these service quality aspects to minimize the quality gapsand to improve profitability.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The findings of the research study confirm the significant gap in all the service quality RATER dimensions measured by SERVQUAL model. This research study provides necessary understandings of the service quality measurements. It helps the service providers to understand the customer view point of the services to win among competitors. The knowledge about customer expectations and customer perceptions enhance performances of the travel agents to reap more innovative profitable transactions by working on the current promotional mix strategies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH:

In Current research study only five RATER service quality dimensions were used, there may be other service quality dimensions that could also be considered in further empirical research studies. The data were collected fromselected cities of Punjab only. This may limit the generalizations of the research findings to the travel agents of other states of India. Questionnaire method limited amount of information revealed by the respondents.

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