Applying Gaps Model in Tourism Industry-A study of customer Gap in selected hotels of Kashmir

Abstract

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Service quality is considered a cornerstone for the success of any service organization. Tourism sector being one of the important service sector, it becomes imperative to focus on providing better service quality. Thus the sector requires employees whose performance exceeds expectation of the customers. The efforts of the employees should be to decrease the negative gap as much as possible between customer perception and their expectations **o**f service quality. Existing research suggests that this gap between customer perception and their expectations of service quality was identified and presented in Gaps model by Parassuraman, et al. This gap was called as customer Gap or Expected Service-Perceived Service Gap. This Gap can be measured and estimated using SERVQUAL instrument also proposed by Parassuraman, et al. The study uses the SERVQUAL instrument to measure the Expected Service-Perceived Service Gap in hotels of Kashmir. The study uses the proportionate stratified sampling considering Srinagar, Gulmarg and Pehalgam as various strata. The data was collected from 300 customers of the 6 hotels (2 hotels and 100 customers from each strata) of Kashmir. Reliability and validity tests were conducted followed by basic descriptive statistics. The gap score was calculated and their significance was tested using t-test. The gap score was used to test the proposed hypotheses. The results of the study reveal that there exists a significant gap between customer perception and expectation of service quality in hotels of Kashmir. Furthermore the average customer gap score is more in lower age group customers as compared to the higher age group customers. The possible reason being their exposure to other hotels of the country that contributes to development of higher expectations

Keywords: Gaps Model, Service Quality, SERVQUAL, customer perception, customer expectation, Tourism sector, Hotels, Jammu & Kashmir. .

1. Introduction

The tourism sector in Kashmir has grown tremendously over a past decade. This growth has resulted in cutthroat competition between various service providers of tourism sector in the state. The players are adopting various strategies to gain the competitive advantage. In order to search and maintain the competitive advantage, the tourism sector is placing more focus on service quality as it has become an important competitive advantage in almost all industries (Albrecht and Zemke, 2001). It has been considered as the most researched concept in the service marketing because of its relationship with various outcomes. (Baron et al., 2009). Bolton and Drew (1991) relate service quality with customer retention whereas Cronin and Taylor (1992) highlight the relationship of service quality with customer satisfaction. Because of fierce marketing strategies adopted by various service providers of tourism sector, customer loyalty has started declined Hence, attracting new customers has become equally important as retaining existing customers (Wisner and Corney, 2001; Jones et al., 2002). As a result, it is vital and important for tourism sector to understand the various dimensions of customers' perception of service quality. In order to achieve this desired service quality, the performance of the employees in general and contact employees in particular need to be effective. The employees should be enough motivated to give desired performance. Thus organizations are consistently putting efforts to match the actual perceptions of the customers with their expectations of service quality and reduce the possible negative gap if any between them. It is in this context that the present study aims to explore the perceptions and expectations of customers regarding service quality in hotels and analyse the possible gaps between perception of service quality and expectations of the service quality in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

2. Literature Review

Literature on the service quality reveal that many researchers have termed service quality an 'elusive' and 'indistinct' construct that is difficult to define and measure (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bolton and Drew, 1991; Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). According to Baron et al. (2009), service quality is a highly abstract construct as compared to the goods quality, where technical aspects of quality are apparent. Furthermore, Clewes (2003) claim that finding an appropriate definition of service quality an unresolved issue in area of service marketing. Researchers have made attempts to define quality as one of the earliest definitions of quality was put forward by the Crosby (1979). He defines quality as: *"the conformation to specifications."* Crosby (1979) further states that quality is often mistaken for some imprecise

adjectives like “goodness, or luxury or shininess or weight”. These adjectives are illustrating the indefinable nature of the construct. However, Lewis and Booms (1983) were one of the first to define quality in terms of services. They define service quality as *“a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer’s expectations.”* (Gronroos, 1984) defined service quality as follows *“the perceived quality of a given service will be the outcome of an evaluation process, where the consumer compares his expectations with the service he perceives he has received, i.e. he puts the perceived service against the expected service. The result of this process will be the perceived quality of the service.”*

Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed this definition and argue that *“service quality stems from a comparison of a consumer’s general expectations with their actual perceptions of a firm”* Consequently, service quality can be measured by how much the service provided to consumers exceeds their expectations (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).

For the purpose of the study, the definition put forward by the Parasuraman et al. (1988) was used and service quality was defined as *“the ability of the organization to meet or exceed customer expectation in terms of what they feel a service provider should offer rather than would offer”*

2.1. Models and Measures of Service Quality

Researchers over the period of time have recognized the need to develop valid measures of service quality. This has lead to the development of many measures service development in the past few decades. In service marketing literature, different models have been developed to find the different determinants of the service quality concept. Gro¨nroos (1984) proposed technical and functional quality model that state that customers compare their expectations to their experience of service quality in forming their judgments. Parasuraman et al., (1985) proposed GAP model that define the service quality as a difference between expectation and performance. If expectations are more than performance, a gap is formed which in turn results from other four Gaps. This exploratory research was refined with their subsequent scale named SERVQUAL for measuring customers’ perceptions of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Attribute service quality model given by Haywood-Farmer (1988) focuses on meeting the expectations of the customers regularly. According to this model a service organization has “high quality” if it meets customer preferences and expectations consistently. Cronin and Taylor, (1992) gave performance only model that the service quality with consumer satisfaction and purchase intentions. The authors suggest that the perceptions are better predictor of service quality and the expectations are difficult to

conceptualize. They authors thus developed performance only measurement of service quality called SERVPERF. They maintained that Performance instead of "Performance-Expectation" determines service quality and service quality is evaluated by perceptions only without expectations. Internal service quality model proposed by Frost and Kumar, (2000) uses Gaps model of Parasuraman et al. (1985) to develop an internal service quality. The model thus identifies three internal Gaps. Internet banking model (Broderick and Vachirapornpuk, 2002): The authors tests the service quality model of internet banking. The model suggests that five key elements in the context of the internet influence the perceived service quality. These key factors are: customer expectations of the service, the image and reputation of the service organization, aspects of the service setting, the actual service encounter, and customer participation.

These were few of the service quality models and measures which has considerable acceptance in the academic circles. However, one of the most popular measures of service quality widely accepted and used by academicians and researchers is SERVQUAL, originally developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1994). According to Brown and Bond (1995), the GAPS model of the Parasuraman et al. is one of the best received valuable contributions to the service marketing literature. This pioneer study of Parasuraman et al. (1985) is regarded as major driving force in developing an increased understanding of service quality (Gerrard and Cunningham, 2001). The current study has used the SERVQUAL as a measure of service quality in hotels and thus for evaluating the Customer Perception-Customer Expectation Gap.

2.2. SERVQUAL Model

Among the general instruments of service quality, the most popular instrument is SERVQUAL, which has been used to measure the service quality in variety of banks in original (Dedeke, 2003; A. 28 Hassan Al-Tamimi and Al-Amiri, 2003; Furrer et al, 2000; De Ruyter et al, 1999; Cowling and Newman, 1996; Kwan and Tan, 1994) as well as adapted versions (Adlaigan and Buttle, 2002; Othman and Owen, 2001, 2002; Bahia and Nantel, 2000; Kangis and Voukelatos, 1997; Teas, 1993).). Many researchers consider a stream of research initiated by Parasuraman et al (1985) the most comprehensive investigation in the field of service quality. According to Parasuraman et al (1985), service quality is a function of three attributes i.e. pre-purchase customer expectations, perceived process quality, and perceived output quality. The researchers propose that consumers evaluate both the process

and the outcome of the service received. SERVQUAL scale consists of 22-items spread over five dimensions, each item measuring two statements:

(i) Customers expectations of service quality, and

(ii) Customer's perceptions of the service they actually received.

According to Parasuraman et al., the content of the 22-items making up each dimensions of SERVQUAL was assessed and following labels and brief definitions for the five dimensions were suggested:

i. ***Tangibles:*** *Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.*

ii. ***Reliability:*** *Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately*

iii. ***Responsiveness:*** *Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service*

iv. ***Assurance:*** *Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence*

v. ***Empathy:*** *Caring, individualised attention the firm provides to its customers*

Parasuraman et al, (1985 &1988) suggested that the difference between customers' expectations of a service provider's performance and their evaluation of the services they have received will determine the service quality. According to Zeithaml et al, (1993), customers' expectations are beliefs about a service. Those beliefs act as standard against which service performance is judged. Parasuraman et al. (1988) state that customers' expectations are what customers think a service provider should offer rather than an actual offer. Thus,

Service quality = f (Perceptions – Expectations)

On the basis of the above equation, Parasuraman et al, developed and proposed the SERVQUAL instrument as a reliable, valid, and generalizable way to measure the service quality construct. As service quality has been defined as difference between a customer's expectations and the perception, a gap is formed if the perception falls short of the expectations. This Gap results due to size and direction of four other Gaps associated with delivery of service quality on the marketer's side (Parasuraman et al, 1988). These five Gaps visualized by the authors are as under:

Gap-1: Difference between consumers' expectation and management's perceptions of those expectations. , i.e. not knowing what consumers expect.

Gap-2: Difference between management's perceptions of consumer's expectations and service quality specifications, i.e. improper service-quality standards.

Gap-3: Difference between service quality specifications and service actually delivered i.e. the service performance gap.

Gap-4: Difference between service delivery and the communications to consumers about service delivery, i.e. whether promises match delivery

Gap-5: Difference between consumer's expectation and perceived service.

The Gap-1is referred as Consumer Expectations-management Gap. This Gap is discrepancy between what customers expect and what management perceived that they expected.The Gap-2 is referred as the Management Perception-Service Quality Specification Gap. This Gap is the result of the difference between manager's perceptions of customers' expectations and the actual standards they set for service delivery. The Gap-3 is referred as the Service Quality Specifications-Service Delivery Gap. This Gap is due to the difference between service specifications and the actual service delivery. The Gap-4 is referred as Service Delivery-External Communications Gap. The Gap is due to the difference between what a firm promises about a service and what it delivers. These four Gaps contribute to the Gap-5 which is referred Expected Service-Perceived Service Gap. This Gap is the result of the discrepancy between customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. The fifth Gap is the basis of the SERVQUAL instrument which is used to measure the difference between consumers' expectation and consumers' perception of the service received. Parasuraman et al. (1988), state that the magnitude of the gap between expectations and perceptions decide the level of the perceived service quality. They believe that the smaller the gap, the higher the level of perceived service quality. When expected service exceeds perceived service, quality is less than satisfactory and the level of gap is negative. When expected service equals perceived service, perceived quality is satisfactory and the level of gap is zero. When perceived service exceeds expected service then service levels are more than satisfactory and the gap is positive. This positive gap depicts that the more than satisfactory service levels is tending towards customer delight.

3. Research Methodology

The study was conducted using convenience sampling technique. Six three star hotels of Kashmir were selected for the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was administered on customers of those Hotels.

3.1. Sampling Frame and Method

The sampling frame consisted of the customers of the six hotels located at Srinagar, Gulmarg and Pahalgam. Two hotels were taken from each of the three regions. Data was collected from customers through the questionnaire administered personally. The questionnaires were distributed among 100 customers of two hotels of Srinagar, 100

customers of two hotels of Gulmarg and 100 customers of two hotels of Pahalgam. A total of 300 customers were taken for the study. All the distributed questionnaires were received and were usable. The details of the sampling frame is in Table 1

Table 1: Sampling Frame and Research Instrument

	SRINAGAR	**GULMARG**	**PAHALGAM**	**TOTAL**
Hotels	**Grand Mumtaz & Royal Batoo**	**Hotel Vintage & Heevan Retreat**	**Pahalgam Hotel & Pine and Peak**	**Six**
Sampling Units	Customers	Customers	Customers	-
No. Of respondents Contacted	100	100	100	300
No. Of usable Questionnaires received	100(100%)	100(100%)	100(100%)	100%
Research Instrument	SERVQUAL Parasuraman et al. (1988)			

3.2. Instruments

The data collection method used to collect the primary data for this study consisted of SERVQUAL instrument. The service quality instrument consisted of 22 items covering 5 dimensions. The scales were properly reviewed to make them more readable and comprehensive.

3.4. Pre-Analysis data screening

Before submitting the dataset for final statistical analysis, each collected questionnaire was individually checked for preliminary analysis to evaluate missing data, incorrect data and outliers. The data was first checked for presence of outliers. The critical value at $p<0.001$for chi squared with 5 independent variables for service quality is 20.52. Hence cases with Mahalanobis distance greater than 20.52 in case of service quality would be multivariate outliers. On inspecting the results it was found that there was no case with value greater than the critical value of 20.52 for df=5 in case of Service Quality, signifying that no outliers existed amongst the data collected. All the collected cases were hence fit for further statistical testing. The extreme Mahalanobis values with case numbers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Table of Extreme Values of service quality

			Hotels	
			Case Number	Value
Mahalanobis Distance	Highest	1	11	17.93838
		2	25	17.64738
		3	31	14.73382
		4	42	14.49582
		5	89	12.09384
	Lowest	1	39	02.99302
		2	23	02.56474
		3	14	03.93884
		4	28	03.44848
		5	71	03.34888

Shapiro-Wilk's test (p>.05) (Shapiro&Wilk,1964 ; Razali & Wah,2011) as shown in Table 3 was conducted on the variables of the study to test for normality. The results of the test showed that the p value of all the variables were above the critical value of 0.05 indicating that all the variables of the study were approximately normally distributed.

Table 3: Results of Shapiro-Wilk Test (Service Quality)

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	**Df**	Sig.
Tangibility	.933	300	.402
Reliability	.922	300	.231
Responsiveness	.917	300	.443
Assurance	.984	300	.501
Empathy	.944	300	.620

The internal consistency of the instruments was also tested by Cronbach Alpha. The reliability coefficients of the constructs of the service quality were 0.908. Each construct exceeded the 0.70 benchmark recommended by Nunnally (1978). The Cronbach Alpha scores indicated that all the scales were internally consistent and the scale items measured

the constructs the way they are intended to be measured. The results of the Cronbach Alpha test is presented in Table 4

Table 4: Cronbach Alpha Coefficients of Test Instrument

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
Service Quality	.914	.918	22

4. Objectives of the study

1. To examine the customer expectations and perceptions of service quality in hotels of Kashmir
2. To study the expectations and perceptions of service quality between different age groups.
3. To study the gap between the customer perception and expectation of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir

5. Hypothesis

H_o1: There is no significant difference between customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir

H_o2: There is no significant difference in perception of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers

H_o3: There is no significant difference in expectation of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers

H_o4: There is no significant difference between lower age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir

H_o5: There is no significant difference between higher age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir

H_o6: There is no significant difference in Gap-1 between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir

6. Data Analysis

It begins with presenting the demographic profile of the respondents followed by the basic descriptive analysis. Finally the difference in customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of kashmir was evaluated to test the proposed hypotheses.

6.1. Demographic information of the sample

The detailed demographic profile of the respondents of the study is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	195	65%
Female	105	35%
Age Group		
Upto 40 years	165	55%
More than 40 Years	135	45%

6.2 Descriptive statistics

The details of the descriptive statistics are presented in the Table 6

Table 6: Descriptive Analysis of Service Quality Factors

		All Six Hotels			
		Perceptions		Expectations	
Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
TANG0101	300	2.9298	.72223	4.5433	.88339
TANG0202	300	3.1433	.65574	4.5488	.64430
TANG0303	300	3.5363	.33324	4.4544	.84945
TANG0404	300	3.1838	.72728	4.3422	.55439
RELI0105	300	3.3433	.94844	4.6223	.58353
RELI0206	300	3.5267	.85744	4.7222	.66621
RELI0307	300	3.7373	.84844	4.4473	.88332
RELI0408	300	3.3331	.78434	4.3342	.82662
RELI0509	300	3.8473	.45464	4.8373	.99948
RESP0110	300	3.2334	.84594	4.9001	.84994
RESP0211	300	3.9441	.65534	4.7334	.88493
RESP0312	300	3.5464	.65554	4.2232	.78366
RESP0413	300	3.2118	.84994	4.4464	.85459
ASSU0114	300	3.6352	.86643	4.6373	.84994
ASSU0215	300	3.5443	.99943	4.4363	.84993
ASSU0316	300	3.7483	.44933	4.5363	.63383
ASSU0417	300	3.6865	.63553	4.7338	.85456
EMPA0118	300	3.9063	.83003	4.9331	.88392
EMPA0219	300	3.5262	.56533	4.5733	.88492
EMPA0320	300	3.4483	.98533	4.7112	.99482
EMPA0421	300	3.4928	.64543	4.6352	.88392
EMPA0522	300	3.1836	.99236	4.7464	.77228

It is seen from the Table 6 that the Mean score of the various items of the SERVQUAL variable Tangibility are close to the score of 3 depicting that the perception of customers towards Tangibility is les satisfactory in hotels of Kashmir. The mean score of the various items of the variable Reliability are around 3.5, thus again depicting less satisfactory perception of the customers regarding the Reliability. The mean score of the items of the variable Responsiveness are either close to 3 or around 3.5. Finally, the mean score of items of Assurance and Empathy are again around 3 and 3.5. This can be further interpreted from the average mean score of all the 5 variables as presented in Table 7

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of SERVQUAL variables – Perception/Expectation questionnaire

		All six hotels			
		Perceptions		**Expectations**	
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	300	3.1983	0.83997	4.4721	0.92220
Reliability	300	3.5521	0.99483	4.5926	0.83931
Responsiveness	300	3.4862	0.88392	4.5751	0.99331
Assurance	300	3.6531	0.99483	4.5682	0.93993
Empathy	300	3.5110	0.99481	4.7191	0.77332

As seen from the Table7 the average mean score of all the 5 variables in Hotels of Kashmir reflect that the customers are less satisfactory about all the variables of the meaning thereby that they feel less responsiveness and their physical facilities also need to be attractive and modern. Furthermore the customers perceive those hotels less dependable, less accurate, and less courteous, lacks the ability to pay individual attentions and care. The Expectation mean score of various items of the all 5 variables in Table 7 and average Expectation mean score of those variable represented in Table 7 reveal that customers have high expectations from those Hotels. The results of the basic descriptive analysis provide us the basic understanding of the customer perception and expectation towards various dimensions of the service quality in Hotels of Kashmir.

6.3. Hypotheses Testing using Gap analysis and T-test

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in perception and expectation of customers of hotels of Kashmir*

The null hypothesis 1 that there is no significant difference in perception and expectations of customers of hotels of Kashmir is statistically tested. The statistical significance in

difference is examined using T-statistics. If the calculated value of T-estimate is greater than 1.96 and less than 2.58, the difference is significant at 5% level. If the T- statistics value greater than 2.58, the difference is significant at 1%. If the T-value is significant, it means the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists a significant difference in perceptions and expectations of customers of hotels of Kashmir. The mean perception and expectation scores of customers along with T-values and significance level are presented in Table 8

Table 8: Perception and Expectation scores, t-value and Sig. level in Hotels

Dimensions	Statement	Expectation Score (ES)	Perception Score (PS)	Gap Score (PS-ES)	t-Value	Sig.
TANGIBILITY	TANG01	4.5433	2.9298	-1.6135		
	TANG02	4.5488	3.1433	-1.4055		
	TANG03	4.4544	3.5363	-0.9181		
	TANG04	4.3422	3.1838	-1.1584		
TANGIBILITY		**4.4721**	**3.1983**	**-1.2738**	**7.723**	**0.000**
RELIABILITY	RELI01	4.6223	3.3433	-1.279		
	RELI02	4.7222	3.5267	-1.1955		
	RELI03	4.4473	3.7373	-0.71		
	RELI04	4.3342	3.3331	-1.0011		
	RELI05	4.8373	3.8473	-0.99		
RELIABILITY		**4.5926**	**3.5521**	**-1.0405**	**8.012**	**0.000**
RESPONSIVENESS	RESP01	4.9001	3.2334	-1.6667		
	RESP02	4.7334	3.9441	-0.7893		
	RESP03	4.2232	3.5464	-0.6768		
	RESP04	4.4464	3.2118	-1.2346		
RESPONSIVENESS		**4.5751**	**3.4862**	**-1.0889**	**7.1231**	**0.000**
ASSURANCE	ASSU01	4.6373	3.6352	-1.0021		
	ASSU02	4.4363	3.5443	-0.892		
	ASSU03	4.5363	3.7483	-0.788		
	ASSU04	4.7338	3.6865	-1.0473		
ASSURANCE		**4.5682**	**3.6531**	**-0.9151**	**6.998**	**0.000**
EMPATHY	EMP01	4.9331	3.9063	-1.0268		
	EMP02	4.5733	3.5262	-1.0471		
	EMP03	4.7112	3.4483	-1.2629		
	EMP04	4.6352	3.4928	-1.1424		
	EMP05	4.7464	3.1836	-1.5628		
EMPATHY		**4.7191**	**3.5110**	**-1.2081**	**7.031**	**0.000**

It is seen from the Table 8 that the difference between customer perception and expectation of service quality in hotels is negative as seen from the various gap scores. This difference is significant at 1% level of significance. This reveals that the customers of hotels of Kashmir expect better service quality than what they receive from them. The overall mean perception and expectations score of customers, standard deviations, T-value and significance level is presented in Table 9

Table 9: Mean Perception & Expectation, S.D., t-value, Sig. level in Hotels

Hotels	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.

PERCEPTION	3.4801	0.94463	6.2810	0.000
EXPECTATION	4.5852	0.99481		

The t-value of 6.2810 as seen from the table 9 is more than the critical value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence we can conclude that there exists a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of customers of Hotels of Kashmir

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference in perception of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers*

The null hypothesis 2 that there is no significant difference in perception of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir is statistically tested. The statistical significance in difference is examined using T-statistics. If the calculated value of T-estimate is greater than 1.96 and less than 2.58, the difference is significant at 5% level. If the T- statistics value greater than 2.58, the difference is significant at 1%. If the T-value is significant, it means the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists a significant difference in perception of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir. The mean perception scores of customers along with T-values and significance level are presented in Table 10

Table 10: Perception scores, t-value and Sig. level in Hotels

		Perception Score (PS)			
Dimensions	Statements	Higher Age Group	Lower Age Group	t-Value	Sig.
TANGIBILITY	TANG01	3.8665	3.1338		
	TANG02	3.9751	3.2199		
	TANG03	3.9887	3.1526		
	TANG04	3.8665	3.0011		
TANGIBILITY		**3.9242**	**3.1268**	**4.321**	**.000**
RELIABILITY	RELI01	3.8012	3.2331		
	RELI02	3.9143	3.3442		
	RELI03	3.7156	3.2554		
	RELI04	3.8467	3.4154		
	RELI05	3.8965	3.2641		
RELIABILITY		**3.8348**	**3.3025**	**2.982**	**.003**
RESPONSIVENESS	RESP01	3.9001	3.4221		
	RESP02	3.9124	3.6254		
	RESP03	3.9652	3.3452		
	RESP04	3.9554	3.3322		
RESPONSIVENESS		**3.9332**	**3.4312**	**3.124**	**.002**
ASSURANCE	ASSU01	3.9025	3.3352		
	ASSU02	3.8971	3.5221		
	ASSU03	3.9786	3.3624		
	ASSU04	3.9712	3.4535		
ASSURANCE		**3.9373**	**3.4183**	**3.392**	**.000**

EMPATHY	EMP01	3.9987	3.5063		
	EMP02	3.7128	3.6862		
	EMP03	3.8272	3.6635		
	EMP04	3.9712	3.5366		
	EMP05	3.8629	3.7621		
EMPATHY		**3.8745**	**3.6301**	**2.749**	**.006**

It is seen from the Table 10 that the mean perception scores of higher age group customers of with regard to all the variables of service quality exceed all the mean perception scores of lower age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir. The difference is significant at 1% level of significance. This reveals that the higher age group customers perceive better service quality compared to lower age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir. The overall mean perception score of lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir is presented in Table 11

Table 11: Mean Perception, S.D., t-value, Sig. level in Hotels

	Hotels	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.
PERCEPTION	LOWER AGE GROUP	3.1956	0.27664	3.321	.000
	HIGHER AGE GROUP	3.9817	0.19886		

The t-value of 3.321 as seen from the Table 11 is more than the critical value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence we can conclude that there exists a significant difference in perception between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir

Hypothesis 3: *There is no significant difference in expectation of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers*

The null hypothesis 3 that there is no significant difference in expectation of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir is statistically tested. The statistical significance in difference is examined using T-statistics. If the calculated value of T-estimate is greater than 1.96 and less than 2.58, the difference is significant at 5% level. If the T- statistics value greater than 2.58, the difference is significant at 1%. If the T-value is significant, it means the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists a significant difference in perception of service quality between lower age group

customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir. The mean expectations scores of customers along with T-values and significance level are presented in Table 12

Table 12: Expectation scores, t-value and Sig. level in Hotels

Dimensions	Statements	Higher Age Group	Lower Age Group	t-Value	Sig.
TANGIBILITY	TANG01	4.6234	4.3771		
	TANG02	4.3342	4.5663		
	TANG03	4.5433	4.4675		
	TANG04	4.5644	4.3738		
TANGIBILITY		**4.5176**	**4.4461**	**2.3987**	**.017**
RELIABILITY	RELI01	4.5363	4.6037		
	RELI02	4.6637	4.7512		
	RELI03	4.7252	4.8556		
	RELI04	4.3362	4.6438		
	RELI05	4.3327	4.7912		
RELIABILITY		**4.5881**	**4.7291**	**2.6521**	**.009**
RESPONSIVENESS	RESP01	4.4432	4.8962		
	RESP02	4.6671	4.7088		
	RESP03	4.4436	4.8654		
	RESP04	4.5536	4.2551		
RESPONSIVENESS		**4.4993**	**4.6813**	**2.0622**	**0.04**
ASSURANCE	ASSU01	4.5025	4.5025		
	ASSU02	4.3162	4.3162		
	ASSU03	4.6975	4.6975		
	ASSU04	4.7488	4.7488		
ASSURANCE		**4.6981**	**4.5662**	**2.7191**	**.007**
EMPATHY	EMP01	4.8121	4.8121		
	EMP02	4.5887	4.5887		
	EMP03	4.6213	4.6213		
	EMP04	4.5425	4.5425		
	EMP05	4.6812	4.6812		
EMPATHY		**4.5237**	**4.6491**	**3.4660**	**.000**

It is seen from the Table 12 that the mean expectation scores of lower age group customers with regard to all the variables of service quality exceed all the mean expectation scores of higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir. The difference is significant at 1% level of significance. This reveals that the lower age group customers expect better service quality compared to higher age group customers. The overall mean perception score of lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir is presented in Table 13

Table 13: Mean Expectation, S.D., t-value, Sig. level in Hotels

	Hotels	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.
EXPECTATION	HIGHER AGE GROUP	4.45	0.41314	4.513	0.000
	LOWER AGE GROUP	4.69	0.29816		

The t-value of 4.513 as seen from the Table 13 is more than the critical value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence we can conclude that there exists a significant difference in expectations between customers of lower age group and higher age group.

Hypothesis 4: *There is no significant difference between lower age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir*

The null hypothesis 4 that there is no significant difference between lower age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir is statistically tested. The statistical significance in difference is examined using T-statistics. If the calculated value of T-estimate is greater than 1.96 and less than 2.58, the is significant at 5% level. If the T-statistics value greater than 2.58, the difference is significant at 1%. If the T-value is significant, it means the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists a significant difference between lower age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir. The mean perception and expectation scores of customers along with gap score, T-values and significance level are presented in Table 14

Table 14: Perception and Expectation scores, Gap Scores, t-value and Sig. level of Lower age group customers in Hotels

	Lower Age Group Customers					
Dimension	Statement	Expectation Score (ES)	Perception Score (PS)	Gap Score (PS-ES)	t-Value	Sig.
TANGIBILITY	TANG01	4.3771	3.1338	-1.2433		
	TANG02	4.5663	3.2199	-1.3464		
	TANG03	4.4675	3.1526	-1.3149		
	TANG04	4.3738	3.0011	-1.3727		
TANGIBILITY		**4.4461**	**3.1268**	**-1.3193**	**7.723**	**.000**
RELIABILITY	RELI01	4.6037	3.2331	-1.3706		
	RELI02	4.7512	3.3442	-1.407		
	RELI03	4.8556	3.2554	-1.6002		
	RELI04	4.6438	3.4154	-1.2284		
	RELI05	4.7912	3.2641	-1.5271		

RELIABILITY		**4.7291**	**3.3025**	**-1.4266**	**8.012**	**.000**
RESPONSIVENESS	RESP01	4.8962	3.4221	-1.4741		
	RESP02	4.7088	3.6254	-1.0834		
	RESP03	4.8654	3.3452	-1.5202		
	RESP04	4.2551	3.3322	-0.9229		
RESPONSIVENESS		**4.6813**	**3.4312**	**-1.2501**	**7.1231**	**.000**
ASSURANCE	ASSU01	4.5025	3.3352	-1.1673		
	ASSU02	4.3162	3.5221	-0.7941		
	ASSU03	4.6975	3.3624	-1.3351		
	ASSU04	4.7488	3.4535	-1.2953		
ASSURANCE		**4.5662**	**3.4183**	**-1.1479**	**6.998**	**.000**
EMPATHY	EMP01	4.8121	3.5063	-1.3058		
	EMP02	4.5887	3.6862	-0.9025		
	EMP03	4.6213	3.6635	-0.9578		
	EMP04	4.5425	3.5366	-1.0059		
	EMP05	4.6812	3.7621	-1.2433		
EMPATHY		**4.6491**	**3.6301**	**-1.3464**	**7.031**	**.000**

It is seen from the Table 14 that the mean expectation scores of lower age group customers with regard to all the variables of service quality exceed all the mean perception scores. This means that the lower age group customers expect more than what they perceive. The difference is significant at 1% level of significance. The overall mean perception score of lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir is presented in Table 15

Table 15: Mean Perception/Expectation scores, S.D., t-value, Sig. level of lower age group customers in Hotels

LOWER AGE GROUP		Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.
	PERCEPTION	3.59	0.28123	4.012	0.000
	EXPECTATION	4.61	0.33213		

The t-value of 4.012 as seen from the Table is more than the critical value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence we can conclude that there exists a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of lower age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir

Hypothesis 5: *There is no significant difference between higher age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir.*

The null hypothesis 5 that there is no significant difference between higher age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir is statistically tested. The statistical significance in difference is examined using T-statistics. If the calculated value of T-estimate is greater than 1.96 and less than 2.58, the difference is significant at 5% level. If the T-statistics value greater than 2.58, the difference is significant at 1%. If the T-value is significant, it means the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists a significant difference between higher age group customer perception and expectations of service quality in Hotels of Kashmir. The mean perception and expectation scores of customers along with gap score, T-values and significance level are presented in Table 16

Table 16: Perception and Expectation scores, Gap Scores t-value and Sig. level of higher age group customers in Hotels

	Higher Age Group					
Dimension	Statement	Expectation Score (ES)	Perception Score (PS)	Gap Score (PS-ES)	t-Value	Sig.
TANGIBILITY	TANG01	4.6234	3.8665	-0.7569		
	TANG02	4.3342	3.9751	-0.3591		
	TANG03	4.5433	3.9887	-0.5546		
	TANG04	4.5644	3.8665	-0.6979		
TANGIBILITY		**4.5176**	**3.9242**	**-0.5934**	**7.723**	**.000**
RELIABILITY	RELI01	4.5363	3.8012	-0.7351		
	RELI02	4.6637	3.9143	-0.7494		
	RELI03	4.7252	3.7156	-1.0096		
	RELI04	4.3362	3.8467	-0.4895		
	RELI05	4.3327	3.8965	-0.4362		
RELIABILITY		**4.5881**	**3.8348**	**-0.7533**	**8.012**	**.000**
RESPONSIVENESS	RESP01	4.4432	3.9001	-0.5431		
	RESP02	4.6671	3.9124	-0.7547		
	RESP03	4.4436	3.9652	-0.4784		
	RESP04	4.5536	3.9554	-0.5982		
RESPONSIVENESS		**4.4993**	**3.9332**	**-0.5661**	**7.1231**	**.000**
ASSURANCE	ASSU01	4.5025	3.9025	-0.6		
	ASSU02	4.3162	3.8971	-0.4191		
	ASSU03	4.6975	3.9786	-0.7189		
	ASSU04	4.7488	3.9712	-0.7776		
ASSURANCE		**4.6981**	**3.9373**	**-0.7608**	**6.998**	**.000**
EMPATHY	EMP01	4.8121	3.9987	-0.8134		
	EMP02	4.5887	3.7128	-0.8759		
	EMP03	4.6213	3.8272	-0.7941		
	EMP04	4.5425	3.9712	-0.5713		
	EMP05	4.6812	3.8629	-0.8183		
EMPATHY		**4.5237**	**3.8745**	**-0.6492**	**7.031**	**.000**

It is seen from the Table 16 that the mean expectation scores of higher age group customers with regard to all the variables of service quality exceed all the mean perception scores. The

difference is significant at 1% level of significance. This reveals that the higher age group customers also expect better service quality than what they perceive. But the gap between perception-expectation is less than lower age group customers. The overall mean perception score of lower age group customers and higher age group customers of hotels of Kashmir is presented in Table 17

Table 17: Mean Perception/Expectation scores, S.D., t-value, Sig. level of higher age group customers in Hotels

		Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.
HIGHER AGE GROUP	PERCEPTION	3.89	0.19823	7.810	0.000
	EXPECTATION	4.41	0.29855		

The t-value of 7.810 as seen from the table is more than the critical value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence we can conclude that there exists a significant difference between perceptions and expectations of higher age group customers of Hotels.

Hypothesis 6: *There is no significant difference in Gap-1 between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir*

The null hypothesis 6 that there is no significant difference in Gap1 between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir is statistically tested. The statistical significance in difference is examined using T-statistics. If the calculated value of T-estimate is greater than 1.96 and less than 2.58, the difference is significant at 5% level. If the T-statistics value greater than 2.58, the difference is significant at 1%. If the T-value is significant, it means the null hypothesis is rejected and there exists a significant difference in between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir. The average Gap1 score in all the dimensions of service quality between lower age group customers and higher age group customers of Hotels of Kashmir along with T-values and significance level are presented in Table 18

Table 18: Gap scores t-value, Sig. level of lower age group and higher age group customers in Hotels

	Gap Scores			
Dimensions	Lower Age Group	Higher Age Group	t-value	Sig.
Tangibility	**-1.3193**	**-0.5934**	5.425	0.000
Reliability	**-1.4266**	**-0.7533**	6.011	0.000
Responsiveness	**-1.2501**	**-0.5661**	6.917	0.000
Assurance	**-1.1479**	**-0.7608**	7.018	0.000
Empathy	**-1.3464**	**-0.6492**	7.214	0.000

It is seen from the Table 16 that the average Gap 1 score in all dimensions of service quality in lower age group customers exceeds the average Gap 1 score in higher age group customers. This difference is significant at 1% level of significance. This reveals that the customers perception-expectation Gap in lower age group are more as compared to higher age group meaning thereby that higher age group customers perceive better service quality in hotels as compared to lower age group. The overall mean perception and expectations Gap, standard deviations, T-value and significance level is presented in Table 19

Table 19: Mean Gap scores t-value, Sig. level of lower age group and higher age group customers in Hotels

		Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Sig.
GAP SCORES	Higher Age Group	-0.664	0.49813	7.956	0.000
	Lower Age Group	-1.298	0.65123		

The t-value of 7.956 as seen from the Table 19 is more than the critical value of 2.58 at 1% level of significance. Thus the null hypothesis is not accepted. Hence we can conclude that there exists a significant difference in Gap 1 between Lower age group customers and higher age group customers

7. Conclusion

The current study measured and compared the service quality gap between low Age customers and High Age customers of Hotels of Kashmir. It is clear from the preceding discussion that the service quality parameters are seriously being evaluated by the customers

of the hotels. The findings of the study show that the expectation of service quality is more in low aged customers as compared to higher aged customers whereas higher aged customers perceive better service quality than lower aged customers. This necessitates the need of improvement in all the dimensions of the service quality as highlighted in the preceding discussions in Hotels. This in no way mean that the higher aged customers receive optimal service quality as the gap between perception and expectation is also significant. The significant finding in the above discussions is that the customers expect more in all the five dimensions of the service quality from Hotels. To keep the gap between perceived service and the expected service as low as possible; all the marketing activities including word of mouth must not be unrealistic compared to the perceived service. Hoteliers should continually evaluate how customers perceive their service quality and what are their expectations in order to check whether they match or not.

8. References

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