

Assessment of Customer Satisfaction of Domestic Tourists in Resorts

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Abstract *The research objective is about finding the customer satisfaction of domestic tourists visiting resorts. On the tourism marketing point of view knowing the tourist expectations is important and what satisfies them and what did not satisfy the tourists should also be found out to take necessary corrective actions. Study on customer satisfaction in resorts in India is scarce and hence this study is initiated. It is a primary research done with standard questionnaires being issued to family tourists who visited resorts in Mahabalipuram and a modified Servqual model has been used in this study with five constructs namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility, which constitute the functional aspects of a resort. Judgment sampling method was used in the study. Five hypotheses were framed and tested using SPSS and Smart PLS Softwares. Customer satisfaction with respect of the five aspects related to the service quality has been evaluated. The results show that all the five aspects did influence the customer satisfaction of the tourists. The level of customer satisfaction of tourists was found to be good. Tourists were found to give more importance for the reliability aspect in resorts.*

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Tourist Satisfaction, Service Quality, Domestic Tourism, Resort Tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Vacation decisions made by family tourists have been discussed by various authors, but customer satisfaction is very important from the marketing point of view. Although the concept of family holidays is not always related to the provision of tourism services, this is a common alternative. (Lam and Zhang 1999: pp 341-349) claimed that in recent years overwhelming customer demand for quality products and service has increased with evidence to professionals in the tourism and hotel industry. Among all customer demands, service quality has been considered as an important factor in the success of any business, (Grönroos, 1990a). In this case, many studies consider that it implies a set of purchasing decisions with the main goal to spend some relaxing time together, in a place different from where the family normally lives (Kang et al., 1986: pp 121-126). Service is the first risk inherent to the industry, the purchase of any service is even greater, given its characteristics of intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and expiration (Kotler,

2000a). Specifically, it has two types of risks as financial and emotional. The financial risk is due to the share of the family budget that is spent on holidays. The emotional risk is explained by the expectations of enjoyment generated, as in the life of many consumers it is the main event that allows them to break their daily routine (Van Raaij & Francken, 1984: pp 101-112). In addition to this greater perceived risk it is the fact that tourism products are complex, since they are composed of a set of basic products delivered by a great number of providers (Kim et al., 2007: pp 423-433). A normal tourist cycle involves: 1. Search of information, 2. Decision making, 3. Performing the tour, 4. Reviewing the tour and satisfaction aspects, 5. Posting feedbacks in social websites. Less study has been conducted on the satisfaction aspect of the tourists, which is so important for the hoteliers (Kotler, 2000b). In India research on customer satisfaction is very less and hence this study is conducted. In the present days the task is not just satisfying a guest but delighting them. For satisfying a guest, the hoteliers need to satisfy all the five aspects namely reliability, assurance, responsiveness,

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empathy and tangibility. A satisfied guest turns into the hotels ambassador in promoting the hotel's business since the happy guest will certainly tell his friends and relatives about his pleasant stay in the resort and naturally the resort will gain positive advertisement by word of mouth. This study aims in finding the customer satisfaction based on the five functional aspects namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility using a conceptual model which is actually a modified version of servqual model.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Christina Geng and Hailin Qu (2008) conducted a research on structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. The result was that destination image directly influenced attribute satisfaction and destination image and attribute satisfaction were both direct antecedents of overall satisfaction.

Atila Yuksel and Mike (1998a) stated that determining customer satisfaction is fundamental to effective delivery of services. Successful judging of customer and satisfying up to their levels and to apply that knowledge potentially is a talent of a hospitality manager and it is an advantage over competitors.

Atila (1998b), has also found through his another research that, While both the first-time and repeat visitors commonly regard quality of food, accommodation, hospitality and safety as a reason to come back, they also consider different additional services to be developed on their return intentions. A tourist's satisfaction is considered based on four components namely transportation, accommodation, outdoor activities and attractions. Outdoor activity results had the most satisfaction among the tourists.

Gandolfo and Rossa Guzzo (2010) conducted a research on customer satisfaction in hotels at Sicily and they said that hotels should concentrate on knowing their customer's satisfaction, which is very important for their business in getting repeated guests.

Tak hi and Alwin hui (2007) conducted a research on, "tourist satisfaction, recommendation and revisiting Singapore", with foreign tourists visiting Singapore based on a conceptual model.

Their study found that the price was insignificant factor, but accommodation and food was significant for North American tourists, whereas attractions were significant for European and Asian tourists.

Chien min Chen et al. (2011), conducted a research on, "tourist behavioral intentions with respect to service quality and customer satisfaction" in Taiwan National park. The results indicated the service quality had a positive relationship with tourist satisfaction.

Jeroen Nawjin (2011) has conducted a study on, "determinants of daily happiness on vacation". The result was that the positive effect of happiness during vacation was four times more than the normal day of the tourists.

Cedric Hsi and Jui Wu (2007) conducted a study on customer interaction and customer satisfaction in tourist service. The result was confirmed that protocol and sociable incidents have a positive impact on evaluation of fellow customers. Finally evaluation of fellow customers had a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Review on Recent Trends in Customer Satisfaction of Tourist

Faizal Ali and Muslim Amin (2104a) made a study influence of physical environment on emotions, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in Chinese resort and found that customers who have higher perceptions of the physical environment are more likely to have positive emotions, increasing customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. They have suggested the chinese hotels to concentrate more on providing hotel facilities to guests.

Lydie bonnefoy-Claudet (2013) have done a research on emotions impact on tourist satisfaction in ski resorts and the findings suggest that managers should focus on staging customers' stay at the resort to stimulate an emotional experience and position their packages based on the promise of such emotional experiences. This emotional approach to customer satisfaction a new upcoming trend.

Cecilia silvestri et al. (2017) have conducted a research on service quality and customer satisfaction in thermal tourism based on three dimensions of service quality namely functional, technical and company image. The results confirm the direct impact of service quality dimensions (technical, functional and CI) on Customer service also in the thermal sector when considered individually. Functional service quality and company image have a stronger impact on service quality than technical service quality. This three dimensional approach is also a renewed trend.

Faizan Ali and Muslim amin (2014b) have proposed a RESERVE scale as a comprehensive instrument for assessing resort hotel service performance. The proposed scale conceptualizes resort hotel service performance as a second-order, three-dimensional construct that assesses tourists' perceptions of setting, audience, and actors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Service Quality Dimensions: Service quality is known to be based on multiple dimensions. However, there is no general

agreement as to the nature or content of the dimensions. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991) defined service quality in terms of physical quality, interactive quality and corporate (image) quality. Physical quality relates to the tangible aspects of the service. Interactive quality involves the interactive nature of services and refers to the two-way flow that occurs between the customer and the service provider, or his/her representative, including both automated and animated interactions. Corporate quality refers to the image attributed to a service provider by its current and potential customers, as well as the general public. They also suggest that when compared with the other two quality dimensions, corporate quality tends to be more stable over time. Gronroos (1990b) identified two service quality dimensions, the technical aspect ("what" service is provided) and the functional aspect ("how" the service is provided). Here our study focuses on the functional aspect of the resort or hotel and the customer satisfaction is measured based on the five aspects of the functional quality.

Customer Satisfaction: What is customer satisfaction? "Customer satisfaction (CS) is a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and/or service". (WTO, 1985). Rust and Oliver (1994) define satisfaction as the response of the customers towards fulfillment of their desires, which is an evaluation as well as an emotion-based response. It is an indication of the customer's belief of the probability of a service leading to a positive feeling. Customer satisfaction is a marketing term that measures how products or services supplied by a company meet or surpass a customer's expectation. Customer satisfaction is important because it provides marketers and business owners with a metric that they can use to manage and improve their businesses

Service Quality Models

SERVQUAL features have five dimensions, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance (Parasuraman et al., 1988a: pp 21-40).

Over the past few decades, much work has been undertaken to evaluate consumer's perception of service quality in services marketing, and a number of service models that has been developed. Of these, the gap model and its accompanying SERVQUAL, Parasuraman et al. (1988b) have significantly contributed to the understanding and measuring perceived service quality. Even though this instrument has been used in various studies, the SERVQUAL has received many criticisms from other scholars, (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Peter, Churchill, & Brown, 1993). The major concern about the SERVQUAL was its use of measurement with different scores which resulted in different numbers of

factor dimensions, improper managerial approaches, and conceptual problems. Cronin & Brady, (1997) and Cronin and Taylor (1992b) has argued that the performance measure increases variance only when they remove the expectation measure. Based on this result, Cronin and Taylor (1994) suggested the use of SERVPERF by arguing that only the performance part of the SERVQUAL should be included.

Another model called the Musa Model (multi criteria satisfaction analysis) was developed by Sikos et al. (1998) to measure customer satisfaction based on the multi criteria behavior of the target customers. The model follows the principle of ordinal regression which may yield multiple solutions, which may a problem for interpretation. Servqual Model has two aspects namely Functional aspect and Technical aspect. Under functional quality there are five major characteristics namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Let us see them individually:

- **Tangibility:** Refers to the appearance of the hotel, resort, the facilities in the room and the hotel surroundings and beauty of the place in general.
- **Reliability:** Is defined as the ability to provide the promised service to the guest dependably and accurately.
- **Responsiveness:** Is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- **Assurance:** Is defined as the employees' knowledge and courtesy, and the capacity of the firm and its employees to build trust and confidence.
- **Empathy:** Denotes a deep emotional understanding of guests feelings or problems, while performing their duties. Along with that we have added customer satisfaction from Gronroos model.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** Is the satisfaction received by the guest who stayed in the hotel or resort.

Based on the review of literature we have taken all the five aspects of SERVQUAL MODEL and added customer satisfaction from Gronroos model since this study is specifically based on assessing the customer satisfaction of the tourists and a new conceptual model has been formed.

METHODOLOGY

Objective and Scope of this Research

The main objective of this research is to assess the customer satisfaction of domestic family tourists based on the five functional quality measure factors namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, (Parasuraman et al., 1994) where Customer satisfaction is an exogenous variable which is most researched variable with several empirical studies. The findings of this research will be a helpful factor for the hotel marketing purpose, to adopt suitable marketing tactics, to target the family tourists.

Model

Based on review of literature a Conceptual model of tourist satisfaction, based on Servqual model has been used for this study. Reason for choosing this model is this model evaluates all the five main characteristics of the resort related to customer service and evaluates customer satisfaction based on the five aspects. The Model has five constructs with 27 items on scale.

Data Collection Method

Data was collected from family couples who were staying in resorts in Mahabalipuram, Tamilnadu through standard questionnaire based on conceptual model with five constructs and 27 items on scale and using five point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). Data was collected from 150 tourist couples from twelve

different resorts around ECR, Mahabalipuram. The questionnaires were mostly given directly to the guests in resorts and in public tourist sites and got responses filled and collected back immediately.

Sampling Method

Judgment sampling method was used by the researcher based on his hotel professional experience, that was able to decide the resorts for the sample study. A sample should be a representative of universe from where it is drawn. "Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using judgment, which will result in saving time and money (Kothari, 2004). Judgment sampling is necessary when a document is too large to be analyzed in its entirety. Probability sampling methods cannot be applied for this study since the samples are not exactly the same in nature.

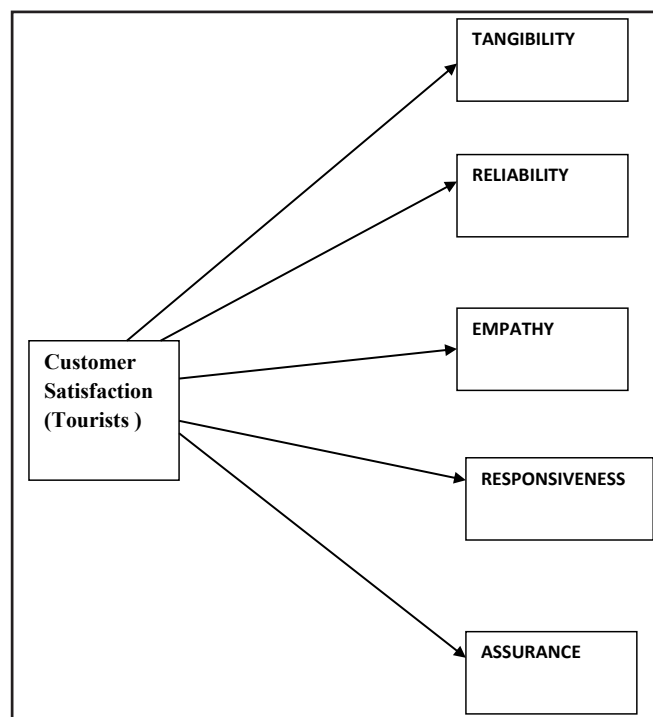


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model of Tourist Satisfaction

HYPOTHESIS

Gronroos (1990 b) states that Customer satisfaction, an outcome of the actual quality of performance, and its perception by consumers. Customer satisfaction can also be defined as satisfaction, based on an outcome or a process (Vavra's, 1997) outcome. Definition of customer satisfaction characterizes satisfaction, as the end-state resulting from the experience of consumption. Service quality and satisfaction are highly correlated, and service quality is an antecedent of

customer satisfaction. (Anderson & Fornell, 2000; Chou & Kim, 2009; (Churchill,1982; Olsen, 2002).

Hence we propose the following hypothesis:

H1 - Tangibility factors are responsible for customer satisfaction.

H2 - Reliability factors influences customer satisfaction of tourists.

H3 - Responsiveness of the staff in resort influences the customer satisfaction.

H4 - Assurance aspect of the resort and staff influences the customer satisfaction.

H5 - Empathy of the resort staff towards guests influences the customer satisfaction.

Table 1: Demographic Details of Respondents

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	90	60 %
Female	60	40 %
Age 20 – 30	45	30 %
Above 30- 40	68	45.3 %
Above 40 – 50	30	20 %
Above 50	7	4.7 %
Both husband & wife employed	62	41.3 %
Only one employed	88	58.7 %
Annual Income		
3 – 4 lakhs	45	30 %
Above 4 – 5 lakhs	75	50 %
Above 5 lakhs	30	20 %
Number of children		
1	58	38.6 %
2	82	54.6 %
3 & above	10	6.8 %

Sex	Number	Percentage
Employed in Govt	32	21.3 %
Private sector	113	75.3 %
Own business	5	3.4 %

Table 2: Reliability of Constructs

Constructs	No. of items	Cronbahs Alpha
Tangibility	4	0.820
Reliability	4	0.896
Responsiveness	4	0.782
Assurance	4	0.746
Empathy	5	0.803
Customer satisfaction	7	0.780

Over all reliability of constructs – Cronbahs Alpha = .781

Cronbah’s value above .7 is considered good and hence the constructs reliability is satisfied.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics were analysed for the mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis of every measure/ item.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Tangibility	150	3.00	5.00	4.55	0.4156	-0.677	-0.529
Reliability	150	3.00	4.92	3.85	0.5093	-0.787	1.007
Responsiveness	150	2.88	5.00	4.19	0.4337	-0.699	0.395
Assurance	150	2.40	5.00	3.88	0.3937	-0.894	2.095
Empathy	150	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.4230	-0.687	2, 132
Customer satisfaction	150	3.5	5.0	4.00	0.435	0.764	1.687

The value of skewness between -1.0 to +1.0 is considered acceptable and in the above table we can find the skewness value is within the acceptable range.

Kurtosis values were observed between -1 and +3 and hence all values fall within acceptable limits.

The data was tested for convergent and discriminant validity using boot strapping technique, and the summary of the parametric estimates are tables below:

Table 4: Parametric Estimates

Indicator	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	CA	R ²
TA	0.515	0.515	0.687	0.804	0.292
REL	0.858	0.503	0.882	0.839	0.335
RES	0.769	0.570	0.841	0.847	0.336

Indicator	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	CA	R ²
ASS	0.654	0.507	0.913	0.896	0.022
EMP	0,697	0.545	0.783	0.796	0.346
CUS	0.737	0.579	0.836	0.823	-----

The factor loadings for all the indicators exceeded the recommended value of 0.5, which is acceptable. The composite reliabilities (CR) for each construct ranged from 0.687 to 0.913, which almost exceeded the recommended value of 0.7. Meanwhile, the AVE for each construct ranged from 0.503 to 0.579, which is greater than 0.5 thus, the cut-off values ensure that at least 50% or more of the variances in the construct are explained by the set of indicators.

The collected data are verified for its reliability by calculating the Cronbach’s Alpha (CA). The resulting value ranged from 0.796 to 0.896, which is acceptable.

The result of the measurement model shows that, all the six constructs have valid measures based on their parameter estimates and statistical significance.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The hypothesis testing was carried out by examining the path coefficients (beta) between latent constructs and their significance. To test the significance of the path coefficients, the bootstrapping technique was utilized. PLS-SEM relies on a nonparametric bootstrap procedure to test the importance of estimated path coefficients in PLS-SEM. In

bootstrapping, subsamples are created by randomly drawn observations from the original set of data (with replacement). The subsample is then used to estimate the PLS path model. The parameter estimates (e.g., outer weights, outer loadings and path coefficients) obtained from the subsamples that are used to yield standard errors for the estimates. Based on this output, t-values are calculated to evaluate each estimate's significance.

The t-value shows the contribution of each variable to the model. On the other hand, p-value shows the significance of the relationship.

Table 5: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	T Statistics	P Values	Hypothesis Result
H1	TA → CS	0.426	6.572	0.000	Accepted
H2	RE → CS	0.484	5.909	0.000	Accepted
H3	RES → CS	0.580	8.810	0.000	Accepted
H4	ASS → CS	0.099	2.235	0.026	Accepted
H5	EMP → CS	0.653	2.875	0.026	Accepted

All the five hypothesis have been accepted and proved as per the test results.

H1 - Tangibility factors are responsible for customer satisfaction.

H2 - Reliability factors influences customer satisfaction of tourists.

H3 - Responsiveness of the staff in resort influences the customer satisfaction.

H4 - Assurance aspect of the resort and staff influences the customer satisfaction.

H5 - Empathy of the resort staff towards guests influences the customer satisfaction.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

Based on the questionnaire evaluation we found that:

- Tourists give more importance for security aspect of the resort.
- Regarding the quality of services, majority tourists were of opinion that resorts and hotels provided good quality services.
- Tourists look for entertainment features in the resort.
- Nearly 60% of tourists said they will come again.
- The overall customer satisfaction of tourists was around 78%.

Based on statistical analysis we found:

- The tangibility factors influence the customer satisfaction of the resort.
- The reliability factors influence the customer satisfaction of tourists.
- The responsiveness of resort staff influences the customer satisfaction of tourists.
- The assurance aspect of the resort influences the customer satisfaction of tourists.

The empathy aspect of the resort influences the customer satisfaction of the tourists.

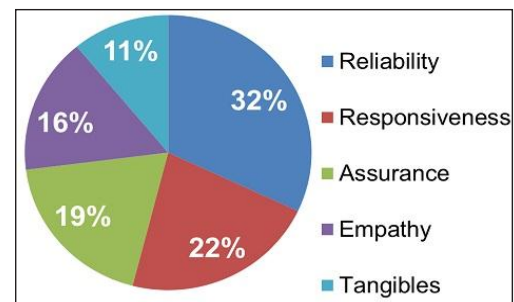


Fig. 2: Distribution of Guest Opinion on Service Quality Aspects

DISCUSSION ON THE RESULTS

Guest opinion on the importance given for the five aspects of service quality was taken and based on their feedback, the above chart is presented with the breakup for each quality aspect. Accordingly Reliability is given more importance by the guest with 32%, next responsiveness with 22% and followed by assurance 19% and empathy with 16% and

tangibles with 11%. Hence, it can be understood that guest give more importance to reliability aspects of the resort and the least for tangibles. Hoteliers should take note of these.

It should also be noted that if any of the five service quality aspects are not up to the satisfaction of the tourists, it can have a negative impact on customer satisfaction of the place of study. What is considered more important for customer satisfaction? A study conducted by Madhavan et al. (2017) in Philipino resort tourists reveal that guest satisfaction significantly impacted guest loyalty and assurance dimension exerted more influence on guest satisfaction.

They have suggested that Managers must focus more on dimensions of Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Assurance other than tangibility to achieve high degree of guest satisfaction which leads to guest loyalty. It has been proved already by Cecilia [19] that functional aspect has more influence on customer satisfaction, which actually denotes the responsiveness and assurance aspects. A study on customer satisfaction made by Payal Agarwal and Dr. Divya shukla (2016) in Bangkok hotels has used the same five factors of our study and found that empathy is more important and perception of guest was found more than their expectation. A study made by Valentina Della et al. (2015) in city of Naples says that destination attributes and activities influences customer satisfaction and they have used 14 tourist satisfaction indicators to determine the same. It has been proven by earlier researchers that empathy, reliability, responsiveness, tangibility and assurance influences guest satisfaction to a great extent. The guest coming to a tourist destination come with some expectations and if their perceived quality is more than the expected quality than the guest is happy. Satisfaction of children is one of the key factor for the guest satisfaction as per findings of Dr. G. Saravana Kumar (2015).

Hence our results reiterates the relevance of using the five factor conceptual model which have proven the positive influence on satisfaction of the tourists.

It is essential for all hotels and resorts to get guest feedback in a questionnaire format, in order to know and improve their services suggested by Ivanka (2009).

Similar feedbacks should be obtained by all tourism service providers, to know and improve their services for better customer satisfaction. A new conceptual model tourist satisfaction has been presented in this study. To be successful a customer satisfaction measurement programme must come from the hotels management side and be incorporated into the hotel's corporate culture.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Resort managers and staff should understand that tangibility factors like physical appearance, facilities offered inside

room and in the resort are important for customer satisfaction.

Next is reliability factor which has proved to influence customer satisfaction, hence hotel staff should ensure that they keep their promise or commitment given to their guests to be reliable.

The other aspect is responsiveness, which means the resort staff should respond quickly to guest requests, otherwise it will create a negative impact on guests.

Assurance is another important aspect and resort staff should create assurance for the guests in the aspect of providing good service, safety and also providing room on the reserved date and time which will create assurance to the guests.

The last one is empathy and the resort staff should be able to understand the feelings of the guest and provide efficient and quick service according to their needs and expectations which will create a good feeling of empathy among guests.

Overall the hotel staff should ensure that all the five functional aspects are fully taken care and aim to delight their guests with best service quality.

LIMITATIONS

The study was conducted only in the resorts of Mahabali-puram with domestic family tourists. The results may vary with other destinations and with foreign tourists.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further studies can be focused on the tourist satisfaction of foreign tourists including destination image and technical quality as suggested in Gronroos model.

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