Beyond The Welcome Smile: Investigating The Nexus Between Service Quality And Guest Satisfaction In Naran's Hotel Sector

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Abstract

Quality of service, is a specific degree of quality at a reasonable cost, becomes more important in defining the achievement or failure, as well as gaining and keeping customer happiness, over the years. Hospitality is service sector, and services are measured in diverse way. To effectively evaluate the efficacy of Hospitality Management, essential statistics consist of guest satisfaction via opinions and feedback, etc. The research study aimed to compare the mean score of the most common hotel in Naran using the Serve Qual model. [1]According to this study, one method for measuring service quality is to use the ServQual model designed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. The SERVQUAL scale consists of 14 attributes for assessing customer perceptions and expectations regarding the quality of service in selected hotels. The population included hotels having restaurants and living accommodation both and stratified on the bases of geography located in Naran Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The research helps both theoretically and practically towards the lodging sector and customer satisfaction in Naran, confirmed by empirical data. This will assist the lodging sector to boost its financial performance through enhanced service quality and increasing customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, SURVQUAL, Tangibility, Hotel industry, Kaghan Valley.

1. Introduction

Naran, located in the upper Kaghan Valley in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, is a charming town about 119 km from Mansehra and the average annual mean temperature remains at 12.3°C. Naran is perchedat an elevation of 8,202 feet, it draws visitors with its stunning beauty, attracting many tourists, hikers, snappers, and environment enthusiasts throughout the year. The Kunhar River, spanning 171 kms in length and nourished by glacial melt, courses through the Kaghan Valley, ultimately contributing nearly 11% of its water to the Mangla reservoir Saifullah, (M., et al., 2021). Pakistan Hotel is the pioneer Hotel of Naran, which establish about in 1953 by a resident named Ayub. That was a single cottage-type hotel of that time. Other sources recounted that Naran has more than 100 hotels of various types ranging from high-end luxury hotels to very low-priced motels but none of them fall in the category of 4 and 5 star. Tent motels are also available there, family size tents to tourists to stay in from average rooms to costly huts beside the river Kunhar.

Hotels' majority falls in small hotels with room number 20 and below. The hotel industry in Kaghan valley (Naran) is seasonal like other hill stations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The

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hotel industry is predominantly seasonal, starting from March and ends in October. Hotel Product is the acquisition or an amalgam of what the facilities and services hotel guests use to make it possible. In the current scenario, the reports from the national and local newspapers shows the increasing trends in the Hotel industry, rise in Occupancy rates and RevPAR its structure (composition of hotels), key consumer segments (leisure traveler, business traveler). Naran receives approximately 1.5mn visitors annually, spending an average of Rs. 11,756 per day on travel, food, shopping, and lodging, the average tourist stays 1.81 days. This contributes an estimated Rs. 32 billion ($290 million) to the local economy yearly, with about 41% of Naran households' incomes tied to tourism (Semiotics, 2018). The economic impact of Hotels in Kaghan valley was estimated 696 million during the year 2008-09. There was 35 hotel/488 guest room according to Hotel and Restaurant directory 2005-06 and 652 Hotel/727 guestroom were enlisted Hotel and Restaurant directory 2007-8.
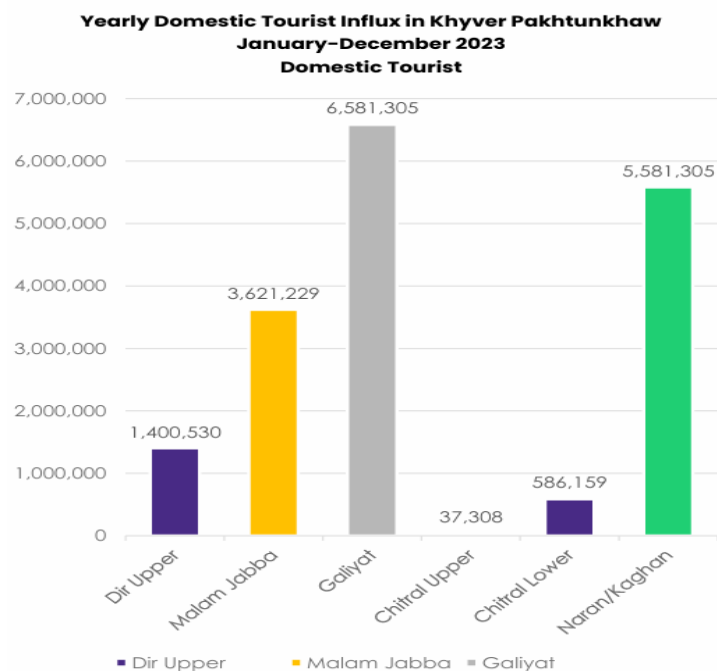

Figure 1: Pakistan Tourism Barometer (Edition – 2023-24)

2. Objectives
   o   To evaluate the expectations and perceptions of guests lodging in hotels in Naran
   o   To quantify the variance between the perceived and anticipated service quality.
   o   To assess the key aspects of service quality that customers perceive and expect within these establishments.

3. Literature Review
Food, clothing & accommodation are the necessities of humans (Fleiner, C. 2021) while the hotel sector provides two essential services, among them are food and lodging (Shah, S. N., & Jan, S. 2018). The tourism and hospitality industry, being a service-oriented sector, possesses diverse characteristics that distinguish it from the manufacturing industry (Sharma 2014). Hotels are frequently regarded as the most "global" entities within the service sector (Littlejohn 1997). A hotel is place where bonafide traveler can receive food and shelter, provided s/he is in position to pay for it and is in a fit condition to be revived (Andrew 2011). A hotel's products and services are the offers that is presented to its guests for sale (Fiorentino, 1995). Hotels are integral to the tourism industry, as they provide essential services upon which the sector depends, with hoteling inherently emphasizing the

importance of service provision (Khan, A. 2019). It is observed that consumers (Hotel guests) rate the same product (tangible and non-tangible) differently, mainly based on their own motives and attitudes (BLEŠIĆ, I. et al 2011). According to BLEŠIĆ, I. et al, (2011) a key success factor in hotels is the application of quality concept as the satisfied customers (guests) will increase the growth. To understand hotel customers, service attributes are important measures for gaining competitive advantages. Providing high quality services and maintaining customers' satisfaction are important factors leading to business success (Markovic, et al. 2011). Since decades researchers tries to measure of service quality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry through models. Among all, the most popular models measure customer satisfaction and service quality in the hotel. industry are SERVQUAL This model is based on the customers evaluation on the basis of service quality. The SERVQUAL measures service quality in hotels across five dimensions/variables. Parasuraman (1988) began by listing several service-related qualities while constructing this model (Shah, S. N., & Jan, S. (2018). Parsuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry developed a service quality model that emphasizes the fundamental elements necessary for achieving high service quality. The SERVQUAL scale, based on the gap model, serves as the foundation of their framework. Service quality means meeting or exceeding a customer's expectations (Parasuraman et al. 1985). The Disconfirmation theory explains that the customers evaluate service quality by comparing their expectations regarding service with delivered one (Markovic, et al. 2011). Chowdhary and Prakash (2007) found that tangible aspects carry greater significance in service contexts, whereas reliability gains prominence in the realm of intangible services. Services emphasizing customer communication demand higher levels of assurance and empathy (Markovic, et al. 2011).

3.2 Customer Satisfaction & Service Quality
The concept of "customer satisfaction" is different from "perceived service quality", although some studies have found a significant correlation between the two paradigms and included similar errors of interpretation (Oh and Park, 1997). Consumer satisfaction may be stated to be how the consumer responds to the perceived service, which is assessed using one's own expectations in comparison to the actual results (Bhuian, D. 2021). In the hospitality literature, a predominant focus has been on investigating service attributes, which are construed as the needs and desires of customers (Loizos, C., & Lycourgos, H. 2005). From a marketing viewpoint, customer satisfaction is attained when these needs and wants are effectively met. There is a general widespread agreement in the literature that the provision of service quality is concerned with generating customer satisfaction. Satisfaction indeed arises from comparing perceived performance with pre-purchase expectations. Exceeding expectations generally leads to satisfaction, while falling short results in dissatisfaction. When the product meets expectations, it often results in moderate satisfaction or indifference (Matzler, K., Renzl, B., & Rothenberger, S. 2006). The SERVQUAL service quality model, crafted by a team of American authors including Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml, and Len Berry, emerged in 1988 (Nimbhore, S., & Zaware, N. 2019). This model illuminates the principal elements of service quality. The SERVQUAL authors distilled the factors from ten down to five, encapsulating them in the acronym RATER, which stands for reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness.

Quality is a multi-dimensional concept. Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) defined three dimensions of service quality, namely, physical quality, interactive quality and corporate quality. Service quality leads to higher profitability (Gundersen et al., 1996) and customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1997). Parasuraman defined "service quality" as the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' perceptions and expectations and defined "perceived service quality" as the gap between customers' perceptions and expectations –a measurement of service quality. The smaller the gap, the better the service quality provided, and the greater the customer satisfaction. The SERVQUAL authors originally identified ten

elements of service quality, but in later work, these were collapsed into five factors - reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness - that create the acronym RATER.

1. **Reliability:** Ensuring the consistent and accurate delivery of promised services, maintaining dependability and precision.
2. **Assurance:** Demonstrating the expertise, politeness, and capacity of employees to foster trust and assurance in customers.
3. **Tangibles:** Reflecting the visual aspects of physical facilities, equipment, staff appearance, and communication materials, shaping the perception of service quality.
4. **Empathy:** Providing genuine, personalized care and attention to customers, acknowledging and addressing their unique needs and concerns.
5. **Responsiveness:** Displaying a readiness and promptness to assist customers, offering timely support and service when required.

Nyeck, Morales, Ladhari, and Pons (2002) stated the SERVQUAL measuring tool "appears to remain the most complete attempt to conceptualize and measure service quality". The SERVQUAL instrument has been widely applied in a variety of service industries, including Tourism and hospitality. Measuring service quality in hospitality research related to hotels & restaurants and employees were studied by Douglas and Connor, (2003); Antony et al., (2004); Olorunniwo et al., (2006); Wang et al., (2007), Heung et al., (2000); Namkung and Jang, (2008); Yoo and Park, (2007).

The foundation of SERVQUAL scale was the gap model. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and berry formulated a service quality model that highlights the main requirements for delivering high service quality. The model identifies five gaps that cause unsuccessful delivery (Todua, N., & Jashi, C. 2016). The key to optimizing service quality is to maximize this positive gap score. The negative value of this gap score reveals the dissatisfaction of customers. The input to calculate this score is customers' feedback.

4. Research Methodology

The data were collected using the questionnaire designed in accordance with Sharma (2014) research. The study identified five factors that best explained expected service quality and eight factors that best explained perceived service quality in the Hotels in Naran. A questionnaire survey was employed to collect the data from 5 hotels in Naran. While 20 customers were selected randomly in same period of time. The SERVQUAL scale (questionnaire) has two sections: customer expectations in relation to a service segment and perception in relation to certain hotels. The researcher distributed questionnaires to willing customers, aided by staff in both distributing and collecting survey sheets from participating guests. Collected data underwent analysis using the statistical package SPSS for Windows 12.0, including descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were employed to evaluate the service quality expectations and perceptions of hotel customers. The Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation were utilized to quantify the average (mean) and the degree of variation (dispersion) from this mean, respectively.

Formula

$$A = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} a_i$$

A = arithmetic mean

n = number of values

a_i = data set values

Respondents rate their agreement with provided statements on a 5-point Likert scale. Consumer perceptions are shaped by actual service, while expectations are based on past experiences and information. These statements represent service quality factors. The SERVQUAL scale offers scores for both customer expectations (E) and customer perceptions (P) for each determinant. Customer expectations, as defined by Miller (1977), represent the desires or wants of customers regarding what they believe service providers should offer or what they anticipate for future events. These expectations are formed before using the service. In contrast, customer perceptions are gauged directly during and after their service experience. They reflect customers' assessments of what they receive from the service. Parasuraman and colleagues propose that the disparity between these scores indicates service quality (Q), calculated as $Q = P - E$.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Five selected hotels
Hospitality is about serving the guests to provide them with "feel-good-effect". "Strangers are the Allah guests" has been one of central tenets of our culture. There are many large and small

- **Hotel DeManchi (DM)**
  Hotel DeManchi is a Luxury 3-star hotel in the green valley of Kaghan's town, Naran. De-Manchi Hotel is equipped with all amenities and facilities of international standards. The Hotel is located on top of the hills overlooking the panoramic views of the Kaghan Valley.

- **Hotel Millennium Inn (MI)**
  Hotel Millennium Inn is located at the bank of Saif ul Maluk stream. It's at the end of Naran Bazar near main bridge. New Hotel with fresh equipment and well-furnished room of excellent standard facilities and amenities. Almost it's the largest Hotel of Naran in Kaghan Valley. According to the visitors it's the real luxury hotel in Naran.

- **Hotel Centurion (HC)**
  Its located at Naran By Pass Road. The building is so attractive in European style. The Centurion Hotel in Naran offers two-star lodgings with a courtyard, and dining establishment. The hotel offers room service and a 24-hour front desk to visitors. The hotel's guest rooms include sitting areas. Some Centurion Hotel rooms provide a balcony in addition to a private bathroom with a shower and complimentary amenities. Each room has a wardrobe and a flat-screen TV.

- **Royal Hotel (RH)**
  Royal Hotel is a modern small hotel in the central Naran, One of the best **hotels** in **Naran** main bazar. The hotel features family rooms, equipped with flat-screen TV, a private bathroom, and a terrace with a mountain view. Breakfast is available every morning, and includes à la carte, continental and American options. The Royal Hotel is very famous for their traditional food and long time serving.

- **Hotel Pine Park (PP)**
  Hotel Pine Park is situated on Lake Saif ul Malook Road. It's surrounded by lush green mountains covered with tall trees. It offers comfortable accommodation, delicious food, and stunning views of the surrounding mountains. Guests can enjoy a range of amenities including free Wi-Fi, room service, and a 24-hour front desk.

Table 1: Services in Top Five Hotel

Hotels Name	Number of Rooms	Restaurants Seats	Google ratting/ views
DM	44	80	4.1/2114
MI	104	450	4.1/1308
C	20	60	4/487

RH	30	80	4.3/465
PP	20	80	4/40

Table 2: Average attribute of top five Hotel

S.No.	SERVQUAL Attributes	Total	RH	DM	HC	MI	PP
i.	**RELIABILITY**	4.69	4.52	4.77	4.8	4.9	4.45
ii.	**RESPONSIVENESS**	4.13	4.17	4.42	3.85	3.97	4.22
iii.	**ASSURANCE**	3.97	3.92	4.27	3.72	4.17	3.78
iv.	**EMPATHY**	3.57	3.52	3.55	3.8	3.8	3.15
v.	**TANGIBLES**	4.28	4.17	4.43	4.25	4.59	3.95
vi.	**COMPETENCE**	4.6	4.9	4.75	4.75	3.8	4.8
vii.	**ACCESS**	4.62	4.6	4.9	4.6	4.85	4.15
viii.	**COURTESY**	4.06	4.1	4.18	3.85	4.1	4.05
ix.	**COMMUNICATION MODES**	4.07	4.13	3.98	4.33	4.05	3.85
x.	**CREDIBILITY**	3.45	2.9	3.5	3.17	3.95	3.7
xi.	**SECURITY**	3.25	3.02	4.25	2.17	3.61	3.3
xii.	**UNDERSTANDING /KNOWING THE CUSTOMER**	3.84	3.4	4.05	4.4	4.1	4.25
xiii.	**FOOD**	4.48	4	4.65	4.6	4.92	4.2
xiv.	**AMENITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT**	3.45	3.82	3.22	3.65	3.25	4.2
Total		56.46	55.17	58.92	55.94	58.6	56.05

6. Discussion and recommendations

During the survey it was observed that there are many hotels which do not give the promised service. But hotels like DeManchi, Millennium Inn, Centurion, Royal and Pine Park which are included in the survey some better than others see table 1 for google rating. The findings suggest that these attributes explain 56.46 of the variances in hotel guests' rating of overall service quality received from the selected hotels. The average highest score was 58.92 by Hotel DeManchi, 58.6 by Hotel Millenium, 56.05 by Hotel Pine Park and 55.17 by Royal Hotel Naran. The individual score is given below.

i. Reliability

The results on reliability (total mean 4.69) shows that ability to deliver quality services to customers Excellent in hotels of Naran.

ii. Responsiveness

The results of responsiveness (total mean 4.13) depict that the hotel staff are helpful, and customers are satisfied, but the staff are not very professional and promptness to deal with guests. So, the guests are not satisfied with the behavior of hotel management with respect to quality service

iii. **Assurance**

All the results of assurance (3.97) depict that hotels are safe, but the hotel management are not responsive toward quality service and need to improve in some sections like the room rate. Cause many guests were not satisfied with the room rent that little bit high from their quality of service.

iv. **Empathy**

The Empathy results are good (total mean 3.57) which shows that hotel staff are not too much trained, so they are unable to meet the needs and requirements of guests.

v. **Tangibles**

The results related to Tangible are better which shows that Hotels having good looking furniture and other equipment (total avg mean 4.28) and hotels having comfortable beds, furniture and good, but need to improve and change with the demand of guests. Their staff don't have proper uniform.

vi. **Competence**

The results of competence (4.60) show excellent. It means the staff have knowledge about local popular places and its main reason is the local employees in hotel.

vii. **Access**

The result of Access (total mean 4.62) is also excellent which shows that the facilities of service provider are satisfactory, and its main reason is the competition in Hotels and Restaurant.

viii. **Courtesy**

ix. Courtesy in Hotels of Naran is good. Its total avg mean is 4.06. The results of Courtesy (total mean 4.06) is very good. Which indicates that the politeness and behavior of staff are good and satisfactory.

x. **Communication modes**

The results of communication mode are good and satisfactory (total mean 4.07) , but sometime mobile network and Wi-Fi service not available or not good which totally depends on the weather condition and on guest occupancy.

xi. **Credibility**

The results of Credibility (total mean below 4) are also fair, which shows gusts having no trust and confidence on the service providers.

xii. **Security**

The overall results of Security (which are below 4) indicates are fair, while the general security (4.00) is good. They don't have on call Doctor facility and accidental facilities. They don't have proper fireproof arrangement. Almost in many hotels no Danger alarm providing service.

xiii. **Understanding/Knowing the customer**

The results of understanding/ knowing the customers are fair with (total means 3.84) this depicts that hotel staff do not understand the needs of the customers.

xiv. **Food**

In Hotels of Naran the food service is good with a total avg of 4.48. They are providing good quality of food and choice of food cause the Competition of hotels and restaurant.

xv. **Amenities and entertainment**

Amenities and entertainment service is not good with the total avg of 3.45 in the targeted Hotels of Naran. They don't have entertainment for children, Facility of cable is not good, they don't have Gym.
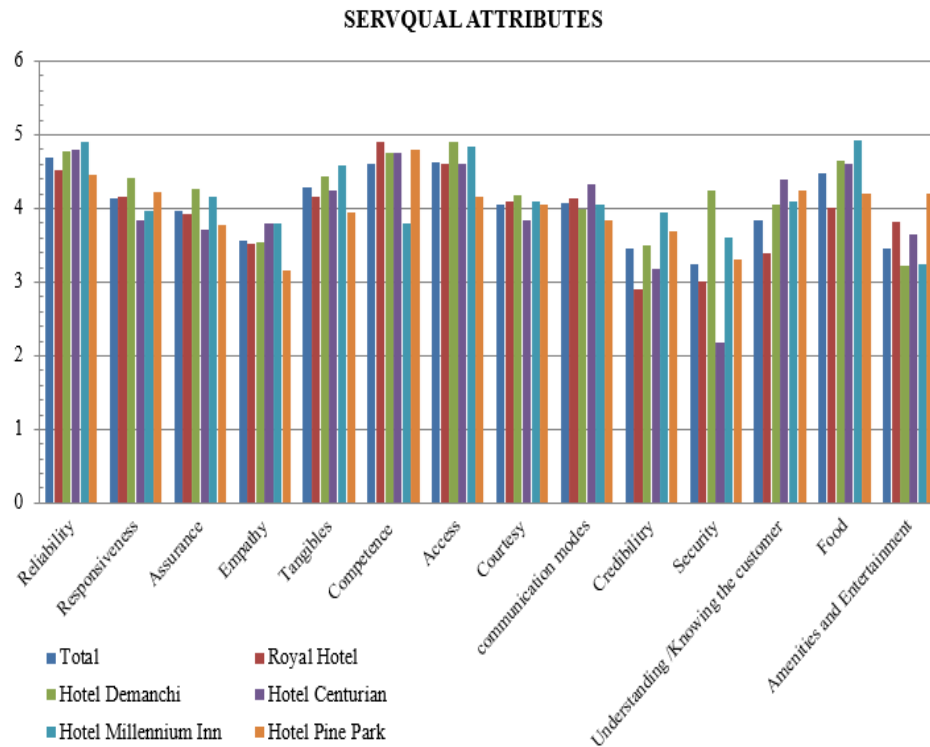
SERVQUAL ATTRIBUTES

Figure 2: Serve QUAL attributes for five hotels in Naran

Recommendations

To narrow the disparity between guests' expectations and their perceptions of the actual service provided, hotel managers and personnel must strive to ensure that every interaction with guests yields a positive experience for them.

Hotels of Naran/association not giving the facility of ambulances or Doctors, Hotel management must introduce first aid facilities in hotel or a group of hotels to deal with emergency cases, for this purpose, hotel management hire doctor in hotel also endorses proper security plans while guest does not feel safe and secure while staying in the Hotel. There is a need to improve security services in the hotel industry, for this purpose, both government and hotel management work together to ensure security services in hotels.

The management of the hotels must improve their credibility while facilitating and helping their customers. When trust is built between hotels and customers it will increase tourism opportunities in the region. The owners and management of the hotels must provide quality and variety of restaurant menu. They also introduced local popular dishes and organic foods which will attract more tourists in the region. Hotel staff not educated and knowledgeable to answer guests, the staff must be trained professionally to provide excellent services. Employers don't have knowledge about the local place of interest. The staff of the hotels must be familiar with the importance of tourism, so they must be familiar with popular places of the region. So, they can properly guide and facilitate the guests. Staff of the hotels must be trained in hotel management and hospitality so they would be able to deal with customers properly and professionally.

There should be a check and balance on the fluctuation of rent prices of rooms which discourages tourism in the region. There must be uniform prices keeping in view the quality services of hotels. There are no entertainment facilities for the kids. Facility of tv and cable not good. Hotel management must ensure amenities and entertainment facilities to attract tourists in the region. The owners and managers of hotels must ensure the basic facilities related to customers satisfaction such as cleanliness, telephone and Wi-Fi services in rooms and in overall hotel premises. To improve the looks of the hotel/staff there is a need to introduce proper dress for the staff of the hotels.

Managerial implications

This study holds significant value for hotel managers, offering guidance on how to refine and adapt current methods for measuring customer satisfaction in hotels. Naran is the main place where the people stay for visiting the different destinations. Accommodation is a very important component during their visit to rest, relax, refresh, to be comfortable.

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