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## A STUDY ON PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF TOURISTS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED BY HOTELS IN NEPAL

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### ABSTRACT

*The quality of services offered in case of hotel industry, as in case of any service oriented industry, determines the success or failure of the hotel as the satisfaction of the guests regarding the services form a crucial part of the image of the hotel. The present study is undertaken with an aim to find out if the services rendered in the hotels are able to meet the expectations of the tourists visiting Nepal. For this purpose, responses from 131 guests staying at 130 hotels across Nepal were collected with the help of SERVQUAL model and the responses were analysed using the Gap Model. It would help the hotel operators to understand the expectations of the guests as well as their perceptions regarding the services offered by them currently. Further, it would help the operators of the hotels to understand the areas where they need to improve further so that the customer satisfaction can be improved which would help them to improve their position in the hotel industry. This study is novel in itself as no such study had previously been undertaken for studying the quality of the services offered by the hotels operating in Nepal and is an original contribution by the researcher for the improvement of services which are being provided by the operators in one of the most important industry for Nepal.*

### KEYWORDS

SERVQUAL, hotel industry, guest satisfaction.

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### INTRODUCTION

The quality of the service offered is one of the main factors which determines the success or failure of a firm working in a service industry. The hotel industry is no different. In the hotel industry, the satisfaction level of the guests regarding the services offered by the hotel determines the future of the hotel. It is the quality of the services which defined the relationship between the guest and the hotel as to whether it would be a one time affair or a start of a long term relation.

Nepal being blessed with scenic beauty, cultural heritage as well as being home to the highest peaks in the world has always attracted tourists from across the globe. Tourists of all kinds visit Nepal and due to this, the tourism sector is one of the top contributors to the economy of Nepal. The tourism industry in Nepal has been growing rapidly and as a result of this, many hotels are also being established in Nepal. It is very essential that with this growth in the tourism industry, the hospitality industry would also see an increase in growth. In that situation in order to maintain this growing level of tourism in Nepal, it is essential that the services offered by the operators of the hotels are improved so that tourists coming to Nepal to enjoy their stay and return back to their home as satisfied customers.

With these caveats in mind, the present study is undertaken with an aim to find out if the services rendered in the hotels are able to meet the expectations of the tourists visiting Nepal. This would help the hotel operators in understanding the expectations as well as of the guests regarding the services offered by them and identify the areas in which the quality of the services can be improved there by allowing them to improve their position in the hospitality industry.

### OBJECTIVES

The three-fold objective of this paper is as follows:

1. To understand the expectations of the tourists as regards to the services provided by the hotels of Nepal;
2. To understand the perceptions of the tourists regarding the services provided by the hotels in Nepal; and
3. To find out if the hotels in Nepal are able to meet the expectations of the tourists regarding the services provided by them.

In order to achieve its objectives this paper is divided into five sections: literature review, methodology of the study, Analysis and discussion, Findings and lastly Conclusion.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Hotel and hospitality industry is among those industries where the trends and preferences change very rapidly.

**Oh (1999)** found that the perceptions of the customers influenced the customer satisfaction only through perceived service quality and perceived value. According to them, customer value is an important variable which should be considered in service quality and consumer satisfaction studies. It was also found that perceived value was an immediate antecedent to customer satisfaction and repurchase intention. Further, they also found that perceived value was determined not only by the tradeoff between price and service quality but also as a result of the direct and indirect influence of performance perceptions.

In a study undertaken by **Chu and Choi (2000)** six factors were identified which were considered as detrimental for selection of a hotel. They also found that the perceptions of the business travelers and leisure travelers were similar. **Andaleeb and Conway (2006)** found that the responsiveness of the front line employees had the maximum influence on the satisfaction of the customers.

According to **Law, Rob and Yip, Ruby (2010)** the tourists whom they interviewed were satisfied with the service quality of the hotels and resorts. According to **Maghziet. al (2011)**, the service quality and the customer satisfaction have a positive influence on brand trust. Further, **Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)** observed that the loyalty of a customer towards a brand was based on their perceptions regarding dimensions such as tangibles, reliability and empathy. According to them, the brand loyalty was strongly influenced by the reliability and tangibles of the hotel. **Hung and Lin (2012)** opined that the services of the hotel should be delivered in a manner which is expected by the customers for ensuring a positive feeling among the customers which would enhance their experience of stay. According to them, this could be achieved by development of systematic management and an appropriate reporting mechanism.

**Tabassum, Rahman and Jahan (2012)** in their study found that there was a significant gap in service quality in terms of components namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. They also observed that the perceptions of the service quality varied significantly according to the gender and education of the tourists.

**Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)** found that the customer's loyalty towards the hotel's brand is influenced by the perceptions of the customers regarding dimensions such as "tangibles", "reliability" and "empathy". According to them, favorable perceptions on hotel tangibles predicted relatively stronger brand loyalty than the reliability and empathy perceptions. They also found that service quality plays a stronger role in development of unique ambiance which is exclusive.

## SERVQUAL AND ITS DIMENSIONS

- **Reliability**

**Mok and Armstrong (1998)** found that Hotel guests expected that whatever was promised should be delivered. They also observed that the customers needed to feel safe in their transaction and they expected the employees to be courteous which instills confidence in their guests. According to them, for building reliable services, inspired leadership, custom oriented corporate culture, excellent service-system design, and effective use of information and technology is required. They also suggested that the hotels to meet and exceed customers' expectations need to understand the culture of their guests.

According to **Yoon and Ekinci (2003)** out of the all the dimensions of SERVQUAL, reliability of the services provided was one of the dimensions which was considered valid.

In their study **Andaleeb and Conway (2006)** found that out of all the factors, the customer satisfaction was influenced the most by how responsive the front line employees.

**Yilmaz (2010)** observed that only four dimensions of SERVQUAL namely Tangibles, Reliability, Empathy and Assurance- Responsiveness were important for measuring service quality in the Turkish Hotel industry.

**Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)** found that the customers' perceptions regarding the brand quality of the hotel was contributed by their perceptions regarding dimensions of service quality such as tangibles, reliability and empathy. They also found that favorable perceptions on hotel tangibles predicted relatively stronger brand loyalty than the reliability and empathy perceptions. According to them, service quality plays a stronger role in development of unique ambiance which is exclusive and services are delivered in such a manner which ensured empathy and reliability.

The findings of the study undertaken by **Tabassum, Rahman & Jahan (2012)** indicated that there was a significant service gap in terms of all the components of service quality including reliability, responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy and Tangibles according to the SERVQUAL model. They also found that the perceptions of the service quality varied significantly according to the gender and education of the tourists.

**Amisshah (2013)** observed that the staff's knowledge to answer the guests and the performance of services at the right time and having the guests' best interest at heart from the reliability factor were considered to be very crucial.

**Siddique, Akhter and Masum (2013)** found that the service quality of the five star hotels is highly dependent on the physical appearance, interior decoration, food quality, behavior of the employees, security system, and customized services given to individual customers. **Al-Msallam (2015)** suggested that for making sure that the customers visit again, the managers should concentrate on improving the image and brand of the hotel by ensuring that they provide solutions to the customers for all their needs. They also suggested that Customer loyalty can be nurtured by providing consistent superior room facilities, complemented by the personalized services of housekeeping staff.

**Debasish and Dey (2015)** suggested that the services must be performed within the promised time duration and luxury hotels should occupy more space to increase parking space. They also suggested that services must be delivered without any delay and individual attention must be given to guests as these hotels belong to luxury category. **Duan et al. (2016)** found that in case of Reliability and assurance dimension, the positive mentions of the users have a strong effect while in case of responsiveness dimension, the negative mentions have a strong effect on the reviews given by the users. Their findings indicate that consumers' review posting behavior was significantly related to reviewer statements about tangibles, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy.

The results of the study of **L. Ren et al. (2016)** indicated that four dimensions which included tangible and sensorial experience, staff aspect, aesthetic perception, and location influenced the customer satisfaction in a positive manner. **Marić (2016)** found that the guests primarily considered feeling confident about the hotel staff to be very important. According to their study, the guests also considered that it is important that no aspect or service provided would lead to some type of misunderstanding. They also observed that married respondents paid more attention to intangible attributes, such as fulfilling promises made to guests, efforts to resolve guests' problems, fast and immediate service, and check-out and check-in efficiency.

- **Accessibility**

According to **Mok and Armstrong (1998)** the hotel guests expected the employees to be courteous which instills confidence in their guests. Their results also indicated that tourists from different cultures may have different expectations of the physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel and communication materials of hotels. Majority of the customers expressed their satisfaction with the overall service they received from the hotel, especially regarding Tangibility, Responsiveness and Assurance according to the results of the study undertaken by **Karunaratne and Jayawardena (2010)**.

- **Tangibles**

According to **Mok and Armstrong (1998)** the tourists from different cultures might have different expectations of the physical facilities, equipments, appearance of personnel and communication materials of hotels. **Yoon and Ekinci (2003)** found that out of the dimensions of SERVQUAL, four were valid and one of them was tangibles. In their study **Nadiri and Hussain (2005)** found that the customers of Northern Cyprus hotels evaluated the hotels on the basis of two dimensions namely tangibles and intangibles and had a narrow zone of tolerance for deviations from their expected service quality.

**Andaleeb and Conway (2006)** observed that the physical design and appearance of the restaurant had no significant effect on the satisfaction of the customer. **Ryan and Huimin (2007)** found that the areas where the expectations of the tourists were met with regards to the Chinese hotels included the aspects such as bed comfort and cleanliness.

**Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)** found that favorable perceptions on hotel tangibles predicted relatively stronger brand loyalty than the reliability and empathy perceptions. According to **Hung and Lin (2012)** the tourists made judgments based in Tangible Hardware along with the intangible service provided by the hotels. According to them these could be important determinants for differentiation.

**Poku, Zakari and Soali (2013)** observed that tangibles did not play any significant role in the development of customer loyalty and the guest were likely to take it for granted in a quest for change.

- **Empathy**

**Mok and Armstrong (1998)** found that among all the aspects of service quality, respondents thought the ability of the staff to solve the problems when they arise was the most important aspect out of all the expectations that they had regarding the service quality. They also suggested that the hotels to meet and exceed customers' expectations, need to understand the culture of their guests.

In their study, **Yoon and Ekinci (2003)** found that empathy was one of the dimensions of service quality which had a significant influence on the customer satisfaction. **Khattab and Aldehayyat (2011)** suggested that the hotel manager should not forget that empathy was the most important dimension in predicting hotel customers' overall service quality evaluations. They also suggested that the managerial implications included the need for the hotel to develop human resource management strategies which included the need for hotel to develop human resource management strategies to train employees to become more skilled in their job, have excellent communication skills, being courteous, friendly and competent to meet customers' need.

**Tabassum, Rahman & Jahan (2012)** observed that as per the occupation of the tourist, their perceptions regarding empathy varied. **Amisshah (2013)** found that the tourists staying in hotels in Cape Coast and Elmina perceived empathy factor to be most important dimension. Among the various aspects of empathy dimension, aspects such as staff understands the specific needs of guests and 'staff gives personalized attention were considered very important.

**Marić (2016)** found that the guests primarily find it important to feel confident about the hotel staff and that no aspect or service provided would lead to some type of misunderstanding. For the guests, precision, accuracy, security, speed of service, staff's courtesy and personal attention were elements of service quality elements were important. They also observed that married respondents paid more attention to intangible attributes, such as fulfilling promises made to guests, efforts to resolve guests' problems, fast and immediate service, and check-out and check-in efficiency. According to **Salleh et al. (2016)**, females concentrate more on the interpersonal nature of the services rendered.

- **Staff Competence (Responsiveness)**

According to **Yoon and Ekinci (2003)** responsiveness of the staff was one of the dimensions which predicted the customer satisfaction. **Andaleeb and Conway (2006)** found that the customer satisfaction was influenced the most by the responsiveness of the front line employees followed by price and food quality.

Similarly, **Al-Rousan, Ramzi and Mohamed (2010)** found that responsiveness of the staff was one of the factor which predicted customer loyalty. **Karunaratne and Jayawardena (2010)** expressed overall satisfaction regarding responsiveness of the staff among all the other factors.

**Khatab and Aldehayyat (2011)** opined that the hotel manager should not forget that empathy was the most important dimension in predicting hotel customers' overall service quality evaluations. They also added that the hotel should develop human resource management strategies which included the need for develop the human resource management strategies for training employee to enable them to become more skilled in their job, have excellent communication skills, being courteous, friendly and competent to meet customers' need. **Debasish and Dey (2015)** also stressed that for improvement in quality, the managers should concentrate on Empathy dimension. For this purpose, the staff should be trained in a better manner to handle customers in a better manner.

- **Gap in Service Delivery**

Many times it happens that what is expected regarding a particular service is not delivered and due to this, the expectations of the customers are not fulfilled. Such gaps are created when the expectations of the customers do not meet the actual quality of the services.

**Law, Rob and Yip, Ruby (2010)** observed that the most frequent reason for gap between the expected and perceived service quality was insufficient knowledge of the customer's needs and expectations. According to them, another possible reason for such a gap could be due to insufficient interactions between the hotel management and their guests.

In another study undertaken by **Minazzi (2010)**, they observed that there was sometimes a gap between the level of quality that consumers expected from a hotel of a certain category and the service that they actually received. According to them, for addressing this issue, the hotels need to work harder for understanding the expectations of the customers instead of following the standards which are specified for their category. They also suggested that the hotels should design their own management programs which should be such that the minimum standards which are set for the category to which the hotel belong should be exceeded.

**Minazzi (2010)** also suggested that courtesy and empathy of the staff should be assessed periodically and subjective inspections should be carried out. Moreover, for inculcating professionalism, training is required to be provided to the staff. The negative values might be due to shortfalls in the services which were offered and the perceived value of the services which were offered by them.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

### POPULATION AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The population of the study was the tourists visiting Nepal and staying in the hotels that were operating in Nepal. In order to collect the responses, 131 guests staying in 130 hotels were given the questionnaire and they were asked to give their opinion on their expectations regarding the service quality of good hotels and their perceptions regarding the quality of services offered by the hotels under the study.

### TIME PERIOD OF THE STUDY

The responses from the guests were collected between the months of April and May 2019.

### HYPOTHESIS FOR THE STUDY

On the basis of the literature review undertaken the following hypothesis was derived:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no gap between the perceptions and expectations of the tourists as regards to the services provided by the hotels in Nepal

### SERVQUAL MODEL

Among the various models used for assessing the quality of the services provided, the SERVQUAL model is widely used. Many studies have widely used this model for assessing the quality of the services provided. The SERVQUAL model is a multi-item scale which is used for measuring consumer perceptions regarding service quality which was developed by **Parasuraman et.al (1988)**. In the present study, the SERVQUAL instrument is used to measure the gap between the expectations and perceptions of the guests staying in 130 hotels in Nepal. In total 131 guests were interviewed and their responses regarding their expectations regarding the services that should be offered and their perceptions regarding the services that the hotels were offering were collected on a 7 point scale.

The gap between the perceptions and the expectations were calculated using the below formula

$$\text{Gapscore} = \text{Score given by the respondent for Perception (SP)} - \text{Score given by the respondent for expectations (SE)}$$

Then the average score for each dimension was calculated.

The Table 1 shows the statements on which the responses were collected from the guests and on the basis on which the gap was calculated:

TABLE 1: STATEMENTS ON WHICH THE RESPONSES WERE COLLECTED FROM THE GUESTS AND ON THE BASIS ON WHICH THE GAP WAS CALCULATED

Statement	Statements for measuring expectations (E)	Statements for measuring perceptions (P)	Gap (P-E)
<b>TANGIBLES</b>			
S1	Excellent Hotels will have all modern facilities	This Hotel has all modern facilities	Availability of Modern Facilities
S2	The physical facilities at hotel will be visually appealing	The physical facilities at this hotel are visually appealing	Visual Appeal of physical facilities
S3	Employees at excellent hotel will be looking neat	Employees at this hotel are look neat	Neat looking employees
S4	Materials associated with the services of the hotel such as the information on the websites, hotel brochures will be visually appealing at an excellent hotel	Materials associated with the services of this hotel such as the information on the websites, hotel brochures are visually appealing at an excellent hotel	Visual appeal of materials associated with the services of the hotel
<b>RELIABILITY</b>			
S5	When an excellent hotel promises to deliver something by a certain time, they do it	When an this promises to deliver something by a certain time, they do it	Delivery of services at the promised time
S6	When a guest has a problem, excellent hotels will show a sincere interest in solving it.	When a guest has a problem, excellent hotels will show a sincere interest in solving it.	Interest of hotel staff in solving the problem of guest
S7	Excellent hotels will perform the service required right the very first time.	This hotel performs the service required right the very first time.	Performance of required service right at the very first time.
S8	Excellent hotels provide the service required at the time they promise to do so	This hotel provides the service required at the time they promise to do so	Provision of the service required at the time they promise to do so
S9	Excellent hotels will insist on ensuring that guests do not have any complaints	This hotel insists on ensuring that guests do not have any complaints	Ensuring that guests have no complaints
<b>RESPONSIVENESS</b>			
S10	Employees of excellent hotels will tell guests exactly when the requested services will be performed	Employees of this hotel tell guests exactly when the requested services will be performed	Telling the guests exactly when the requested services will be performed
S11	Employees of excellent hotels will give prompt service to guests	Employees of this hotel give prompt service to guests	Prompt services to the guests
S12	Employees of excellent hotels will always be willing to help guests	Employees of this hotel are always be willing to help guests	Willingness of the employees to help the guests
S13	Employees of excellent hotels will never be too busy to respond to guests' requests	Employees of this hotel are never be too busy to respond to guests' requests	Employees of hotel are never be too busy to respond to guests' requests
<b>ASSURANCE</b>			
S14	The behavior of employees in excellent hotels will instill confidence in guests	The behavior of employees in this hotel instills confidence in guests	Behavior of employees in the hotel instills confidence in guests
S15	Guests of excellent hotels will feel safe in transactions	Guests of this hotel will feel safe in transactions	Safety in undertaking transaction
S16	Employees of excellent hotels will be consistently courteous with guests	Employees of this hotel are consistently courteous with guests	Employees of hotel are consistently courteous with guests
S17	Employees of excellent hotels will have the required knowledge to answer the questions of the guests	Employees of this hotel have the required knowledge to answer the questions of the guests	Employees have required knowledge to answer the questions of the guests
S18	Excellent hotels will give guests individual attention.	This hotel gives guests individual attention.	Hotel gives guests individual attention
<b>EMPATHY</b>			
S19	Excellent hotels will have operating hours convenient to all their guests	This hotel has operating hours convenient to all their guests	Convenience of operating hours of the hotel to all
S20	Excellent hotels will have employees who give the guests personal attention	This hotel has employees who give the guests personal attention	Employees give personal attention to the guests
S21	Excellent hotels will have the best interest of their guests at their heart	This hotel has the best interest of their guests at their heart	Hotel has best interest of the guest at their heart
S22	The employees of excellent hotels will understand the specific needs of their guests	The employees of this hotels understand the specific needs of their guests	Employees understand the specific needs of the guests

One the basis of the statements in Table 1, the average score was calculated as indicated in Table 2

TABLE 2: CALCULATION OF AVERAGE SCORE FOR THE DIMENSION

Dimension of SERVQUAL	Statement included in that Dimension	Average score calculation		
		Expectation	Perceptions	Gap
Tangibles	S1 to S4	$S1+S2+S3+S4/4$	$S1+S2+S3+S4/4$	Average score of Perception for that dimension – Average score of Expectation for that dimension
Reliability	S5 to S9	$S5+S6+S7+S8+S9/5$	$S5+S6+S7+S8+S9/5$	
Responsiveness	S10 to S13	$S10+S11+S12+S13/4$	$S10+S11+S12+S13/4$	
Assurance	S14 to S18	$S14+S15+S16+S17+S18/5$	$S14+S15+S16+S17+S18/5$	
Empathy	S19 to S21	$S19+S20+S21+S22/4$	$S19+S20+S21+S22/4$	

**ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

After undertaking the analysis of the collected responses, an aggregate score for each statement was calculated and the results are presented in Table 3

**TABLE 3: AVERAGE SCORE FOR EXPECTATIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND GAP SCORE**

Statement	Average score for Expectations	Average score for Perceptions	Average Gap Score
S1	5.85 (22)	5.14 (22)	-0.71 (19)
S2	6.01 (19)	5.30 (20)	-0.71 (19)
S3	6.15 (9)	5.47 (18)	-0.68 (18)
S4	5.95 (20)	5.16 (21)	-0.79 (22)
S5	6.18 (7)	5.45 (19)	-0.73 (21)
S6	5.91 (21)	5.50 (17)	-0.40 (11)
S7	6.04 (16)	5.70 (15)	-0.34 (2)
S8	6.15 (9)	5.79 (6)	-0.37 (6)
S9	6.19 (6)	5.80 (5)	-0.39 (9)
S10	6.10 (14)	5.71 (13)	-0.39 (9)
S11	6.16 (8)	5.76 (8)	-0.40 (11)
S12	6.30 (3)	5.75 (9)	-0.55 (17)
S13	6.04 (16)	5.73 (10)	-0.31 (1)
S14	6.14 (12)	5.73 (10)	-0.40 (11)
S15	6.33 (1)	5.84 (3)	-0.49 (16)
S16	6.22 (5)	5.86 (2)	-0.36 (5)
S17	6.14 (12)	5.71 (13)	-0.43 (14)
S18	6.08 (15)	5.72 (12)	-0.37 (6)
S19	6.15 (9)	5.81 (4)	-0.34 (2)
S20	6.04 (16)	5.70 (15)	-0.34 (2)
S21	6.24 (4)	5.78 (7)	-0.46 (15)
S22	6.31 (2)	5.93 (1)	-0.38 (8)

**Note:** Figures in the brackets indicate the rank for that statement from the average score as calculated from the responses collected

**EXPECTATIONS OF THE GUESTS REGARDING THE SERVICE QUALITY OF THE HOTELS**

From the Table 3, it can be observed that feeling safe while undertaking transactions with the hotel was one of the most important expectation that the guests had while staying in the hotel followed by the ability of the employees of understand the specific needs of the guests. The third important criteria for them was the willingness of the employees to help the guests followed by the hotel having the best interest of the guest at heart and courteous behaviour of the employees at the fourth and fifth place respectively. (Table 3)

Visual Appeal of physical facilities was ranked at the nineteenth position while Visual appeal of materials associated with the services of the hotel was placed at the twentieth position. This was followed by Interest of hotel staff in solving the problem of guest at the twenty first position. According to the guests their satisfaction level was least influenced by the Availability of Modern Facilities in the hotel that they were staying.

**PERCEPTIONS OF THE GUESTS REGARDING THE SERVICE QUALITY OF THE HOTELS**

As regards to the perception of the guests regarding the service quality of the hotels in Nepal, the ability of the employees to understand the specific needs of the guests was ranked the highest as it plays an important role in determining the satisfaction level of the guests. This was followed by the courteous nature of the employees at the second place and the feeling of safety while undertaking the transactions with the hotel at the third place respectively. Convenient hotel working hours was placed at the fourth place and the ability of the hotel to ensure that the guests have no complaints was placed at the fifth place.

On the other hand, the guests placed the delivery of the required services at the nineteenth place, visual appeal of the physical facilities at the twentieth place and the Visual appeal of materials associated with the services of the hotel at the twenty first position. According to the responses of the guests, they placed the Availability of Modern Facilities at the last position.

**ANALYSIS OF THE GAP BETWEEN THE PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF THE GUESTS REGARDING THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE HOTELS**

When the Gap was calculated between the what the guests felt and their expectations, it was found that the highest gap was found in case of the Visual appeal of materials associated with the services of the hotel followed by the promise of delivering the services on time. These were followed by Availability of Modern Facilities and the Visual Appeal of physical facilities which are available in the Hotels of Nepal.

The lowest gap between the perceptions and expectations of the guests regarding the way in which the Employees of hotel are never be too busy to respond to guests' requests. This was followed by the aspect of performance of the service right at the very first time, convenient operating hours and personal attention given by the employees to the guests.

**ANALYSIS WITH THE HELP OF DIMENSIONS OF SERVQUAL MODEL**

When the scores given to the individual statements was used to arrive at the average score of the SERVQUAL dimensions, it was found that the guests had highest expectations regarding the assurance dimension, followed by the empathy dimension, responsiveness dimension, reliability dimension and tangibles dimension respectively.

When the scores for perceptions were studied, it was found that the score for the empathy and the responsiveness dimension were equal and highest among all the dimensions of SERVQUAL. This was followed by responsiveness of the services, reliability of the services, and tangibles.

As regards to the gap between the perceptions and expectations of the various dimensions of SERVQUAL, it was observed that the lowest gap was found regarding the empathy dimension of the SERVQUAL, followed by the responsiveness dimension, assurance dimension, reliability dimension and lastly the tangibles dimension. These findings are summarised in below given Table No. 4:

**TABLE 4: AVERAGE SCORE FOR EXPECTATIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND GAP FOR THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SERVQUAL**

Dimension of SEVQUAL Model	Average score for Expectations	Average score for Perceptions	Average Gap Score
TANGIBLES	5.99	5.27	-0.72
RELIABILITY	6.09	5.65	-0.44
RESPONSIVENESS	6.15	5.74	-0.41
ASSURANCE	6.21	5.79	-0.42
EMPATHY	6.16	5.79	-0.38

**FINDINGS**

The following are the major findings of the study:

1. The guests expected the hotels that they visited to have an atmosphere where in they could feel that they could undertake transaction with the hotel staff without any fear. This finding is in line with the finding of the study undertaken by **Mok and Armstrong (1998)**.

2. The guests also expected the hotel staff to understand their needs and show willingness to address the issues faced by them. These findings are similar to the study undertaken by **Andaleeb and Conway (2006)**.
3. The visual appeal of the physical facilities and of the materials associated with the services of the hotel and the Interest of hotel staff in solving the problem of guest as well as the availability of modern facilities were not important criteria which determined the level of services expected by the guests which are contrary to the findings of the study undertaken by **Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)**
4. The guests considered among all the criteria of the service quality the ability of the employees to understand the specific needs of the guests to be most important followed by the courteous nature of the employees which were in line with the findings of the study undertaken by **Mok and Armstrong (1998)**. Further availability of modern facilities was placed at the last position as regards to their perceptions of the services rendered by the hotels in Nepal.
5. The highest gap was found in case of the Visual appeal of materials associated with the services of the hotel. This has to be improved as it would enable the management to project themselves in a better light. The management could highlight the exclusive services provided by them to differentiate themselves from their competitors.
6. The services that were promised should be delivered on time as it ensures that the guests trust the hotel staff. This has to be addressed by the management.
7. Guests had highest expectations regarding the assurance dimension, followed by the empathy dimension, responsiveness dimension, reliability dimension and tangibles dimension respectively. These findings are in line with the study undertaken by **Mok and Armstrong (1998)** and **Debasish and Dey (2015)**.
8. Their perceptions regarding empathy and the responsiveness dimension were equal and highest among all the dimensions of SERVQUAL. This was followed by responsiveness of the services, reliability of the services, and tangibles. More efforts have to be made by the management to improve the perceptions of the guests in the other dimensions as well. The findings regarding the tangibles aspect are similar to the study undertaken by **Andaleeb and Conway (2006)** and **Poku, Zakari and Soali (2013)** while were in contrast with the studies undertaken by **Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)** and **Hung and Lin (2012)**
9. The lowest gap was found regarding the empathy dimension of the SERVQUAL, followed by the responsiveness dimension, assurance dimension, reliability dimension and lastly the tangibles dimension. Efforts should be made by the management to lower the gap in the reliability as well as tangibles dimension to improve the overall quality of services provided by the Hotels in Nepal.

## CONCLUSION

The quality of the service offered is one of the main factors which determines the success or failure of a firm working in a service industry. The hotel industry is no different. In the hotel industry, the satisfaction level of the guests regarding the services offered by the hotel determines the future of the hotel. The present study is undertaken with an aim to find out if the services rendered in the hotels are able to meet the expectations of the tourists visiting Nepal. For this purpose, responses from 131 guests staying at 130 hotels across Nepal were collected with the help of SERVQUAL model.

The first objective of the study was to understand the expectations of the tourists as regards to the services provided by the hotels of Nepal. It was found that the guests visiting hotels desired to have a safe environment for undertaking transaction with the hotel (**Mok and Armstrong (1998)**) as well as they wanted to hotel staff to understand their needs and showed a willingness to address the issues faced by them (**Andaleeb and Conway (2006)**). The visual appeal of the physical facilities and of the materials associated with the services of the hotel and the Interest of hotel staff in solving the problem of guest as well as the availability of modern facilities were not considered as important criteria while deciding the level of quality of services expected by them which is in contrary to the findings of the study undertaken by **Malik, Naeem and Nasir (2011)**.

The second objective of the study was to understand the perceptions of the tourists regarding the services provided by the hotels in Nepal. The ability of the employees to understand the specific needs of the guests to be most important followed by the courteous nature of the employees (**Mok and Armstrong (1998)**). Further availability of modern facilities was placed at the last position as regards to their perceptions of the services rendered by the hotels in Nepal.

The third objective of the study was to find out if the hotels in Nepal are able to meet the expectations of the tourists regarding the services provided by them. For this purpose, the hypothesis that there is no gap between the perceptions and expectations of the tourists as regards to the services provided by the hotels in Nepal as formulated. The highest gap was found in case of the Visual appeal of materials associated with the services of the hotel. This has to be improved as it would enable the management to project themselves in a better light. The management could highlight the exclusive services provided by them to differentiate themselves from their competitors.

Among the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model Guests had highest expectations regarding the assurance dimension [**Mok and Armstrong (1998)** and **Debasish and Dey (2015)**] while their perceptions regarding empathy and the responsiveness dimension were equal and highest among all the dimensions. It is suggested to the management of the hotels which are in Nepal to improve the physical facilities as well their visual appeal so as to ensure that the quality of the services can be improved as the highest gap in the perceptions and expectations was observed in case of the tangibles aspect [**Andaleeb and Conway (2006)** and **Poku, Zakari and Soali (2013)**]. Further the services which are promised should be delivered in an adequate and timely manner so as to ensure that the confidence of the guest can be gained and the customer satisfaction can be increased which could help the firms establish and distinguish themselves from their competitors in the hotel and tourism industry of Nepal.

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