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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

OBJECTIVES

HYPOTHESIS (ES)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

RECOMMENDATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

LIMITATIONS

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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GUEST SATISFACTION IN HOTELS OF KASHMIR: THE PERCEPTION OF FOREIGN TOURISTS

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ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is an important measurement that has to be taken on a regularly basis in every tourism facility in the country. Customer satisfaction is exceedingly personal estimation that is deeply influenced by the customer expectations regarding the services. The most dynamic verb in the lexis of customer satisfaction is 'to improve'. Hence the hotel industry like other industries is realizing the significance of customer centered philosophies with the overall goal in terms of customer satisfaction is to stay as close to their customers as possible. 10 point likert scales was worn to gauge the responses. Based on data gathered, with the help of a self-developed and statistically-tested research instrument, from one hundred forty-eight (148) respondents representing seventy-six hotels (76) showed that an improvement in empathy and reliability dimension are needed to augment the over-all guest satisfaction in hotels.

KEYWORDS
customer satisfaction, service quality, hotel amenities, Kashmir valley.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hospitality industry has evolved to become one of the largest and most dynamic industries of the global economy. Since 1950, the phenomenon of tourism has been remarkable in terms of growth, spread and diversification. The international tourist arrivals since then have grown from mere 25 million to reach 940 million in 2010. The fast growth and spread not only resulted the globalization of people's movements as never before but also contributed in creating a vibrant industry and opportunities for millions of people.

Tourism and hospitality industry is high on international agenda. The 7th session of the Commission on Sustainable Development focused on tourism and hospitality industry and subsequently work programmes on sustainable tourism and hospitality are being developed. The year 2020 will see the penetration of technology into all aspects of life. It will become possible to live one's day without exposure to other people, according to World Trade Organizations (WTO's) latest look into the future. But this bleak prognosis has a silver lining for the hospitality sector. People in the high-tech future will crave the human touch and hospitality industry will be the principal means to achieve this. Hotel industry that manages to provide 'high touch' products will prosper. Upscale, luxury services that pamper and spoil their customers have a bright future in the upcoming century. But WTO's report also predicts good prospects for low-budget accommodations and packages. Self-catering holiday facilities, for example, which offer plenty of opportunities for socializing among families and friends. Opportunities abound at both ends of the spectrum and there will be plenty of them. Tourism and hospitality industry in the 21st century will not only be the world's biggest industry; it will be the largest by far that the world has ever seen. Along with its phenomenal growth and size, the tourism and hospitality industry will also have to take on more responsibility for its extensive impacts. Not only its economic impacts, but also its impact on the environment, on societies and on cultural sites, all of which will be increasingly scrutinized by governments, consumer groups and the travelling public. With hope that "Tourism and Hospitality 2020 vision" will be more than a useful marketing tool, that it will act a warning signal for destinations – helping them recognize the need to prepare for the pressure of growth. WTO is advising destinations and accommodations to implement long term, strategic planning and to strengthen the partnerships, both strategically and at the operational level, between the public and private sectors.

With growth in hospitality industry competition among hotels will also become increasingly fierce. 'The study Tourism and Hospitality 2020 Vision' outlines a series of 12 megatrends that will shape the sector and offers advice on how to better compete. No tourism and hospitality operators can afford to sit back and wait for more tourists and guests respectively to arrive. They have to be won-and there will be winners and losers. To be a winner, there are a number of imperatives:

- Development focused on quality and sustainability;
- Value-for-money;
- Full utilization of information technology to identify and communicate effectively with market segments and niches.

As 2020 vision points out, the next century will mark the emergence tourism destinations and accommodation places as a 'fashion accessory'. The choice of holiday destinations and accommodation places will help define the identity of the travelers and, in an increasingly homogenous world, set him apart from the hordes of other tourists/guests.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To measure satisfaction of foreign guests in selected hotels of Kashmir valley.
2. To suggest ways and means for improving hotel services among foreign guests in Kashmir valley with a view to make overall accommodation service more effective and efficient.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION
Customer satisfaction is considered to be one of the most important outcomes of all marketing activities in a market-oriented firm. The obvious need for satisfying the firms' customer is to expand the business, to gain the higher market share, and to acquire repeat and referral business, all of which lead to improved profitability. Customer satisfaction is a complex construct. Recently, researchers have argued that there is a distinction between customer satisfaction as related to tangible products and as related to service experiences. This distinction is due to the inherent intangibility and perishability of services, as well as the inability to separate production and consumption. Hence, customer satisfaction with services and with goods may derive from, and may be influenced by, different factors and therefore should be treated as separate and distinct (Veloutsou et al., 2005).

According to the previous literature, research for this model supports the conceptualization of perceived quality as a separate construct, distinct from satisfaction (Bitner and Hubbert, 1994). Moreover, many authors make it a point to highlight that service quality and satisfaction are distinct constructs (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Bitner, 1990; Boulding, et al., 1993; Bitner and Hubbert, 1994; Taylor and Baker, 1994). Oliver (1980) identified satisfaction and dissatisfaction in terms of the disconfirmation of consumers' expectation. A positive disconfirmation leads to customer satisfaction and a negative disconfirmation leads to customer dissatisfaction. Oliver (1980) argued that the amount of dissatisfaction is dependent on the extent of disconfirmation and the consumer's level of involvement with the service and the problem solving process. The Expectations Disconfirmation Model has been dominant model in satisfaction research. The model uses pre-consumption expectations in a comparison with post-consumption experiences of a product/service to form an attitude of satisfaction or dissatisfaction toward the product/service (Oliver, 1980; Churchill and Surprenant, 1982; Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988; Tse and Wilton, 1988). The expectancy disconfirmation paradigm in process theory provides the grounding for the vast majority of satisfaction studies and encompasses four constructs: (1) Expectations (2) Performance (3) Disconfirmation and (4) Satisfaction.

Disconfirmation arises from discrepancies between prior expectations and actual performance. There are three possibilities: zero disconfirmation can result when a product performs as expected; positive disconfirmation can occur when the product performs better than expected; and negative disconfirmation when the product performs below expectations and dissatisfaction sets.

A comparison of the satisfaction model with the Gaps model indicates that the most salient feature is that the latter leaves out the issue of disconfirmation and seeks to represent an entire psychological process by an operationalisation that involves the simple subtraction of expectations from perceptions. A number of other distinctions are often made between satisfaction and quality. First, while the original five dimensions of SERVQUAL are fairly specific, those for satisfaction are broader and can result from a wider set of factors. Second, satisfaction assessments require customer experience, while quality does not (Oliver, 1980; Bolton and Drew, 1991b; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Boulding, et. al., 1993). Operationally, satisfaction is similar to an attitude, as it can be assessed as the sum of the satisfactions with the various attributes of the product or service (Churchill and Surprenant, 1982). However, while attitude is a pre-decision construct, satisfaction is a post decision experience construct (Latour and Peat, 1979). Furthermore, it highlights the construct of a "global" level of satisfaction (the overall service satisfaction) in contrast to the construct of a component level of satisfaction (the encounter service satisfaction). Boulding, et. al., 1993, mentioned that customer's satisfaction is influenced by two factors which is experiences and expectations with service performance. Two additional issues that need to be clarified when researching customer satisfaction in services is whether satisfaction is conceptualized as facet (attribute specific) or as overall (aggregate); and whether it is viewed as transaction-specific (encounter satisfaction) or as cumulative (satisfaction over time) (Hoest and et. al., 2004). However, according to Levesque and McDougall (1996) satisfaction is conceptualized as an overall customer attitude towards a service provider. Similarly, Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) claimed that customer satisfaction is the accumulated experience of a customer's purchase and consumption experiences. Jones and Sessar (1995) have identified the following methods for measuring customer satisfaction:

- customer satisfaction indices;
- feedback;
- market research; and
- frontline personnel.

The research study conducted by Kotler (1995) has found that companies can counter competition effectively by changing their strategy of product-selling philosophy to consumer-oriented marketing philosophy and the "Customer centered approach" help the service providers to deliver superior value to target customer and yield rich sights. Paterson (1997), through their study found that delighting customers, as opposed to satisfying them, is a better way to engage guests and ensure loyalty. The study further concluded that customer delight involves going beyond satisfaction and involves a pleasurable experience for the guest.

The purpose of measuring customer satisfaction is to assess the quality of the existing management practices and identify directions for improvement. The aim of managing satisfaction is to obtain a high rate of customer retention and improve a company market share and profit. Many researchers propose that customer satisfaction influences customer loyalty, which in turn affects profitability.

SAMPLE DESIGN

Keeping in the view the paucity of time, the present study was limited to District Srinagar of Kashmir valley. The size of the sample was limited to one hundred forty-eight (148) respondents selected from (76) hotels of different types. Stratified random sampling was, however, followed for the present study. All important demographic characteristics like age, gender, level of education, length of stay, nationality, purpose of visit, number of visits to valley and category of hotel was taken into consideration while seeking the response from the customers regarding their level of satisfaction in hotels. All these aspects have an important bearing on the user's evaluation of hotel services. The effort was made to give a balanced representation to above demographic characteristics to make the sample representative. The data on the table 1.1 clearly shoes that majority of respondents (43.2%) belonged to the age group of 31-40 years followed by the age group of 41-50 years (25.7%) whereas the respondents belonging to the age group of above 51 years of age were the least participants followed by the age group of 20-30 years (22.3%). The sample includes (64.9 %) male respondents. Highest numbers of the respondents (63.5%) were graduates followed by post graduates (18.9%) and the remaining was under graduates. (48.6%) respondents had their stay in between 1-6 days, (40.5%) in between 7-12 days, (7.4%) had stayed in between 13-18 days and the remaining (3.4%) had stayed more than 19 days. All respondents were foreigners. Leisure/Holiday seekers were heavy participants (89.9%) followed by business tourists (8.1%) and the pilgrimage tourist were the least (2.0%). (64.9%) respondents had come to the valley for the 1st time followed by (28.4%) 2nd time, and (5.4%) for 3rd time and remaining for the 4th time.

TABLE 1.1: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographic Data		No. of respondents	Percentage
Age	20-30years	33	22.3
	31-40years	64	43.2
	41-50years	38	25.7
	Above51years	13	8.8
	Total	148	100.0
Gender	Male	96	64.9
	Female	52	35.1
	Total	148	100.0
Level of education	Up to secondary level	26	17.6
	Graduation	94	63.5
	Post graduation	28	18.9
	Total	148	100.0
Length of stay	1-6 days	72	48.6
	7-12 days	60	40.5
	13-18 days	11	7.4
	More than 19 days	5	3.4
	Total	148	100.0
Nationality	Foreign	148	100.0
	Total	148	100.0
Purpose of visit	Business	12	8.1
	Pilgrimage	3	2.0
	Leisure/Holiday	133	89.9
	Total	148	100.0
Your visit to valley	1st	59	39.9
	2nd	33	22.3
	3rd	53	35.8
	4th	3	2.0
	Total	148	100.0
Category of Hotel	A	96	64.9
	B	42	28.4
	C	10	6.75
	Total	148	100

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METHODOLOGY

This study used a self-administered questionnaire, which is an adapted version of SERVQUAL scale to measure the level of customer satisfaction of the foreign guests' staying in hotel of Kashmir Valley. There are various models used by researchers to measure customer satisfaction, i.e., SERVQUAL Parasuraman, et.al. (1991), SERVPERF Cronin, et.al. (1992) etc. However, Cronin and Taylor (1992) objected on measurement of quality of services in terms of expectation and perception. Several other authors were in line with Cronin and Taylor about the use of SERVQUAL instrument like Quester (1995), Robinson (1999). As such service performance SERVPERF has been used in present study.

Some modifications were made to SERVQUAL instrument in order to suit the context of hotels. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was designed to measure the guests' perceptions regarding customer satisfaction in hotels. The second part of the questionnaire contained questions relating to socio-demographic data about the respondents. The researchers introduced the tool of measurement in such a way that it briefly illustrated the topic of the study and procedures of response. The measurement grades were placed according to the 10-point Likert scale (Malhotra, Y 2003). The scale was ordered regressively as follows: Highly Satisfied (10), to Highly Dissatisfied (1).

The study was conducted in the hotels of Srinagar of Kashmir valley for four months during the summer of 2012. The target population selected for this study during the data collection period comprised tourists who stayed in hotels of Srinagar. A stratified sampling approach (Getz, et.al., 2006) was employed, in which 148 questionnaires were distributed to the guests who agreed to participate in the survey. The guests completed the questionnaire in the presence of the researchers. The completed questionnaires were then collected by the researchers immediately.

The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics analyses were used to measure customers' perception scores. To explore dimensionality of the (42) item scale, a factor analysis was performed. The exploratory factor analysis extracted five factors, which accounted for 68.619 percent of variance in the data. The results are present in table 1.2. Most of the factor loadings were greater than 0.50, implying a reasonably high correlation between extracted factors and their individual items. The communalities of 26 items ranged from .580 to .828 indicating that a large amount of variance has been extracted by the factor solution. Fourteen items (v1, v2, v3, v6, v12, v13,

TABLE 1.2: MEASURING PERCEIVED GUEST SATISFACTION USING SERVPERF
Factor analysis and reliability analysis results of hotel guest's perception (n=148)

Item (n=26)	Factors					Communalities
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	
V5	.774					.675
V11	.503					.737
V20	.556					.667
V32	.606					.769
V33	.609					.741
V37	.674					.778
V14		.549				.773
V18		.518				.782
V19		.641				.707
V30		.565				.580
V21			.632			.733
V9			.508			.727
V24			.636			.714
V38			.742			.775
V7			.617			.740
V22				.715		.777
V23				.754		.828
V25				.637		.750
V34				.608		.713
V4					.795	.690
V8					.596	.695
V10					.512	.734
V16					.506	.775
V26					.569	.718
V31					.699	.697
V39					.613	.761
Eigen value	**8.890**	**7.360**	**5.216**	**4.856**	**1.124**	**19.036**
% of Variance	**22.226**	**18.401**	**13.040**	**12.141**	**2.811**	**68.619**
Cronbach's alpha	**.836**	**.861**	**.891**	**.887**	**.873**	**.970**
Number of items	**6**	**4**	**5**	**4**	**7**	**26**

TABLE 1.3: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	.934
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square)	4203.308*
Cronbach's Alpha	.970

* Significance at 1% level

v15, v17, v27, v28, v29, v35, v36, v40) were below the suggested value of .50 (Haier et al., 2006) and were not been considered in factor analysis. The remaining factors are labeled as F1- 'assurance' (knowledge and accuracy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence), F2-'tangibility' (appearance of the facilities, equipment and communication material), F3'empathy' (staff knowledge and ability to provide individual attention), F4 'responsiveness' (willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service), F5 'reliability' (solving guests' problems and performing error-free service at promised time), The first factor contains most of the items and explains most of the variance (22.22%). Thus, hotel service assurance is an important determinant of perceived customer satisfaction.

The results of the reliability analysis showed that cronbach's alpha coefficient of the extracted factors ranged from 0.836 to 0.891. That is well above the minimum value of 0.70, which is considered acceptable as an indication of scale reliability. Thus, these values suggest good internal consistency of the factors. Finally, Cronbach's alpha value for the overall perception scale is 0.970 and indicates its high reliability.

The adequacy of the sample size was confirmed using both the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) test sampling adequacy and Barlett's Test of Sphericity (Table 1.3). In fact, KMO for customer satisfaction (0.934) exceeded satisfactory value and revealed a Chi-square at 4203.308, (p<0.000) which verified that the correlation matrix

was not an identity matrix, thus validating the suitability of factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was performed which showed KMO= 0.934 is higher than the suggested 0.6 value (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2001).

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In line with the objectives, the present study seeks to find out the level of customer satisfaction among foreign guests in hotels of Kashmir valley. As mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction was measured on a ten point Likert type (highly dissatisfied/highly satisfied) scale. Mean scores and standard deviation were calculated and ranks were assigned accordingly (on the basis of mean) on each element/ dimension. The result of all this is shown in tables 1.4 -1.9

OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

In order to assess the overall customer satisfaction among foreign guests in hotels of Kashmir, mean scores were calculated on each element. The element-wise mean scores were then averaged on all dimensions to get overall tourist satisfaction score. It is obvious from the data that customers are satisfied with the hotel services (8.03). The analysis clearly reveals that customers are satisfied with hotel services as is reflected by the respective mean scores on all dimensions of hotel service - Tangibility (8.06), Reliability (7.98), Responsiveness (8.04), Assurance (8.15), and Empathy (7.95) respectively. However, higher degree of satisfaction is reported on Assurance (8.15) followed by Tangibility (8.06) while as Empathy (7.95) followed by reliability (7.98) are reported relatively low.

TABLE 1.4: OVERALL CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN HOTELS

S. No.	ELEMENTS	HOTELS	RANK
1	Tangibility	**8.06**	**2**
2	Reliability	**7.98**	**4**
3	Responsiveness	**8.04**	**3**
4	Assurance	**8.15**	**1**
5	Empathy	**7.95**	**5**
Total		**8.03**	

DIMENSION-WISE ANALYSIS
TANGIBILITY

Data on tangibility dimension shows comparatively high satisfaction score of 8.06, The element wise analysis of the said dimension clearly shows relatively higher mean score on neat and cleanliness' (8.31) followed by 'appropriate location' (8.20) whereas lowest score (7.83) is reported on 'broachers and pamphlets are visually presented' followed by 'high quality meals' (8.02), 'employees neat appearance' (8.03) and 'interior and exterior decoration (8.04).

TABLE 1.5: AVERAGE SCORES OF GUEST SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS IN HOTEL SETTINGS ON TANGIBILITY

Elements of Tangibility	Mean	St. Deviation	Rank
Brochures and pamphlets are visually presented.	7.83	1.45	6
Employee's neat appearance.	8.03	1.17	4
Interior and exterior decoration is quite appealing.	8.04	1.26	3
Appropriate location.	8.20	1.07	2
Neat and clean hotel.	8.31	1.07	1
High quality meals.	8.02	1.46	5
Total	**8.06**		

RELIABILITY

Table 1.6 shows comparatively low satisfaction score (7.98) on reliability dimension which implies that hotels of Kashmir valley needs to improve service dependably and accurately. It's item-wise analysis reveals lowest score on 'providing accurate information' (7.90) followed by 'check in or check out time' (7.92) However, the said dimension shows relatively highest score on 'promised services' (8.07), followed by 'front desk employees verify reservation requests' (8.05).

TABLE 1.6 AVERAGE SCORES OF GUEST SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS IN HOTEL SETTINGS ON RELIABILITY

Elements of Reliability	Mean	St. Deviation	Rank
Promised services.	8.07	0.96	1
Front-desk employee verifies the reservation requests.	8.05	1.37	2
Providing accurate information.	7.90	1.42	4
Check in or check out time is not too long.	7.92	1.40	3
Total	**7.98**		

RESPONSIVENESS

The mean score on responsiveness dimension (8.04) in Table 1.7 brings to light that hotels of valley are providing prompt services to customers. Its element-wise analysis reveals higher levels of customer satisfaction on 'reservation systems' (8.17) followed by 'credible and courteous employees' (8.14). Though, said dimension is relatively low on 'services without any delay' (7.87) followed by 'individual attention to guests' (8.01) and 'willingness to help guests' (8.02).

TABLE 1.7: AVERAGE SCORES OF GUEST SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS IN HOTEL SETTINGS ON RESPONSIVENESS

Elements of Responsiveness	Mean	St. Deviation	Rank
Reservation is easy to use.	8.17	1.06	1
Giving individual attention.	8.01	1.13	4
Willing to help guests.	8.02	1.34	3
Services without any delay.	7.87	1.62	5
Credible and courteous employees.	8.14	1.31	2
Total	**8.04**		

ASSURANCE

Data on table 1.8 shows relatively highest guest satisfaction score on Assurance Dimension (8.15) which indicates that the service personnel of hotels in Kashmir valley are competent and well mannered. It's element-wise analysis reveals higher satisfactory score on 'having time and knowledge to answer guests' questions' (8.29) followed by 'safety and security (8.25). However, least satisfaction score is reported on 'imparting confidence to guests' (8.00) followed by friendly staff (8.06).

TABLE 1.8: AVERAGE SCORES OF GUEST SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS IN HOTEL SETTINGS ON ASSURANCE

Elements of Assurance	Mean	St. Deviation	Rank
Safe and secure hotel	8.25	1.21	2
Imparts confidence to the guests.	8.00	1.32	4
Friendly staff.	8.06	1.17	3
Having time and knowledge to answer guests 'questions.	8.29	1.09	1
Total	**8.15**		

EMPATHY

The mean score on empathy dimension (7.95) reveals satisfaction score on said dimension. It's element-wise analysis reveals higher satisfactory score on 'understanding guests' requirements' (8.17) followed by 'providing services with smile' (8.10). 'However least satisfactory score is associated with 'operating hours' (7.53). The items that fall in between their extremes include 'good communication capability' (7.95) and 'calling guests by name (7.99).

TABLE 1.9: AVERAGE SCORES OF GUEST SATISFACTION PERCEPTIONS IN HOTEL SETTINGS ON EMPATHY

Elements of Empathy	Mean	St. Deviation	Rank
Calling by name.	7.99	1.37	3
Understanding guests' requirements.	8.17	1.36	1
Good communication capability.	7.95	1.35	5
Polite staff and providing services with smile.	8.10	1.10	2
Convenient operating hours	7.53	2.09	6
Guests' best interest at heart.	7.97	1.28	4
Total	**7.95**		

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

A review of literature suggests that quality continues to be an issue to debate and research. Hotels worldwide give importance to service quality as it reflects their standard and create a positive image of their product and service and increases customer satisfaction, which in turn can have a strong effect on sales and competitive position. Our qualitative analysis of the hotels of Kashmir valley shows that the level of customer satisfaction is good both considering the overall service and dimension-wise analysis.

The result of the study brings to light that guest satisfaction in hotels is quite satisfactory (8.03). Dimension-wise analysis reveals that guest satisfaction is relatively high on assurance (8.15). Relatively least guest satisfaction is reported on empathy (7.95) and reliability (7.98) which suggest that management in hotels need to improve said dimensions, in particular, convenient operating hours, good communication capability, providing accurate information, check in or check out time not too long to enhance over-all guest satisfaction. The findings of this study brought to light that the most important factor in predicting hotel quality evaluation was, tangibility, followed by reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Along with the important findings obtained in this study, the modified questionnaire itself is an important contribution. The questionnaire developed through this study is suitable for measuring satisfaction among foreign guests in hotels of Kashmir valley, allowing them to confidently identify the service areas which require action. At the same time, the modified questionnaire could also provide indicators through which managers and planners can plan service policies that would result in satisfied customers. Further, this study was conducted in hotels of district Srinagar of Kashmir valley. To be able to generalize the findings for this specific hospitality segment, a study that would include more hotels in a variety of regional settings would be appropriate.

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