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Service quality perceptions and socio-demographic characteristics of tourists in Kashmir

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Abstract
Tourism is adopted in many developing countries to ensure economic growth. It can reduce the gap between rich and poor nations by promoting the development of the country using natural and cultural attractions. High quality customer service plays an important part in the tourism experience. So, delivering high level of service quality has become an important strategy for tourism destinations, as the inflow of the tourists depends on the quality of service they receive from a destination. Tourism entrepreneurs, in order to provide better service quality, need to understand tourists' expectations, their word of mouth, current knowledge and past experience. Besides, in order to provide personalized service they have to study the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists as they have an impact on perceptions of service quality (Min and Khoon, 2013). Therefore, the study was aimed to investigate the role of demographic factors in the evaluation of service quality. A sample of 1043 tourists (727 domestic and 316 foreign) was surveyed through structured questionnaire and the analysis was done in relation to tourists' socio-demographic characteristics. F-test/t-test was used to test the variation in service quality experienced by various groups based on demographic characteristics. The results of the study demonstrate that service perception of tourists' varies significantly ($p<0.05$) among groups based on age and purpose of visit. However, service quality based on income and occupation varies significantly ($p<0.05$) among foreign tourists only.

Keywords: service quality, tourists', perceptions, demographic characteristics

Introduction
The travel and tourism has become one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. The international tourist arrivals since 2005 have increased from mere 809 million to reach 1186 million tourists in 2015 recording a growth of 4.6% over 2014. Advanced economies recorded a growth of 5% which was moderately higher than the emerging economies (4.1%) in 2015. The total contribution of travel and tourism to the world GDP was to the tune of 9.8% (US$ 7,170.3 billion) in 2015 and is forecasted to rise by 4.0% p.a. to reach to 10.8% of world GDP (US$10,986.5 billion) by 2026. However, its total contribution to global employment was 9.5% (283,578,000 jobs) in 2012 and is projected to grow to 2.5% p.a. (370,204,000) by 2026 (WTTC, 2016) [48].

Tourism is largest economic activity and the main source of foreign exchange earnings in any country. India has been witnessing steady growth in its travel and tourism sector over the years. About 8.89 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2016 compared to 8.027 million in 2015, recording a growth of 10.7%. According to World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism contributed 9.6% (US$220 billion) of the India's GDP in 2016 and supported 40.343 million jobs i.e., 9.3% of its total employment (WTTC, 2016) [48]. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism in India during 2016 were US$ 23,146 million as compared to US$ 21,071 million in 2015, showing a growth of 9.8% (India Tourism Statistics, 2017).

Service quality is one of the critical factors that influence the success of tourism destinations. High quality tourism service attracts large number of tourists and ensures tourist retention. Tourist retention provides higher profit contribution in terms of favourable behavioural intentions/repeat visits and positive word of mouth communication. On the other hand, service failure can have devastating effects on a destination because tourists frequently switch to different places when they experience a service failure (Sparks and Westgate, 2002) [42]. Providing high quality tourism services depends on the destination's ability to exceed the expectations of the visitors. Thus, it becomes essential to study tourists' expectations and perceptions regarding quality of services, the destination is offering. Moreover, no research initiative has been taken so far to explore the service quality perceptions of tourists', vis-a-vis their socio-demographic characteristics in Kashmir. Present study is aimed to fill this research gap by achieving the following objectives:

- To study service quality perceptions of tourists in Kashmir;
- To measure service quality variation across demographic variables; and
- To offer suggestions in order to improve overall service quality in Kashmir.

Literature Review
Service Quality Conceptualization
Although service quality construct has been studied by many researchers for several decades, there is no consensus about the conceptualization of service quality (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) [7]. Most of the suggested definitions focus on meeting customer needs and expectations. Parasuraman, *et al*., (1985) [30] proposed a formal definition of customer service quality as, "the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' service perceptions and expectations". Mackay and Crompton (1990) [20] defined service quality as, "the relationship between what customers desire from a service and what they perceive that they receive". On the other hand, Joewono and Kubota

(2007) [14] stated, "service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations while delivering quality service" – means conforming to customer expectations on a consistent basis. However, Demoranville and Bienstock (2003) [8] identified service quality as a measure to assess service performance, diagnose service problems, manage service delivery, and as a basis for employee and corporate rewards.

According to Vazquez (2001) [45], customers' perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of their before-service expectations with their actual service experience. Madhavaiah, *et al*., (2008) [21] described that service quality is a function of expectation and performance as performance below expectation (obtaining a negative score) leads to a perception of low service quality, while exceeding expectation (obtaining a positive score) leads to a perception of high service quality. In this context, service quality offered by a destination can be better understood by expectations and perceptions of tourists regarding a tourist destination (Kozak, *et al*., 2004) [18].

Service Quality and Socio-demographic Characteristics

In the consumer behaviour literature, personal characteristics are among the major factors determining consumer decision-making and subsequent behaviours. Therefore, it is logically assumed that customers with different individual characteristics have different reasons for behaving the way they do. Demographic variables such as age and education have been found to exert an important influence on the overall perception of service quality (Kim and Lough, 2007) [16]. Also, customers with higher income have selected ambience and comfort level as their determinant selection variables (Kivela, 1997) [17]. Tourists' socio-demographic characteristics are important factors that affect perception of service quality in the tourism industry. Abdullah and Hamdan (2012) [1] identified that age, marital status, gender, ethnicity, occupation and monthly income influenced how domestic and foreign guests in Malaysia selected their hotel accommodation. In addition, Mattila, *et al*., (2003) [27] and Snipes *et al*., (2006) [40] argue that there can be gender differences in customer perceptions about service quality. To confirm this, Tabassum, *et al*., (2012) [43] found that perception about service quality varies significantly among the tourists visited in the hotels of Bangladesh based on the differences in their gender, age, occupation and education. Hagan (2015) [10] also revealed considerable differences in the perceptions of service quality in hotels vis-a-vis guests' socio-demographic characteristics. Moreover, the authors commented that only few researchers have focused on the influence demographic characteristics on customer perceptions of the dimensions of service quality. Shergill and Sun (2004) [38] also recommended that more research should pay attention to the influences of different demographic characteristics on tourism service quality. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been framed:

Hypothesis 1: Tourism service quality varies significantly across demographic variable.

Service Quality Measurement

Service quality is quite an elusive concept that is difficult to define and measure. However, a solid foundation for research work in the area is the SERVQUAL instrument developed by Parasuraman, Zeithamal and Berry in 1985 [30] (Hagan 2015) [10]. Parasuraman, *et al*., (1988) [32] developed SERVQUAL instrument consisting of five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and 22 items to measure customers' expectations and perceptions and service quality is considered as the difference between perceptions and expectations. Parasuraman, *et al*., (1991b) [31] proposed that the SERVQUAL instrument is developed for use in various service settings and provides a basic skeleton that can be adapted to fit the specific attributes of a particular organisation. In addition, it is applicable across different empirical contexts and various countries and cultural backgrounds. The SERVQUAL model has been implemented to measure and assess service quality across different service, industrial, commercial, and non-profit settings including: hospitals and health-care sector (Ahuja, *et al*., 2011) [2], banking (Lassar, *et al*., 2000; Chang, 2003; Siddiqi, 2010) [19, 6, 39], telecommunications industry (Wang and Lo, 2002; Madhavaiah, *et al*., 2008) [21, 47], information systems (Van-Dyke, *et al*., 1997; Jiang, *et al*., 2002) [44, 13], health spas (Snoj and Mumel, 2002; Markovic, *et al*., 2004) [41, 22, 25], higher education (Russel 2005; Markovic, 2006) [36, 23], hotels (Markovic, 2003, 2004; Juwaheer, 2004; Wang, *et al*., 2007; Raspor, 2009; *et al*Markovic and Raspor, 2010) [22, 25, 15, 46, 35, 24], public-transport (Sanchez, *et al*., 2007) [37], restaurants (Andaleeb and Conway 2006; Namkung and Jang, 2008) [3, 29], travel agencies (Martinez and Martinez, 2008) [26] and tourism (Gonzalez, *et al*., 2007; Bhat, 2012; Bhat and Qadir, 2013b) [9, 4, 5]. The researchers concluded that SERVQUAL is a remarkable diagnostic tool for the assessment of service quality.

Methodology

Research Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of tourists visiting various tourism destinations of Kashmir Valley. The study is based on both primary as well as secondary data. Secondary data has been collected through published books and articles. In order to collect primary data, a survey was conducted. The respondents were selected on the basis of a non-probability convenience sampling technique. Since, survey was designed to uncover tourists' expectations and perceptions regarding tourism services of Kashmir, the obvious primary sampling unit is tourist. In order to make sample representative of the population, due care has been taken to ensure that respondents represent different socio-economic groups classified on the basis of age, gender, income, occupation, education, nationality, purpose of visit, length of stay and number of visits. In total, one thousand-seventy (1070) questionnaires were distributed among the respondents at different tourist attractions like: Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Sinthan-top, Daksum and Mughal Gardens. After collecting responses, only one thousand-forty three (1043) filled in questionnaires (727 from domestic tourists and 316 from foreign tourists) were found usable for the purpose of analysis. However, the usable responses were above the minimum sample size of 345 as suggested by Hair, *et al*., (2006) [11].

Measures

For measuring tourists perceptions regarding service quality, a modified SERVQUAL scale proposed by Parasuraman *et al*., (1988) [32] has been used. The items chosen for the

questionnaire were modified and rephrased in terms of both wording and contextual applications to suit the present research purposes. On the basis of the literature review, an initial pool of 36 items was generated. After the addition, elimination and paraphrasing of several questions, the final questionnaire was prepared containing thirty two (32) questions. Level of service quality was measured on a ten point scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 10 = strongly agree) and all questions were phrased positively as suggested by Parasuraman *et al*., 1994 [33]. The data was then put into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 19.0 and analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests.

In order to get clear factorial design, 3 items with factor loadings of less than 0.50 were dropped and loadings equal to or above 0.50 were retained (Hair, *et al*., 2006) [11]. The dropped questions were: comfortable recreational facilities; professional, polite and competent service personnel; and, provision of information about local events and entertainment. The factor analysis got completed in 8 iterations identifying 5 factors (Tangibility, Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness and Empathy) on service quality with 29 items and 67.94% Explained Variance.

The suitability of factor analysis was validated with the help of Barlett's Test of Sphericity that revealed a Chi-square at 12158.612 ($p<0.000$ at 1% level) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO=0.948). The Cronbach's Alpha test was used to determine the internal consistency. The coefficients of the test were: Tangibility-0.78, Assurance-0.79, Reliability-0.83, Responsiveness-0.78 and Empathy-0.76. Thus, the scale is found acceptable and reliable

Profile of Respondents

The result in Table 1 shows that most of the sampled tourists (63.1 percent) were males against 36.9% females and considerable number of respondents (33.9 percent) belonged to the age group of 30-40 years. The present study constitutes a sample where majority of the respondents (61.2 percent) are graduates. Respondents with monthly income of Rs 20,001-40,000 were highest in number (34.4 percent). However, majority of the respondents in the sample belonged to service class (54.6 percent), yet respondents who stayed for 1-6 days in Kashmir were highest in number (43.7 percent). Most of the participants were leisure/holiday tourists (66.5 percent), while a major proportion of sample constitutes Indians (70.0 percent) and majority of the tourists were first time visitors (61.6 percent).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics		No. of Respondents	Percentage
Nationality	Indian	727	70.0
	Foreign	316	30.0
	Total	1043	100
Gender	Male	658	63.1
	Female	385	36.9
	Total	1043	100
Age in Years	Up to 30 years	262	25.1
	31-40 years	354	33.9
	41-50 years	271	26.0
	Above 51 Years	156	15.0
	Total	1043	100
Level of Education	Up to Secondary Level	164	15.7
	Graduation	638	61.2
	Post-Graduation	241	23.1
	Total	1043	100
Level of Income	Up to Rs 20,000 p.m.	235	22.5
	21,000-40,000 p.m.	359	34.4
	41,000-60,000 p.m.	288	27.6
	Above 61,000 p.m.	161	15.4
	Total	1043	100
Occupation	Service	569	54.6
	Business	344	33.0
	Professional	130	12.5
	Total	1043	100
Length of Stay	1-6 days	456	43.7
	7-12 days	358	34.3
	13-18 days	165	15.8
	More than 19 days	64	6.1
	Total	1043	100
Purpose of Visit	Business	69	6.6
	Pilgrimage	137	13.1
	Sport	70	6.7
	Leisure/holiday	694	66.5
	Visiting friends/relatives	73	7.0
	Total	1043	100
No. of Visits	1st Visit	643	61.6
	2nd Visit	279	26.7
	3rd Visit	92	8.8
	4th Visit	29	2.8
	Total	1043	100

Data Analysis and Discussion

In order to determine the service quality perceptions of tourists, mean SERVQUAL scores averaged on all dimensions of service quality were computed. It is evident from data that Kashmir Valley is providing superior service quality (0.43) to tourists. Positive service quality scores clearly reveals higher levels of service quality on all dimensions of tourism services – Tangibility (0.31), Assurance (0.56), Reliability (0.40), Responsiveness (0.53), and Empathy (0.37) respectively.

Table 2: Seroquel Scores Averaged on all Dimensions

Dimensions of Tourism Services	Mean Score		Service Quality
	Expectation	Perception	
Tangibility	7.19	7.50	0.31
Assurance	7.12	7.68	0.56
Reliability	7.11	7.51	0.40
Responsiveness	7.20	7.73	0.53
Empathy	7.03	7.40	0.37
Overall Service Quality (Averaged on all dimensions)	7.13	7.56	0.43

Also, the study is aimed to measure service quality variation across demographic variables. To achieve this objective, respondents were divided into different groups based on demographic variables like: nationality, age, gender, income, occupation, education, purpose of visit, length of stay and number of visits. Mean scores of expectations and perceptions were calculated for each group and for both domestic and foreign tourists separately. Accordingly, SERVQUAL scores were computed for different groups and for each category of tourists. F-test/t-test has also been performed to test the hypothesis. The results of such an analysis are presented in Tables 3 to 9.

Service Quality Perceptions and Nationality

The results in Table 3 shows tourists perceptions regarding service quality experienced by domestic (0.43) and foreign tourists (0.44). The data clearly indicate that there is an insignificant difference ($p>0.05$) in tourism service quality as perceived by domestic and foreign tourists meaning thereby that both domestic and foreign tourists have experienced same level of quality service in Kashmir. Dimension-wise analysis also reveals insignificant difference ($p>0.05$) in service quality perceptions of domestic and foreign tourists on all dimensions.

Table 3: Comparative Service Quality on Nationality

Dimensions of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
Tangibility	Domestic	7.23	7.53	0.30	0.98	0.29	0.76
	Foreign	7.16	7.48	0.32	0.93		
Assurance	Domestic	7.11	7.68	0.57	0.91	0.40	0.68
	Foreign	7.13	7.67	0.54	0.92		
Reliability	Domestic	7.10	7.48	0.38	0.93	0.46	0.46
	Foreign	7.12	7.54	0.42	0.91		
Responsiveness	Domestic	7.21	7.73	0.52	0.96	0.33	0.73
	Foreign	7.19	7.73	0.54	0.90		
Empathy	Domestic	7.03	7.40	0.37	0.97	0.13	0.88
	Foreign	7.03	7.40	0.37	0.99		
Overall Service Quality (Averaged on all dimensions)	Domestic	7.13	7.56	0.43	0.83	0.24	0.80
	Foreign	7.13	7.57	0.44	0.83		

*Insignificant ($p>0.05$) at 5% level

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

Service Quality Variation and Age

With a view to measure service quality variation, if any, of different age groups of sampled tourists, respondents were categorized into four groups: up to 30 years, 30-40 years, 40-50 years, and above 50 years. SERVQUAL scores were computed for each group and for each category of tourists separately which are presented in Table 4. From the analysis of data in Table 4, it is evident that domestic tourists reported comparatively higher SERVQUAL scores across all dimensions in the first and the last age group (ranked, 1st). However, as far as the 2nd and 3rd age group is concerned, foreign tourists reported comparatively higher SERVQUAL scores across all dimensions (ranked, 1st). Further, the data shows significant difference ($p<0.05$) in tourism services experienced by different age groups of domestic and foreign respondents.

Table 4: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per different Age Groups

Service Quality Dimensions	Age in Years								'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	Up to 30 years		30-40 years		40- 50 years		Above 50 years					
	Domestic Tourists N=170	Foreign Tourists N=87	Domestic Tourists N=254	Foreign Tourists N=94	Domestic Tourists N=188	Foreign Tourists N=91	Domestic Tourists N=115	Foreign Tourists N=44	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.211 (5)	0.134 (5)	0.294 (4)	0.412 (3)	0.479 (5)	0.557 (5)	0.145 (5)	-0.008 (5)	4.011	4.462	0.008*	0.004*
Assurance	0.541 (1)	0.455 (1)	0.506 (2)	0.612 (2)	0.747 (1)	0.701 (2)	0.466 (1)	0.259 (2)				

Reliability	0.362 (3)	0.272 (4)	0.314 (3)	0.406 (4)	0.571 (3)	0.701 (3)	0.228 (4)	0.192 (3)				
Responsiveness	0.495 (2)	0.409 (2)	0.507 (1)	0.619 (1)	0.664 (2)	0.727 (1)	0.375 (2)	0.281 (1)				
Empathy	0.355 (4)	0.376 (3)	0.282 (5)	0.319 (5)	0.539 (4)	0.601 (4)	0.300 (3)	0.045 (4)				
Overall	0.393	0.329	0.381	0.473	0.601	0.658	0.303	0.153				
Rank	(1)	(2)	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(1)	(2)				

**Significant (p<0.05) at 5 % Level*

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perceptions and Gender

In order to study service quality variation by gender, SERVQUAL scores of males and females for each category of respondents were calculated (Table 5). It is evident from Table 5 that males experienced relatively better service quality. Also, the table clearly reveals that male foreign tourists received comparatively better service quality than male domestic tourists. However, in case of females, domestic tourists reported comparatively superior service quality than foreign tourists. Further, the data shows insignificant variation (p>0.05) in service quality between male and female respondents.

Table 5: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Gender

Service Quality Dimensions	Gender				't' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	Male		Female					
	Domestic Tourists N=453	Foreign Tourists N=203	Domestic Tourists N=274	Foreign Tourists N=113	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.316 (5)	0.385 (5)	0.271 (4)	0.198 (5)	1.042	1.164	0.298	0.245
Assurance	0.576 (1)	0.595 (1)	0.560 (1)	0.456 (2)				
Reliability	0.385 (4)	0.429 (3)	0.367 (3)	0.415 (3)				
Responsiveness	0.555 (2)	0.585 (2)	0.472 (2)	0.474 (1)				
Empathy	0.433 (3)	0.421 (4)	0.262 (5)	0.300 (4)				
Overall	0.453	0.483	0.387	0.368				
Rank	(2)	(1)	(1)	(2)				

*Significant (p<0.05) at 5 % Level

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perceptions and Education

With a view to study service quality variation of respondents, if any, at different levels of education, respondents were grouped into three education levels: up to Secondary level; Graduation; and, Post-Graduation. Mean expectations and perceptions of respondents at different levels of education were calculated for both domestic and foreign respondents separately and their SERVQUAL scores were accordingly computed which are presented in Table 6. The overall analysis of Table 6 reveals that foreign respondents having education up to Secondary and Graduation level reported relatively better services in comparison to domestic respondents. Post graduate domestic tourists, however, reported relatively better service quality. Further, insignificant variation (p>0.05) in quality of tourism services has been observed among the various education groups of two categories of respondents.

Table 6: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Level of Education

Service Quality Dimensions	Level of Education						'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	Up to Secondary Level		Graduation		Post-Graduation					
	Domestic Tourists N=126	Foreign Tourists N=37	Domestic Tourists N=439	Foreign Tourists N=196	Domestic Tourists N=162	Foreign Tourists N=83	Domestic Tourists N= 727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N= 727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.206 (4)	0.359 (5)	0.326` (5)	0.314 (5)	0.299 (4)	0.310 (3)	2.059	0.957	0.128	0.385
Assurance	0.427 (2)	0.643 (2)	0.593 (1)	0.561 (2)	0.621 (1)	0.465 (1)				
Reliability	0.187 (5)	0.474 (3)	0.435 (4)	0.468 (3)	0.372 (3)	0.299 (4)				
Responsiveness	0.441 (1)	0.648 (1)	0.539 (2)	0.568 (1)	0.549 (2)	0.445 (2)				
Empathy	0.232 (3)	0.452 (4)	0.448 (3)	0.457 (4)	0.259 (5)	0.156 (5)				
Overall	0.299	0.515	0.468	0.474	0.420	0.335				
Rank	(2)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(1)	(2)				

*Significant (p<0.05) at 5 % Level

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perceptions and Income

In order to measure service quality variation by different income groups, respondents were categorized into four income groups, viz., group 1st – income up to Rs 20,000 p.m., group 2nd – income Rs 20,001-40,000 p.m., group 3rd – Rs 40,001-60,000 p.m., and group 4th – where income exceeds Rs 60,000 per month. The comparative SERVQUAL scores are reported in Table 7. From the analysis of data, it is evident that SERVQUAL scores of foreign tourists are comparatively high for the 1st and 2nd income groups whereas they are comparatively low in the 3rd and 4th income groups respectively. Also, insignificant variation ($p>0.05$) in service quality among different income groups of domestic tourists and significant variation ($p<0.05$) in service quality among different income groups of foreign tourists has been observed.

Table 7: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Level of Income

Service Quality Dimensions	Level of Income								'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	Up to 20,000 p.m.		20,001-40,000 p.m.		40,001- 60,000 p.m.		Above 60,000 p.m.					
	Domestic Tourists N=176	Foreign Tourists N=63	Domestic Tourists N=276	Foreign Tourists N=85	Domestic Tourists N=210	Foreign Tourists N=79	Domestic Tourists N=65	Foreign Tourists N=89	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.171 (5)	0.491 (5)	0.327 (5)	0.384 (5)	0.375 (5)	0.254 (4)	0.279 (4)	0.191 (5)	1.676	3.180	0.171	0.024*
Assurance	0.476 (1)	0.841 (1)	0.586 (1)	0.684 (1)	0.637 (1)	0.455 (1)	0.544 (1)	0.283 (3)				
Reliability	0.297 (3)	0.545 (3)	0.406 (4)	0.571 (3)	0.435 (3)	0.287 (3)	0.294 (3)	0.319 (2)				
Responsiveness	0.405 (2)	0.723 (2)	0.574 (2)	0.684 (2)	0.580 (2)	0.432 (2)	0.452 (2)	0.386 (1)				
Empathy	0.252 (4)	0.507 (4)	0.421 (3)	0.538 (4)	0.431 (4)	0.250 (5)	0.261 (5)	0.247 (4)				
Overall	0.321	0.621	0.463	0.572	0.491	0.335	0.366	0.286				
Rank	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**				

**Significant ($p<0.05$) at 5 % Level*

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perceptions and Occupation

To study service quality variation by occupation, respondents were categorized into service, business and professional groups. The SERVQUAL scores of the three groups for each category of tourists are presented in Table 8. The Table clearly reveals that foreign tourists received comparatively better service quality in service group while as vice-versa has been observed for business and professional groups. Further, insignificant variation ($p>0.05$) in service quality for domestic tourists and significant variation ($p<0.05$) for foreign tourists has been observed.

Table 8: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Occupation

Service Quality Dimensions	Occupation						'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	Service		Business		Professional					
	Domestic Tourists N=403	Foreign Tourists N=165	Domestic Tourists N=262	Foreign Tourists N=78	Domestic Tourists N=62	Foreign Tourists N=73	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.307 (5)	0.485 (5)	0.313 (5)	0.231 (5)	0.185 (4)	0.036 (5)	0.753	5.654	0.471	0.004*
Assurance	0.590 (1)	0.647 (2)	0.567 (1)	0.615 (1)	0.454 (2)	0.241 (2)				
Reliability	0.378 (4)	0.524 (4)	0.399 (3)	0. 402 (3)	0.290 (3)	0.221 (3)				
Responsiveness	0.569 (2)	0.666 (1)	0.468 (2)	0.520 (2)	0.467 (1)	0.298 (1)				
Empathy	0.406 (3)	0.540 (3)	0.359 (4)	0.266 (4)	0.165 (5)	0.130 (4)				
Overall	0.450	0.572	0.422	0.407	0.312	0.185				
Rank	(2)	(1)	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)				

**Significant ($p<0.05$) at 5 % Level*

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perceptions and Purpose of Visit

With a view to measure tourism service quality variation, if any, respondents visiting Kashmir valley for various purposes, were categorized into five groups, viz., group 1st – business, group 2nd – pilgrimage, group 3rd – sport, group 4th – leisure/holiday and group 5th – tourists visiting for friends/relatives. SERVQUAL scores were calculated for each group and for each category separately and are presented in Table 9. From the analysis of data in Table 9, it is evident that foreign tourists reported comparatively higher SERVQUAL scores in the first and the 5th group. However, as far as the 2nd, 3rd and 4th groups are concerned, higher SERVQUAL scores have been reported by domestic tourists. Significant variations ($p<0.05$) in quality of tourism services have been observed for the two categories of respondents, under reference.

Table 9: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Visiting Purpose

Service Quality Dimensions	Purpose of Visit										'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	Business		Pilgrimage		Sport		Leisure/Holiday		Visiting friends/relatives					
	Domestic Tourists N=60	Foreign Tourists N=17	Domestic Tourists N=114	Foreign Tourists N=32	Domestic Tourists N=48	Foreign Tourists N=21	Domestic Tourists N=447	Foreign Tourists N=236	Domestic Tourists N=58	Foreign Tourists N=10	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	-0.020 (5)	0.560 (4)	0.151 (3)	0.130 (3)	0.187 (4)	- 0.041 (3)	0.389 (5)	0.349 (5)	0.317 (5)	0.538 (3)	3.523	3.236	0.007*	0.013*
Assurance	0.420 (1)	0.988 (1)	0.426 (1)	0.300 (2)	0.625 (1)	0.219 (1)	0.608 (1)	0.579 (1)	0.675 (2)	0.460 (4)				
Reliability	0.208 (4)	0.764 (3)	0.131 (4)	0.054 (5)	0.151 (5)	-0.245 (5)	0.478 (3)	0. 509 (3)	0.459 (4)	0.429 (5)				
Responsiveness	0.306 (2)	0.776 (2)	0.421 (2)	0.425 (1)	0.329 (2)	0.009 (2)	0.562 (2)	0.577 (2)	0.824 (1)	0.920 (1)				
Empathy	0.225 (3)	0.529 (5)	0.127 (5)	0.078 (4)	0.328 (3)	-0.107 (4)	0.424 (4)	0.441 (4)	0.599 (3)	0.600 (2)				
Overall	0.227	0.723	0.251	0.195	0.324	-0.033	0.492	0.491	0.575	0.589				
Rank	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(2)**	**(1)**				

*Significant (p<0.05) at 5 % Level

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perceptions and Length of Stay

In order to study service quality variation by length of stay, respondents were categorized into four groups, viz., group 1st – tourists staying for 1-6 days in Kashmir, group 2nd – 7-12 days, group 3rd – 13-18 days and group 4th – more than 18 days. The comparative SERVQUAL scores are presented in Table 10. From the analysis of data, it is clear that SERVQUAL scores of domestic tourists are comparatively high for the 1st and 4th group whereas they are comparatively low in the 2nd and 3rd group of stay. Both categories of tourists reported insignificant variation (p>0.05) in tourism service quality.

Table 10: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Length of Stay

Service Quality Dimensions	Length of Stay								'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	1-6 days		7-12 days		13-18 days		More than18 days					
	Domestic Tourists N=323	Foreign Tourists N=141	Domestic Tourists N=235	Foreign Tourists N=114	Domestic Tourists N=127	Foreign Tourists N=37	Domestic Tourists N=42	Foreign Tourists N=24	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.253 (5)	0.178 (5)	0.302 (5)	0.369 (5)	0.326 (5)	0.623 (3)	0.555 (5)	0.438 (4)	1.494	2.328	0.215	0.075
Assurance	0.536 (1)	0.429 (1)	0.532 (1)	0.621 (1)	0.663 (1)	0.681 (2)	0.761 (2)	0.658 (3)				
Reliability	0.399 (3)	0.312 (3)	0.308 (4)	0.478 (4)	0.382 (4)	0.474 (5)	0.601 (3)	0.750 (1)				
Responsiveness	0.516 (2)	0.411 (2)	0.444 (2)	0.591 (2)	0.598 (2)	0.783 (1)	0.809 (1)	0.750 (2)				
Empathy	0.352 (4)	0.221 (4)	0.333 (3)	0.504 (3)	0.407 (3)	0.554 (4)	0.577 (4)	0.427 (5)				
Overall	0.411	0.310	0.384	0.512	0.475	0.622	0.660	0.604				
Rank	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(1)**	**(2)**				

**Significant (p<0.05) at 5 % Level*

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Service Quality Perception and Frequency of Visits

With a view to study service quality variation, if any, by frequency of visits, respondents were divided into four groups, viz., group 1st – tourists who visited Kashmir for the 1st time, group 2nd – who visited 2nd time, group 3rd – who visited 3rd time and group 4th – who were 4th time visitors. SERVQUAL scores were computed for each group and for both categories of tourists which are presented in Table 11. From the analysis of data in Table 11, it is clear that foreign tourists in the 1st and 2nd group reported comparatively higher SERVQUAL scores while as in the 3rd and 4th group, domestic tourists reported relatively higher SERVQUAL scores. Both categories of tourists showed insignificant variation (p>0.05) in tourism service quality based on frequency of visits.

The overall analysis of data related to tourism service quality brings to light that perception about service quality does not vary significantly (p>0.05) among the tourists in terms of nationality, gender, education, length of stay and frequency of visits but varies significantly (p<0.05) in terms of age and purpose of visit. However, perception about service quality based on income and occupation varies significantly (p<0.05) among foreign tourists only. Therefore, the hypothesis is partly accepted.

Table 11: Comparative SERVQUAL Scores as per Frequency of Visits

Service Quality Dimensions	No. of Visits								'F' Value (Overall)		'p' value (Overall)	
	1st Visit		2nd Visit		3rd Visit		4th Visit					
	Domestic Tourists N=430	Foreign Tourists N=203	Domestic Tourists N=195	Foreign Tourists N=82	Domestic Tourists N=77	Foreign Tourists N=23	Domestic Tourists N=25	Foreign Tourists N=8	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316	Domestic Tourists N=727	Foreign Tourists N=316
Tangibility	0.296 (5)	0.325 (5)	0.405 (5)	0.443 (5)	0.094 (5)	-0.086 (5)	0.159 (5)	0.046 (3)	2.047	1.635	0.106	0.181
Assurance	0.547 (1)	0.536 (1)	0.697 (1)	0.704 (1)	0.464 (2)	0.234 (3)	0.296 (2)	0.025 (5)				
Reliability	0.340 (3)	0.406 (3)	0.517 (3)	0.539 (3)	0.279 (4)	0.242 (2)	0.252 (3)	0.213 (2)				
Responsiveness	0.465 (2)	0.516 (2)	0.643 (2)	0.639 (2)	0.516 (1)	0.556 (1)	0.640 (1)	0.300 (1)				
Empathy	0.320 (4)	0.394 (4)	0.487 (4)	0.475 (4)	0.376 (3)	0.010 (4)	0.250 (4)	0.031 (4)				
Overall	0.394	0.435	0.550	0.560	0.345	0.190	0.319	0.123				
Rank	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(1)**	**(2)**				

*Significant ($p<0.05$) at 5 % Level

Note: Figures within the parenthesis are ranks (dimension wise and overall).

Conclusions

The study employed modified SERVQUAL instrument for determining tourists' perceptions regarding tourism services and identified five factors – Tangibility, Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness and Empathy with 29 statements. The overall SERVQUAL (perception-expectation) score of domestic and foreign tourists (0.43 and 0.44) clearly indicates higher levels of tourism service quality. The results have confirmed that out of five tourism service dimensions, assurance and responsiveness dimensions are the significant contributors of overall tourism service quality. The findings reveal that perceptions about service quality varies significantly ($p<0.05$) among the tourists visited Kashmir Valley based on the differences in their age and purpose of visit. Also, significant variation ($p<0.05$) based on income and occupation differences has been found among foreign tourists only. However, insignificant variation ($p>0.05$) in service quality perceptions among the tourists based on nationality, gender, education, length of stay and frequency of visits has been observed. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is partially accepted (Table 12).

Table 12: Hypothesis Testing: Service Quality Variation across Demographic Variables

Hypothesis	Statement	Category of tourists	'F' Value/'t' Value	'p'-Value*	Status
H:1a	Service quality varies significantly across all age groups.	Domestic	4.01	0.00*	Accepted
		Foreign	4.46	0.00*	Accepted
H:1b	Service quality varies significantly between gender groups.	Domestic	1.04	0.29	Rejected
		Foreign	1.16	0.24	Rejected
H:1c	Service quality varies significantly across all educational groups.	Domestic	2.05	0.12	Rejected
		Foreign	0.95	0.38	Rejected
H:1d	Service quality varies significantly across all income groups.	Domestic	1.67	0.17	Rejected
		Foreign	3.18	0.02*	Accepted
H:1e	Service quality varies significantly across all occupational groups.	Domestic	0.75	0.47	Rejected
		Foreign	5.65	0.00*	Accepted
H:1f	Service quality varies significantly across groups based on visiting purposes.	Domestic	3.52	0.00*	Accepted
		Foreign	3.23	0.01*	Accepted
H:1g	Service quality varies significantly across groups based on staying period.	Domestic	1.49	0.21	Rejected
		Foreign	2.32	0.07	Rejected
H: 1h	Service quality varies significantly across groups based on frequency of visits.	Domestic	2.04	0.10	Rejected
		Foreign	1.63	0.18	Rejected

*Significant ($p<0.05$) at 5 % Level

Managerial Implications

The results of the study provide some implications for tourism managers. Overall, the results suggest that managers in the tourism industry need to take the views of certain demographic segments into account if they want to maximize perceived service quality. Socio-demographic characteristics can provide tourism managers with a means of determining market segments that are feasible in terms of achieving greater market penetration. Moreover, to remain competitive, organizations must be able to develop and refine their services to meet the needs and preferences of different consumer segments (Pennington-Gray *et al*., 2003) [34]. They should ensure that tourists receive highly interactive and customized service, individual attention and proper care. In addition to this, they should ensure that the quality of their service experience and the physical service environment is of the highest standard. Lastly, the study suggests that socio-demographic characteristics can be used as an important base for tourism market segmentation so as to provide customized service to tourists based market segment differences and improve overall perceptions of tourism service quality.

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