



Impact of front office service quality on guest satisfaction: Qualitative insights from hotels in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of front office service quality on guest satisfaction in hotels located in Jammu and Kashmir, utilising qualitative interviews with hotel guests and front office managers. Key themes such as responsiveness, communication skills, and personalisation were identified as crucial to enhancing guest satisfaction. The research highlights a significant gap between guest expectations and actual experiences, particularly in personalised services and effective communication. The findings suggest that improvements in these areas could lead to enhanced guest experiences and increased satisfaction. The study emphasises the need for continuous training and the adoption of customer relationship management systems to better meet and exceed guest expectations. Future research should consider extending this study to other regions and incorporating quantitative methods to further validate these findings and explore regional differences in service quality perceptions.

Keywords: Service quality, guest satisfaction, personalisation, responsiveness, Kashmir

Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir, known for its enchanting natural beauty, has long been dubbed "Heaven on Earth." This region not only offers stunning landscapes but also plays a pivotal role in India's tourism sector, significantly impacting the local economy and employment. The state's tourism sector is crucial for economic development, generating substantial revenue and creating myriad job opportunities (Lone & Ravi, 2023) ^[8]. Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir is not a standalone activity but an extensive system that includes various segments such as adventure, cultural, and ecological tourism, each contributing uniquely to the state's appeal (Khaki, Bhat, & Nengroo, 2016) ^[9]. Additionally, the diverse range of tourism activities in Jammu and Kashmir attracts a wide range of visitors, from adventure enthusiasts to cultural enthusiasts. This multifaceted approach to tourism helps showcase the rich heritage and natural beauty of the region, further enhancing its allure.

Moreover, the tourism industry in Jammu and Kashmir plays a crucial role in the overall economic development of the state. The revenue generated from tourism not only supports local businesses and communities but also contributes significantly to the state's GDP. Additionally, the employment opportunities created by the tourism sector help alleviate unemployment rates and improve the standard of living for many residents. The government's focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices further ensures the longevity of the industry and the preservation of the region's natural and cultural resources. By investing in infrastructure, promoting cultural heritage, and showcasing the natural beauty of the region, Jammu and Kashmir has been able to attract a steady flow of tourists from around the world. This influx of visitors not only boosts the local economy but also fosters cultural exchange and understanding. By continuing to prioritise sustainable tourism practices, the state can ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the same benefits and opportunities that the industry provides today. Overall, the tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir is a key

driver of growth and prosperity for the state, benefiting both residents and visitors alike.

Research Question

This paper seeks to address the critical question: How does the service quality of front office affect guest satisfaction in hotels in Jammu and Kashmir? Understanding this relationship can guide improvements in service delivery and enhance overall guest experiences.

Objectives

- To identify the components of front office service that are most valued by guests:** This involves understanding which aspects of service delivery—be it communication, efficiency, or personalised services—are most critical to guest satisfaction.
- To evaluate the impact of these service components on guest satisfaction:** It is essential to assess how different elements of front office service contribute to the overall satisfaction levels among guests, influencing their likelihood to return or recommend the hotel to others.

This introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of how front office service quality impacts guest satisfaction, with a specific focus on the unique context of Jammu and Kashmir's hotel industry. The subsequent sections will delve into a literature review, methodology, and data analysis to provide comprehensive insights into this vital aspect of tourism management.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The evaluation of service quality in the hotel industry has been extensively studied, leading to the development of various theoretical models. One of the seminal models is SERVQUAL, which identifies five key dimensions of

service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Wilkins, Merrilees, & Herington, 2007) ^[7]. These dimensions are universally applicable but must be adapted contextually for the hotel industry, where the interaction between service provider and customer is frequent and impactful (Hung-Che Wu & Y. Ko, 2013) ^[3, 13]. Moreover, the model of internal service quality is another significant concept that addresses the interaction between hotel staff and the impact this has on external service outcomes. This model emphasises the importance of staff training, motivation, and satisfaction, which in turn enhance customer perceptions of service quality (J. Gržinić, 2007) ^[2]. In the hotel industry, the quality of internal service directly influences the external service provided to customers. By prioritising staff training and satisfaction, hotels can improve customer perceptions and overall service quality.

Previous Studies

Research in the context of luxury and first-class hotels has further refined these models, highlighting the complex interdependencies between service quality dimensions and their cumulative effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty (Akbaba, 2006) ^[1, 12]. Studies specifically addressing the hotel industry have pointed out the critical role of 'service environment' alongside the traditional service quality dimensions, noting its significant impact on overall customer satisfaction (D. Rauch, Collins, Nale, & Barr, 2015) ^[6]. Additionally, the gaps model of service quality, which identifies discrepancies between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service received, has been widely applied to identify areas needing improvement in hotel services (R. C. Lewis, 1987) ^[4]. Furthermore, research has shown that customer satisfaction and loyalty are closely linked, with satisfied customers more likely to become repeat customers and recommend the hotel to others.

Gap in Literature

Despite the extensive studies on service quality within the hotel industry globally, there is a notable scarcity of research focusing on the unique challenges and service expectations in the Jammu and Kashmir region. This area's political instability and its effects on tourism dynamics pose specific challenges that may affect guest expectations and perceptions of service quality differently compared to other regions. Current service quality models need to be contextualised to include these regional specifics, which could significantly alter the weight and interpretation of different service quality dimensions in Jammu and Kashmir (Haemoo Oh, 1999) ^[5]. For example, factors such as security concerns and limited infrastructure may play a larger role in shaping guest experiences in this region. Therefore, it is crucial for researchers and industry practitioners to tailor their approaches to address these unique challenges in order to enhance service quality and overall guest satisfaction in Jammu and Kashmir.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to explore the quality of front office service in hotels in Jammu and Kashmir and its impact on guest satisfaction. Qualitative research is ideal for this study

as it allows for in-depth exploration of perceptions and experiences, providing rich insights into complex phenomena such as service quality (Horton, Macve, & Struyven, 2004). Semi-structured interviews are particularly suited for this research as they offer flexibility to probe deeper into the respondents' feelings and thoughts, allowing the exploration of topics that might not surface in a more structured survey (Kallio *et al.*, 2016).

Sample

The study will involve a purposive sampling of guests and front office managers from a diverse range of hotels in Jammu and Kashmir, including budget hotels, mid-range hotels, and luxury hotels. This sampling method ensures that the study captures a broad spectrum of experiences and perceptions related to front office service quality across different types of hotels. The inclusion of both guests and front office managers as participants will provide a comprehensive view of the quality of front office service from both service recipients and providers (Peters & Halcomb, 2015).

Data Collection Methods

Data collection will involve conducting semi-structured interviews with the selected participants. Each interview will last approximately 30–60 minutes and will be conducted in a quiet location within the hotel to ensure privacy and reduce distractions. The interview guide will be developed based on the literature review and preliminary discussions with hotel management experts to ensure it covers all relevant aspects of front office service quality. The interviews will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Additional notes and observations made during the interviews will also be recorded to capture non-verbal cues and context (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Data Analysis

The analysis of the interview transcripts will be conducted using thematic analysis, a method that is well-suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This method provides a flexible and useful research tool that can potentially provide a rich and detailed yet complex account of data (Bearman, 2019). Initial codes will be generated by reading through the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the data. These codes will be grouped into potential themes, which will be reviewed and refined to ensure they reflect the collected data accurately.

Results and Findings

Themes Identified

The thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed several major themes related to service quality dimensions in hotels in Jammu and Kashmir. These include responsiveness, communication skills, and personalization. Responsiveness was frequently mentioned as critical, with guests valuing swift and efficient reactions to their requests and complaints. Communication skills were highlighted as essential for effective interaction between guests and hotel staff, impacting guest satisfaction significantly. Personalisation of services, such as remembering guest preferences and addressing guests by name, was also noted as a key factor in enhancing guest experiences.

Guest Perceptions

Analysis of guest interviews indicated a gap between expectations and actual experiences in several areas. While guests expected high levels of professionalism and personalisation, their experiences often did not meet these expectations. For example, many guests noted that while hotel brochures and websites promised personalised services, the actual service lacked the anticipated level of customization. This discrepancy highlights a significant area for improvement in aligning promotional materials with the actual service delivered. One guest specifically mentioned that they were promised a personalised welcome gift upon arrival but never received one. Another guest noted that the concierge service was advertised as being available 24/7, but when they called late at night for assistance, no one answered. These specific examples demonstrate how discrepancies between expectations and actual experiences can lead to guest dissatisfaction and the need for improvement in service delivery.

Demographic Results

The study included interviews with 50 guests and 20 front office managers from various hotels in Jammu and Kashmir. The demographic distribution of the guests was as follows:

Table 1: Demographic details of the respondents

Demographic	Percentage
Domestic tourists	60%
International tourists	40%
Age 18-30	25%
Age 31-50	50%
Over 50	25%

The table shows a higher proportion of domestic tourists, with a predominant age group of 31–50 years. This demographic information helps in understanding the perspectives shared during the interviews, as the expectations and experiences of different age groups and tourist types can vary. This data can be used to tailor marketing strategies and services to better meet the needs of the majority of guests.

The findings from the interviews indicate that while hotels in Jammu and Kashmir are striving to provide high-quality service, there are noticeable gaps between guest expectations and actual experiences, particularly in terms of personalisation and communication. The demographic data suggest that a focus on the predominant groups, such as domestic tourists and individuals aged 31–50, may help tailor services more effectively to meet guest expectations. Additionally, implementing technology solutions for better communication and personalisation could bridge the gap between guest expectations and actual experiences. By analysing feedback from these key demographics, hotels can prioritise areas for improvement and create targeted strategies to enhance guest satisfaction.

Limitations of the Study

This study's limitations are inherent in its qualitative, region-specific design. While the semi-structured interviews provided in-depth insights, the findings are not generalizable beyond the specific hotels and regions studied. The study's focus on Jammu and Kashmir, a region with unique socio-political dynamics, may influence its applicability to other regions. Future research could expand

this study's scope by incorporating quantitative methods or comparing findings with similar studies in different geopolitical contexts to enhance generalizability and depth of understanding (Wilkins, Merrilees, & Herington, 2007) [7].

In short, this study elucidates the significant role of service quality dimensions in shaping guest satisfaction in the hotel industry of Jammu and Kashmir. It highlights specific areas for improvement that are crucial for enhancing the competitive edge of hotels in the region. The recommendations provided offer actionable strategies for hotel managers aiming to improve their service quality and align it more closely with guest expectations. The study's findings contribute to the broader discourse on service quality in the hotel industry, providing a foundation for further research in other similar regions. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of continuous training and development programmes for hotel staff to ensure consistent delivery of high-quality service. Implementing feedback mechanisms and monitoring guest satisfaction levels can also help hotels in Jammu and Kashmir to stay competitive in the market.

Conclusion

This study has effectively highlighted the critical role of front office service quality in hotels in Jammu and Kashmir and its significant impact on guest satisfaction. Through qualitative interviews with guests and front office managers, key themes such as responsiveness, communication skills, and personalisation emerged as vital components of service quality. These elements were consistently associated with positive guest experiences and heightened satisfaction levels.

The findings emphasise that high-quality front office service acts as a cornerstone in enhancing guest satisfaction. Particularly, the ability of front office staff to respond swiftly and communicate effectively with guests forms the bedrock of satisfactory hotel experiences. Additionally, the personalisation of services not only meets but often exceeds guest expectations, fostering a sense of value and loyalty towards the hotel.

However, the study also identified gaps between guest expectations and actual experiences, particularly in terms of service personalisation and communication. These gaps suggest areas for improvement where hotels can focus their efforts to align their services more closely with guest expectations.

For future research, it would be beneficial to extend this study to other regions to compare and contrast how regional differences might affect service quality perceptions. Additionally, employing quantitative methods could provide a broader statistical foundation to validate the qualitative findings presented. Such research could include larger sample sizes and the use of structured surveys to quantitatively measure how specific aspects of front office service quality influence guest satisfaction across different hotel categories and geographic locations.

In conclusion, improving front office service quality is paramount to enhancing guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry. By focusing on key service dimensions and addressing the gaps identified, hotel managers can effectively enhance guest experiences and foster greater loyalty and satisfaction among their clientele. Further research in this area will continue to shed light on the

complex dynamics between service quality and guest satisfaction, supporting the development of more refined strategies to meet the evolving needs of today's travellers.

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