

Service Quality and Tourist Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry: A Study of Government Tourism Hotels in Himachal PradeshVikrant Chauhan¹, Dr. Shiv Raj², Rakesh Patyal³^{1&3}Research Scholar-School of Hotel Management, Airlines and Tourism-CT -University-Ludhiana -Punjab²Associate Professor- School of Hotel Management, Airlines and Tourism-CT -University-Ludhiana -Punjab**Abstract**

Himachal Pradesh is one of the most attractive hill states of India in north-western part of the Himalayas. The state is famous for its beautiful views, snow-capped mountain peaks, dense forests, rivers, lakes, apple orchards and its heritage. Himachal Pradesh is traditionally known as a summer destination, but over the years has diversified its tourism product in order to minimise the seasonality of tourism and to encourage tourism throughout the year. Tourism is an important part of the state's economy and the accommodation facilities are one of the important factors affecting the visitors. The government tourism hotels play a pivotal role in tourism development and promotion in the region and are a source of providing lodging and hospitality services to tourists in H.P. Revenue production in the tourism sector has become one of the major factors to consider in determining the satisfaction level and overall tourist experience. Quality services meet the needs of the tourists and increase visitors' satisfaction, leading to repeat trips and word-of-mouth. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction of the tourism hotels of the Government of Himachal Pradesh. It addresses the different aspects of service quality such as accommodation facilities, behaviour of staff, responsiveness, reliability, cleanliness and food services and how these affect the tourists' satisfaction level. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of ways to improve the quality of services and increase customer satisfaction levels in the tourism sector so as to boost the tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh, through government run tourism hotels.

Keywords: HPTDC Hotels, Service Attributes, Guest Satisfaction.**Introduction**

Tourism is a growing industry all over the world; its impact on economic development, job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and culture exchange are significant (World Tourism Organization, 2023). The hospitality sector is a vital part of the tourism sector since the service and accommodation experience directly relates to the perception and satisfaction the tourists have from the tourism sector (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2017). Kotler et al. (2017) indicated that hotels are not just service providers for accommodation and food but are also experience makers, which will impact customer attitudes and future behavioural intentions. Service quality is an important factor in customer satisfaction and organizational success in today's cutthroat competitive service market and in the hospitality industry (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2018). Located in the north-western part of the Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh is one of the most beautiful and popular tourist destinations in India, with its scenic landscapes, snow-covered mountains, forests, rivers, valleys, and rich cultural heritage (Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department, 2024). Every year the state gets millions of domestic and international tourists who come to enjoy leisure vacations, adventure sports, pilgrimage and eco-tourism (Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department, 2024). Tourism is now an important source of income for the state and it is also significant for the employment generation and regional development etc. (Sharma & Kumar, 2019). Himachals was traditionally known for its summer tourism. To minimise seasonality and encourage a year-round visit, the state tourism authorities have launched diversified tourism products like eco-tourism, adventure tourism, heritage tourism, winter tourism and rural tourism (Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation, 2024). The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department (2024) states that these measures are designed to spread out the tourist season and traffic across various areas, and to improve the tourist experience.

The role of accommodation facilities in tourism infrastructure is one of the most important, as it plays an important role in influencing visitors' experiences and the image of the destination (Cooper et al., 2008). Government Tourism Hotels (GTH) in Himachal Pradesh are a vital component of the tourist accommodation and hospitality framework in the state, offering facilities to the tourists at all the places in the state. The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) operates various government tourism hotels in major tourist destinations, providing lodging facilities for tourists to make their stay comfortable and encourage tourism activities (HPTDC, 2024). These hotels not only support the tourism sector's accommodation need but they also help develop and promote the tourism destination. Due to its effect on customer satisfaction and the organization's performance, service quality has received a great deal of attention in the hospitality research literature (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), service quality is the gap between the customer's expected service and actual service. They developed a SERVQUAL model that integrates five dimensions of service quality that are widely recognized as measuring the service quality in the hospitality industry, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). For hotel services, tourists assess the quality of service according to the quality and cleanliness of the rooms, the behaviour of staff, their responsiveness, food services and the overall hospitality (Marković & Raspor, 2010).

Community satisfaction is also a key factor in hospitality research and a customer's judgement of the service experience following consumption (Oliver, 1980). From Oliver's (1980) view, satisfaction is a function of the difference between customer expectations and their evaluation of the service provided. Customer satisfaction has a positive impact on customer loyalty, intentions to return, and word-of-mouth recommendations (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Eager tourists have a higher tendency to come back and to share their hospitality service experiences with other people, boosting the reputation and competitiveness of hotels.

Thus, the service quality and tourist satisfaction relationship is gaining greater relevance in the hospitality sector. In addition to quality services, government tourism hotels are expected to contribute to the development of tourism and keep a positive image of the destinations (HPTDC, 2024). Thus, the present study is designed with the objective of examining the effect of various dimensions of service quality on the tourist satisfaction and also the perception of areas for improving the service quality for government tourism hotel in the hospitality industry in the region of Himachal Pradesh.

Literature Review

There is a growing interest in research on service quality and tourist satisfaction, as it plays an important role in ensuring customer loyalty, creating a positive image of the destination, and improving organizational performance in the hospitality and tourism sector. Past research focused on the notion that service quality is an important factor influencing customer satisfaction, especially in hotel and tourism services where most of the service experiences are intangible and depend on customer-service provider interaction. The SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) brought into the limelight five important dimensions of service quality: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Parasuraman et al. (1988) have cited that the gap between customer's expectation and perception of service quality is the basis for measuring their quality. They are still one of widely-used frameworks for assessing service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector.

Following research furthered the knowledge about service quality in the hospitality context. Both Cronin and Taylor (1992) have stated that actual service performance, rather than expectation gaps, can affect the satisfaction of customers and offered the SERVPERF model. They concluded that customer perceptions of service performance was a significant factor in influencing their satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Likewise, Oliver (1980) introduced the expectancy-disconfirmation theory which stated that customer satisfaction depends upon the differences between their expectations and their experiences. Positive disconfirmation happens when the service performance is above what customers had anticipated, thus leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

In the hospitality field, researchers largely paid attention to the effect of hotel services attributes on tourists' perceptions and satisfaction. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) concluded that customer satisfaction and image are important factors in building up customer loyalty in hotels. Their study found that the quality of the rooms, the actions of the employees, and the overall service experiences have a significant impact on guests' willingness to return and recommend the services of the hotel. Similarly, Choi and Chu (2001) studied the factors affecting guests' satisfaction in the hotel and found that the quality of staff, room quality, value for money and food quality have an impact on the overall satisfaction level.

Studies in the tourism and hotel industry also show that service quality matters a great deal for retaining customers and gaining competitive advantage. Marković and Raspor (2010) have found that there are several dimensions in the evaluation of the service quality of the hotel, such as physical facilities, the reaction of employees, cleanliness, and reliability of services. They showed that there was a strong relationship between the perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in the study of the hotel sector. Likewise, Raza et al. (2012) examined the impact of service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction and revisit intention in the hospitality sector and concluded that they had positive impacts.

Recent studies have turned focus to the tourist experience and customer-centred service orientation. Rather (2021) states that the customers now look to the personalized service, quality of staff interaction and emotional experience of the tourists, besides the basic facilities offered by the accommodation service. It stressed that service quality has gone beyond the physical characteristic and has come to encompass experiential and relational characteristics which add to the

satisfaction and loyalty of the tourist. In addition, Sharma and Sharma (2022) highlighted that the efficacy of the service offered, digital service integration, cleanliness standards and employee behaviour are crucial factors that affect tourists' perceptions in modern hospitality services.

In the Indian tourism sector, research has been conducted on service quality and satisfaction in public tourism facilities and government hospitality establishments. Tourism hotels owned by the government also have problems in infrastructure modernization, the responsiveness of staff and service consistency, observed Singh and Gupta (2021). These, however, still have a significant contribution to make in tourism development, particularly in areas where there is considerable tourism potential. From the perspective of Himachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) runs government tourism hotels which play a major role in the promotion of tourism and in providing accommodation facilities in the major tourist destinations of the state.

Although there is strong relationship between service quality and the satisfaction level of the customer, but not much research is available on Government Tourism Hotel in HP. The existing literature tends to focus on the private hotel context, luxury hospitality services, and international tourism contexts. Thus, there is a research gap of how the dimensions of service quality relate to the satisfaction of tourists in government-owned hotels. In this context, the present study tries to fill the gap by investigating the level of service quality and tourist satisfaction at the government tourism hotels of Himachal Pradesh and what are the factors which can enhance the service quality and tourist satisfaction in the government tourism hotel industry.

Research Gap

Previous research has shown that service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality sector (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Raza et al., 2012). A number of studies have been conducted on the dimensions of service and their effects on the service experience of the customers in the hotel and touristic business (Choi & Chu, 2001; Marković & Raspor, 2010). In addition, the role of service quality in hospitality organizations in achieving competitive advantage and customer satisfaction is also highlighted (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Recent research also shows that there is an increasing demand among tourists for tailored services, quick reply and better service experiences outside of the services provided by the hotel (Rather, 2021). Although significant research has been conducted in the field of hospitality and tourism services, the majority of the previous studies have focused on the private sector, luxury hotels and international tourism scenarios (Sharma & Sharma, 2022). There are relatively few studies which have focused on government-operated tourism hotels, especially in the context of tourism in India. The government tourism hotels are not operated in the same way as the private hospitality organisations because they have other goals along with profitability, such as tourism promotion and regional development (Singh & Gupta, 2021). Moreover, few studies have studied the aspects of service quality and tourist satisfaction of government Tourism hotels specifically in the state of Himachal Pradesh. HPTDC's government tourism hotels play a vital part in the tourism infrastructure and promotion of the state of Himachal Pradesh, which is one of the important tourist center of India (HPTDC, 2024). But, empirical research on the perception of service quality and the satisfaction of visitors to these establishments are still limited in these hotels. For this reason, there is a research gap on the understanding of the relationship of service quality dimensions with tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels across HP. The present study tries to fill this gap by examining the perceptions of tourists in relation to service quality and assessment of their relationship with the tourists' satisfaction in government tourism hotels.

Research objective

- ❖ To examine the service quality dimensions in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.
- ❖ To analyze the impact of service quality on tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

Hypotheses of the Study

H01 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

H11 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is a significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

Results and Findings

The study was conducted on a sample of 150 tourists staying in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh. The findings are presented according to the two objectives of the study.

Objective 1: To examine the service quality dimensions in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

Table 1: Mean Scores of Service Quality Dimensions

Service Quality Dimension	Mean Score	Interpretation
Tangibility	4.12	High
Reliability	3.95	High
Responsiveness	3.68	Moderate
Assurance	4.03	High
Empathy	3.59	Moderate
Overall Service Quality	3.87	High

Sources: Researcher Own Computation

The findings showed that the overall satisfaction of government tourism hotels by the tourists was positive with the overall mean score of 3.87. In addition to the dimensions, Tangibility (Mean = 4.12) got the highest score, which means that the respondents were satisfied by the hotel infrastructure, room facilities, room cleanliness, and physical appearance. Assurance (4.03) and Reliability (3.95) were also rated well, indicating that the behavior of the hotel staff and the reliability of their services had a positive impact on tourists' perceptions.

However, the comparable relatively lower scores were for Responsiveness (Mean = 3.68) and Empathy (Mean = 3.59), suggesting that service responsiveness and personalized attention were expected to be faster from the tourists.

Objective 2: To analyze the impact of service quality on tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

Table 2: Correlation Analysis Between Service Quality and Tourist Satisfaction

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Value (p)	Result
Service Quality and Tourist Satisfaction	0.742	0	Significant Positive Relationship

Sources: Researcher Own Computation

The correlation analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction with a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.742$. The significance value ($p = 0.000$) is lower than the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the variables. This finding suggests that improvements in service quality lead to increased tourist satisfaction levels in government tourism hotels.

Hypothesis Testing

H01: There is no significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

H11: There is a significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Result

Hypothesis	p-value	Decision	Result
H01: No significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction	0	Rejected	Significant relationship exists
H11: Significant relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction	0	Accepted	Hypothesis supported

Sources: Researcher Own Computation

Since the significance value ($p = 0.000$) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H01) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H11) is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that service quality significantly influences tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh. The findings indicate that higher service quality leads to greater satisfaction among tourists.

Discussion

The study results suggest that service quality has an important impact on tourists' satisfaction at the government tourism hotels in HP. The result of the analysis of the dimensions of service quality showed that the tourists had positive perceptions about tangibility and reliability dimensions and positive perceptions about the assurance dimension. The higher the ratings are for tangibility, the more satisfied the respondents were with the infrastructure of the hotels, their cleanliness,

physical facilities, and accommodation arrangements. The results agree with the studies conducted by Choi and Chu (2001) who determined that the physical facilities and room quality were significant factors of customer satisfaction in the hotel services.

The study also revealed that reliability and assurance positively affected tourists' experiences. With regard to the quality of the service and how the employees conduct themselves in the hotel, the respondents believed that the hotel's workers were reliable and trustworthy; which is a significant factor in improving their satisfaction with the hotel's performance. In the context of the hospitality services, the same were confirmed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Marković and Raspor (2010) who pointed out the need for reliable and assured service provision within the hospitality sector.

The mean scores of the responsiveness and empathy dimensions on the other hand were comparatively lower. This means that visitors were seeking faster response rates, more customer engagement and more customized service when they visited the site. The results indicate that the overall level of service was acceptable, but there is room for improvement in terms of service responsiveness and customer engagement. This aligns with Rather's (2021) research, which identified a growing trend of tourists seeking personalized experiences and personalized services in today's market.

The correlation analysis showed a positive relationship between the tourist satisfaction and service quality with a correlation value of 0.742 and a significant value of $p < 0.05$. The result confirms that the hypothesis of the positive relationship between the level of service quality and tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotels is correct. The results are in line with the previous study done by Raza et al. (2012) and Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) that concluded that an increase in service quality translated into higher level of customer satisfaction and customer's loyalty intentions.

Conclusion

The quality of the service and the satisfaction of the tourists with the government tourism hotels in the state of Himachal Pradesh was analyzed in the present study. The results show that the service quality dimensions have significant impact on the satisfaction of tourists and overall hospitality experience. The four service dimensions were tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness, and empathy, and the results indicated that tangibility, reliability, and assurance were of critical importance in improving the tourists' perceptions; whereas responsiveness and empathy were of relatively low importance.

The study results were able to conclude that the service quality is an important factor for tourist satisfaction in government tourism hotel. The results from the hypothesis testing showed that there is significant relationship between the service quality and the level of tourists' satisfaction, which shows that service quality improvement can improve tourists' experiences and improve tourists' satisfaction level. The tourism hotels run by the government should continuously work on enhancing their service standards and customer-oriented practices to meet their competitiveness and to create positive experiences in the destination of Himachal Pradesh.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- ❖ Government tourism hotels should improve responsiveness by ensuring prompt and efficient service delivery.
- ❖ Hotel staff should receive regular training programs to improve communication skills and customer interaction.
- ❖ Greater emphasis should be placed on personalized attention and customer care practices.
- ❖ Hotel management should regularly collect customer feedback and address service-related issues promptly.
- ❖ Infrastructure and physical facilities should be upgraded periodically to maintain service quality standards.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to selected government tourism hotels in Himachal Pradesh and may not represent all hospitality establishments. The sample size was restricted to 150 respondents, which may affect the generalization of findings. The study focused only on service quality and tourist satisfaction and did not include other variables such as customer loyalty, destination image, or behavioral intentions. Future studies may consider larger samples and additional variables for broader analysis.

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