
**PERCEIVED FOOD AND BEVERAGE SERVICE QUALITY IN
RELATION TO GUEST EXPECTATIONS IN HPTDC HOTELS,
HIMACHAL PRADESH**

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ABSTRACT

The current research paper looks at the linkage between guest expectation and the perceived food and beverage service quality in **Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation** (HPTDC) hotels. The customer expectations and actual perceptions of service performance are usually used to measure service quality in hospitality (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The research design was quantitative, and primary data was gathered among 100 customers of the hotel using a structured questionnaire based on SERVQUAL and addressing five dimensions, namely, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Data analysis was performed with the help of descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and Pearson correlation analysis. The results show that there is a large disparity between the expectations of the guests and the perceived quality of the services on all dimensions, which means that the perceived service performance is below the expectations. The expectation-perception gaps and overall service quality also were significantly and positively related. The research adds to the literature on hospitality services quality as it gives an empirical evidence on a hill tourism destination location and offers a practical implication of enhancing quality service delivery in food and beverage services in hotels within the public sector.

KEYWORDS: Guest expectations; Food and beverage service; Service quality; SERVQUAL; HPTDC; Himachal Pradesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality of service has become an important determinant of customer satisfaction and competitiveness of an organization within the hospitality sector (Zeithaml et al., 2009).

Hotels and especially their food and beverage sections are high-service environments where the perceptions of the guests are formed by both tangible (e.g., the way the food is presented) and intangible (e.g., how the staff treats the customers and how responsive they are) features (Kotler et al., 2017). Food and beverage service quality is highly relevant in the repeat visitations and the image of the hotel (Padlee et al., 2019). The public sector hotels run by HPTDC are put under greater pressure to be as competitive as the service quality offered by the private hospitality industry as tourism in Himachal Pradesh grows continuously.

The development of guest expectations is built on the basis of the past experience, marketing communications, and the word-of-mouth recommendations (Oliver, 1997). The expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm reveals that customer satisfaction is achieved when perceived performance is expected to be lower than it actually is and dissatisfaction is achieved when the perceived performance is expected to be higher than that (Oliver, 1980). Hospitality-related expectations form a guideline by which guests make judgments over service experiences, especially where food and beverage operations are concerned, whereby service workers and clients interact more frequently (Brady and Cronin, 2001).

Although service quality has been increasingly attracting attention in tourism destinations, empirical studies have not given much concern on the relationship between guest expectation and perceived food and beverage service quality in the public sectors hotels in hill area like Himachal Pradesh. The earlier research has majorly focused on privately owned hotels and city hospitality establishments (Abdullah and Othman, 2019). As such, the proposed research will fill this research gap by conducting an empirical test on the relationship between guest expectations and the perceived food and beverage service quality in the HPTDC hotels.

2. Review of Literature

The conceptualization of service quality is the difference between the customer expectations and the perceptions of service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The SERVQUAL model shows five dimensions of service quality, namely, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. This model has found extensive use in hospitality studies to evaluate the quality of services in a hotel and restaurant (Pimonsompong, 2007). Tangibles are physical facilities, equipment and look of the personnel, reliability is the capacity to deliver the promised service with dependability, responsiveness is the willingness to assist the customers, assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of the employees and empathy is the personalized treatment of the customers.

The expectations of guests are of great centrality in defining service quality perceptions. Lewis and Booms (1983) described service quality as the extent to which presented service fulfills customer expectations. Empirical research shows that high expectations tend to increase the size of the service quality difference when the performance falls short of expectations (Brady, and Cronin, 2001). The study by Padlee et al. (2019) showed that perceived service quality in the hotel food and beverage restaurants depends heavily on food quality, staff responsiveness, and service environment.

Multiple researches have investigated the connection that exists between the quality of services and customer satisfaction in hospitality. Abdullah and Othman (2019) discovered that each of the dimensions of SERVQUAL plays a significant role in the perceived quality of service and satisfaction in hotel restaurants. In the same way, Gronroos (2007) implied that customer assessments are a combination of technical quality (what is delivered) and functional quality (how it is delivered). But little has been given to the hospitality organizations within the public sector especially on the hill tourism destinations. The research/study expands the available body of literature, through exploration of expectation-perception relationship within the HPTDC hotels.

3. Research Objective and Hypothesis

The primary objective of this study is:

To examine the relationship between guest expectations and perceived food and beverage service quality in HPTDC hotels of Himachal Pradesh.

Based on the literature, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: There is a significant relationship between guest expectations and perceived food and beverage service quality in HPTDC hotels.

4. Research Methodology

The quantitative research design was followed to discuss the correlation between guest expectations and perceived food and beverage service standards. The survey was carried out in those HPTDC hotels that are situated in the key tourist attraction sites within Himachal Pradesh including Shimla, Manali, and Dharamshala. These destinations were selected because they receive the highest number of tourists and they play an important role in the functioning of the HPTDC network.

A total of 100 guests who had ordered food and beverage services during their stay in a hotel were taken as the primary data sample. The respondents were sampled systematically and

randomly. The structured questionnaire (based on the SERVQUAL tool by Parasuraman et al., 1988) was used to collect data. The questionnaire was designed to cover two parts, one to determine the expectations of guests and the other one to determine perceived service quality in five dimensions. Everything was measured in terms of a five-point Likert scale with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree.

Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument with all dimensions having a value over 0.70, a value that was above the acceptable limit of 0.70, demonstrating internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). Data analysis was done with the help of SPSS software. Respondent profiles and mean scores were summarized with the help of descriptive statistics. Paired samples t-tests were used to compare the difference between the expectation and perceptions scores. The correlation between the guest expectations and perceived service quality was tested by Pearson correlation analysis. The level of statistical significance was determined at 5 per cent ($p < 0.05$).

5. RESULT

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Expectation and Perception Scores. (N = 100)

Dimension	Expectation Mean (E)	SD	Perception Mean (P)	SD	Gap (P-E)
Tangibles	4.42	0.51	3.97	0.56	-0.45
Reliability	4.35	0.48	4.04	0.52	-0.31
Responsiveness	4.38	0.5	3.99	0.55	-0.39
Assurance	4.3	0.46	4.02	0.5	-0.28
Empathy	4.33	0.49	3.98	0.54	-0.35
Overall	4.36	—	4	—	-0.36

Table :1- SPSS OUTPUT

Table 1 shows the comparisons of the expectation and perception of customers in the five dimensions of SERVQUAL and the service quality gaps (P-E). All the results show that the expectation scores are always greater than the perception scores in all the dimensions which leads to negative values of gaps. This implies that the services offered are not up to the expectation of the customers. Tangibles had the greatest negative gap (-0.45) which means that the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel are well below the expectations. It is then succeeded by Responsiveness (-0.39) and Empathy (-0.35), indicating that the customers experience malfunctions in the processes of immediate service and personal treatment. The gaps of Reliability (-0.31) and Assurance (-0.28) are relatively smaller and indicate the relatively high level of performance in the reliable service provision and employee competence, but the expectations remain yet to be fully met. The gap score (-

0.36) also indicates that the shortage on the level of service quality is also moderate, and it is necessary to implement specific changes, especially related to tangible factors and responsiveness, to increase the overall level of customer satisfaction.

Table 2. Paired Sample t-test between Expectations and Perceptions. (N = 100)

Dimension	Mean Difference (E-P)	t-value	p-value	Result
Tangibles	0.45	6.87	0	Significant
Reliability	0.31	4.92	0.001	Significant
Responsiveness	0.39	6.14	0	Significant
Assurance	0.28	4.35	0.002	Significant
Empathy	0.35	5.76	0	Significant
Overall	0.36	6.98	0	Significant

Table: 2_SPSS OUTPUT-(p < 0.05 = significant)

The findings of the paired sample t-test show that there was a statistically significant difference between the expected and perceived service quality of the guests along all the five dimensions of service ($p < 0.05$). This establishes that the expectations of the guests are much higher than what they actually perceive the performance of the food and beverage service. The biggest t-value is recorded in the case of tangibles ($t = 6.87$), which means that physical features of food presentation, the dining area, and the cleanliness are the most dissatisfying. Therefore, the level of service quality discrepancies is empirically determined within HPTDC hotel food and beverage processes.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation between Expectations and Perceptions. (N = 100)

Variables	R-value	p-value	Strength of Relationship
Expectations & Perceptions (Overall)	0.68	0	Strong positive
Tangibles (E & P)	0.64	0	Strong
Reliability (E & P)	0.61	0	Strong
Responsiveness (E & P)	0.66	0	Strong
Assurance (E & P)	0.59	0.001	Moderate
Empathy (E & P)	0.63	0	Strong

Table: 3-SPSS OUTPUT

Correlation analysis shows that there is strong and positive relationship between the expectations and the perceived quality of food and beverage service ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that the higher the expectations of the guests, the more critical service quality appraisals get and hence increasing service quality disparities. Responsiveness ($r = 0.66$) and tangibles ($r = 0.64$) exhibit the highest levels of the significance of timely service and physical service cues influencing the way guests are viewed. The findings indicate the

research hypothesis, which is that there exists a significant correlation between guest expectation and perceived food and beverage service quality in the HPTDC hotels.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: There is a significant relationship between guest expectations and perceived food and beverage service quality in HPTDC hotels.

Since correlation results are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), **H1 is accepted.**

6. DISCUSSION

The results of the research reveal clearly the presence of an apparent gap concerning the expectation of the guests and the perceived quality of food and beverage service in the HPTDC hotels. The bad gap scores in all SERVQUAL dimensions confirm that performance of service is below the expectations of the guests. Tangibles was the dimension that registered the biggest gap, and issues of concern include physical facilities, food presentation, cleanliness, and general dining environment were noted. This finding confirms the results of Padlee et al. (2019) who focused on the role of service environment and food presentation in developing restaurant service quality perceptions.

The responsiveness and empathy had also a significant gap, which means that the guests want to see faster service delivery, immediate attention, and personal attention. This is in line with the argument by Brady and Cronin (2001) who suggested that functional quality (delivery of the service) has a strong bearing on the overall service assessment. Even though reliability and assurance have shown a comparatively smaller gap, the t-test scores were significant to approve that even these areas need improvement.

Moreover, the findings of the Pearson correlation indicate that there is a very strong and positive correlation between the expectations and the perceptions. This implies that the higher the expectations of the guest, the more critical their assessment of service quality becomes and hence the service quality gap is enhanced once the performance falls below expectations. These observations are in line with the expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980) which lays that dissatisfaction is experienced when the perceived performance falls below expectations. So, the work empirically proves the SERVQUAL model of the public sector hill tourism hotels.

7. CONCLUSION

The current paper has explored the association between guest expectations and perceived food and beverage service quality in HPTDC hotels of Himachal Pradesh. The findings

indicate that the gap between expectations and perceptions on all the five dimensions of SERVQUAL is considerable, which means that the existing service delivery level fails to meet the expectations of guests completely. The key areas that needed to be improved were tangibles and responsiveness.

The correlation analysis also confirms that the two variables are statistically significant and show that there is a strong relationship between expectations and perceived service quality by the guests, which encourages the acceptance of the prepared hypothesis (H1). The paper finds that concepts to increase the quality of food and beverage service delivery, especially in terms of physical facilities, timeliness, and personalized service, are critical in improving the level of guest satisfaction and competitiveness in hill tourism destination sites.

Scope for Future Research

The future research can expand the sample size and involve a comparison between the public and the private hotels in Himachal Pradesh. It can also be conducted through longitudinal studies to evaluate the changes in the service quality perceptions with time. Moreover, qualitative data that can be further used in the investigation of the guest expectations and service experience includes interviews and focus group discussions. A new study can also be done on the influence of the quality of service on customer loyalty and the intention to visit again in the hill tourism destinations.

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