

Assessing Service Quality: A Cross-Sector Analysis of Hotel and Tourism Service Providers.

Abstract

Background: In today's competitive hospitality industry, service quality has become a decisive factor influencing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term business sustainability. Measuring service quality across different service environments provides useful insights for enhancing customer experiences and organizational performance.

Objective: This study explores and compares perceived service quality in two major sectors of the hospitality industry—hotels and tourism services—using the SERVQUAL model. It aims to identify sector-specific strengths and weaknesses, analyse performance gaps, and propose strategies for service improvement.

Methodology: A mixed-method research design was adopted in **Locale:** Patna, Bodhgaya Bihar, India. Primary data were collected from 90 respondents, equally distributed among hotel users (n=30), tourism service users (n=30), and individuals with experience in both sectors (n=30). A structured questionnaire based on the SERVQUAL framework (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) was rated on a five-point Likert scale, supplemented with semi-structured interviews for qualitative insights. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were employed to evaluate mean differences across groups.

Results: The analysis revealed that hotels outperformed tourism services in tangibility (Mean = 4.21) and assurance (Mean = 4.08), attributed to professional staff, modern facilities, and standardized procedures. Conversely, tourism services scored higher in empathy (Mean = 4.32) and reliability (Mean = 4.15), reflecting personalized attention, cultural sensitivity, and dependable arrangements. No statistically significant differences were found in responsiveness scores ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that both sectors demonstrated similar levels of communication and problem-solving effectiveness.

Conclusion: The findings highlight that while both sectors strive for service excellence, their customer service priorities and delivery mechanisms differ. Hotels should focus on enhancing empathy and personalization, whereas tourism services can benefit from further investment in physical infrastructure and standardized quality assurance. Continuous customer feedback mechanisms and targeted staff training are essential for sustaining high service quality.

Keywords: Service Quality, SERVQUAL, Hotels, Tourism Services, Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry, ANOVA

Introduction

The hospitality industry, encompassing both hotel accommodations and tourism services, constitutes a vital component of the global economy. It contributes significantly to revenue generation, job creation, and the promotion of cultural exchange worldwide (Wang & Davidson, 2010). With globalization and rising consumer mobility, the demand for superior

39 service experiences has intensified, compelling hospitality businesses to prioritize customer
40 satisfaction as a core strategy for competitiveness and long-term sustainability (Kandampully,
41 Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). In this dynamic environment, service quality has emerged as a
42 critical differentiator, directly influencing customer loyalty, brand reputation, and profitability
43 (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Oh, 1999).

44 Service quality in the hospitality sector is inherently complex due to the intangible,
45 heterogeneous, and perishable nature of services (Grönroos, 1984; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016).
46 Unlike physical products, services cannot be stored, standardized, or evaluated before
47 consumption. Customers rely on their perceptions—shaped by employee behavior, physical
48 ambiance, responsiveness, and personalization—to judge service quality (Zeithaml, Bitner, &
49 Gremler, 2013). Thus, understanding and measuring service quality becomes imperative for
50 businesses striving to deliver memorable customer experiences.

51 Within the hospitality domain, hotels and tourism service providers perform overlapping yet
52 distinct functions. Hotels primarily emphasize tangible aspects such as cleanliness, comfort,
53 and modern amenities, reinforced by standardized service protocols (Marković & Raspor,
54 2010). In contrast, tourism services focus on delivering personalized and experiential value
55 through guided tours, cultural immersion, and flexible itineraries, where empathy and
56 adaptability are key drivers of satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). These
57 inherent differences raise the need for comparative assessment of service quality across
58 sectors.

59 To address this, the SERVQUAL model, developed by (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry
60 (1988), has become a widely used diagnostic tool for evaluating service quality. The model
61 identifies five core dimensions—tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and
62 empathy—allowing researchers and practitioners to pinpoint sector-specific strengths and
63 weaknesses (Tsang & Qu, 2000; Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Bojica, 2007). Several
64 studies highlight that hotels often excel in tangibility and assurance due to their
65 infrastructure-driven operations, while tourism services outperform in empathy and reliability
66 because of their relational and personalized nature (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Ryu, Han, &
67 Kim, 2008).

68 Given evolving customer expectations, rapid technological adoption, and intensifying
69 competition, understanding these sectoral differences has become increasingly crucial for
70 both academia and practice (Zeithaml et al., 2013). This study contributes to the literature by
71 conducting a cross-sector analysis of service quality in hotels and tourism services through
72 the SERVQUAL framework. By identifying strengths, weaknesses, and performance gaps, it
73 aims to provide actionable insights for service improvement, thereby supporting managers,
74 policymakers, and service designers in enhancing customer experiences and sustaining
75 competitive advantage.

76 **Understanding the SERVQUAL Model**

77 The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), provides a framework for
78 assessing service quality based on the gap between customer expectations and perceptions.
79 The model outlines five critical dimensions that contribute to service quality:

- 80 1. **Tangibility:** Physical facilities, appearance of personnel, and material elements.
- 81 2. **Reliability:** The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- 82 3. **Responsiveness:** Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- 83 4. **Assurance:** Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust.
- 84 5. **Empathy:** The degree of caring and personalized attention the business provides.

85 These dimensions allow researchers and managers to pinpoint specific areas for improvement
86 and build customer loyalty.

87 **Application of SERVQUAL in Hotels and Tourism Services**

88 The SERVQUAL model has been extensively applied in hospitality and tourism research to
89 evaluate customer perceptions of service performance across its five dimensions—tangibility,
90 reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988;
91 Marković & Raspor, 2010). Its strength lies in offering both diagnostic and comparative
92 insights, making it highly suitable for analyzing hotels and tourism services (Wang &
93 Davidson, 2010).

94 **Tangibility**

95 In hotel services, tangibility refers to the quality of physical facilities, décor, cleanliness, and
96 staff appearance. Guests frequently associate service quality with visible cues such as modern
97 amenities and well-maintained spaces, which strongly shape first impressions (Zeithaml,
98 Bitner, & Gremler, 2013). Research shows that hotels consistently score higher in tangibility
99 due to their infrastructure-based operations and emphasis on aesthetics (Marković & Raspor,
100 2010). In contrast, tourism services often face limitations in standardizing tangibility because
101 many activities occur in variable outdoor or cultural settings. However, investments in
102 branded equipment, comfortable transportation, and visually appealing communication
103 materials can enhance perceived tangibility (Chen & Chen, 2010).

104 **Reliability**

105 Reliability reflects the ability to perform services dependably and accurately. Studies indicate
106 that tourism services often outperform hotels in this dimension, as customers value adherence
107 to schedules, punctuality, and consistency in delivering promised experiences (Yoon & Uysal,
108 2005; Baker & Crompton, 2000). For example, tourists particularly appreciate accurate
109 itineraries and reliable logistics. Hotels, while generally dependable, sometimes face issues
110 such as delayed check-ins or booking discrepancies, which can negatively influence customer
111 trust (Oh, 1999).

112 **Responsiveness**

113 Responsiveness, or the willingness to assist customers promptly, is a vital determinant of
114 satisfaction in both sectors. Hotels typically demonstrate strong responsiveness through quick
115 room service and rapid handling of guest complaints (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Similarly,
116 tourism operators display responsiveness by adapting to unforeseen challenges such as
117 weather changes or itinerary modifications (Chen & Chen, 2010). Studies suggest that
118 responsiveness often achieves comparable ratings across both sectors, as timely interventions
119 are integral to maintaining service quality (Tsang & Qu, 2000).

120 **Assurance**

121 Assurance concerns the knowledge, courtesy, and professionalism of employees in inspiring
122 customer trust. Hotels consistently perform well in this area, supported by standardized
123 training, security protocols, and multilingual staff (Zeithaml et al., 2013). Such practices
124 enhance guests' confidence and perceptions of safety. Conversely, assurance in tourism
125 services often depends on the expertise and interpersonal skills of guides. While many guides
126 display strong cultural knowledge and communication ability, variability in service delivery
127 may reduce consistency in assurance (Albacete-Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Bojica, 2007).

128 **Empathy**

129 Empathy emerges as a critical strength of tourism services. Tourists highly value personalized
130 attention, cultural sensitivity, and flexibility in designing experiences, which significantly
131 enhance satisfaction (Chen & Chen, 2010; Kandampully, Zhang, & Bilgihan, 2015). Guides
132 who demonstrate care, recognize individual preferences, and adapt to diverse customer needs
133 provide a sense of authenticity and emotional connection. In contrast, hotels, despite offering
134 customer-oriented services, often adopt standardized procedures, resulting in less
135 personalization compared to tourism services (Grönroos, 1984; Ryu, Han, & Kim, 2008).

136 Overall, comparative application of SERVQUAL underscores sector-specific strengths.
137 Hotels generally excel in tangibility and assurance due to their structured and infrastructure-
138 driven operations, while tourism services demonstrate greater strength in empathy and
139 reliability, reflecting their relational and experiential focus (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Wang
140 & Davidson, 2010). These findings reaffirm the need for tailored service quality strategies
141 rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

142

143 **Cross-Sector Comparison and Insights**

144 The comparative analysis indicates that each sector demonstrates distinct strengths:

- 145 • **Hotels excel in tangibility and assurance**, making them strong in operational
146 stability and visual presentation.
- 147 • **Tourism services lead in empathy and reliability**, positioning them better for
148 delivering flexible, customized, and relationship-driven experiences.

149 This divergence stems from the inherent differences in service delivery models. Hotel
150 services are more standardized and infrastructure-based, allowing for controlled quality
151 management. In contrast, tourism services operate in more fluid environments, requiring
152 adaptability, human interaction, and emotional intelligence.

153 The research also revealed that customers today evaluate service quality holistically,
154 considering both functional benefits and emotional experiences. Simply meeting expectations
155 is no longer sufficient; exceeding them through personalized, culturally aware, and
156 responsive services is the new benchmark.

157 **Summary of Findings**

- 158 • **Tangibles:** Higher in hotels due to controlled environments.
- 159 • **Reliability:** Slightly higher in tourism services due to logistical accuracy.
- 160 • **Responsiveness:** Equal in both sectors, reflecting effective service training.
- 161 • **Assurance:** Higher in hotels due to staff training and professionalism.
- 162 • **Empathy:** Higher in tourism due to customized, human-centered service.

163 **Key Terms**

- 164 • **Service Quality:** The extent to which a service meets or exceeds customer
165 expectations.
- 166 • **SERVQUAL Model:** A diagnostic tool measuring service quality across five
167 dimensions.
- 168 • **Tangibility:** Physical facilities, appearance, and communication materials.
- 169 • **Reliability:** Consistency and accuracy in service delivery.
- 170 • **Responsiveness:** Promptness and willingness to help customers.
- 171 • **Assurance:** Employee knowledge and ability to inspire trust.
- 172 • **Empathy:** Individualized care and attention provided to customers.

173 **Objectives of the Study**

- 174 1. **To define the concept of service quality** and highlight its relevance in the hospitality
175 and tourism industry.
- 176 2. **To compare service quality performance** between hotels and tourism services using
177 the SERVQUAL model.
- 178 3. **To assess sector-specific strengths and weaknesses** in the five key SERVQUAL
179 dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

180 4. **To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference** in customer-
181 perceived service quality between the two sectors.

182 5. **To contribute to existing literature** on service quality assessment in the hospitality
183 industry and suggest directions for future research.

184 **Literature Review**

185 Service quality has long been recognized as a critical factor in determining customer
186 satisfaction and loyalty, especially in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Given the
187 intangible, perishable, and experiential nature of services, businesses must continuously
188 measure and improve service delivery to meet and exceed customer expectations. A key
189 model widely used for this purpose is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman,
190 Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), which identifies five core dimensions of service quality:
191 tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

192 According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), service quality can be conceptualized as the gap
193 between customers' expectations and their perceptions of the actual service received. The
194 SERVQUAL model has become a foundational tool for service quality measurement across
195 industries and has been widely applied in both hotel management and tourism service studies.
196 Oh (1999) further emphasizes the strong correlation between perceived service quality,
197 customer satisfaction, and customer value, indicating that improvements in service quality
198 directly enhance business outcomes.

199 Studies focused on hotel services generally highlight the importance of tangible factors such
200 as room cleanliness, physical ambiance, and staff professionalism (Zeithaml et al., 2013). For
201 instance, guests often equate high-quality service with visible aspects like décor, hygiene, and
202 staff appearance. Conversely, research in tourism services emphasizes intangible factors such
203 as empathy, personal attention, and cultural sensitivity, given the experiential and variable
204 nature of tourism activities (Chen & Chen, 2010).

205 Comparative research has shown that while hotels typically perform better in tangibility and
206 assurance due to their standardized and infrastructure-driven operations, tourism service
207 providers tend to excel in empathy and responsiveness. This is because tourism experiences
208 often involve dynamic interactions and tailored services that require flexibility and cultural
209 awareness.

210 Furthermore, emerging studies underline the significance of measuring service quality not
211 only to assess performance but also to guide managerial decision-making. As customers
212 become more informed and service expectations rise, service quality is increasingly seen as a
213 strategic tool for differentiation. This is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, where
214 hygiene, digital communication, and personalized service have become more crucial than
215 ever.

216 In summary, the literature supports the idea that service quality dimensions may differ in
217 importance across sectors. The application of the SERVQUAL model in both hotel and

218 tourism contexts allows for a structured comparison and deeper understanding of how service
219 quality affects customer experience in each domain.

220 **Research Methodology**

221 **Research Design**

222 This study employed a cross-sectional and comparative research design to evaluate service
223 quality in the hotel and tourism sectors. The SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, &
224 Berry, 1988) was adopted as the conceptual framework, incorporating its five dimensions:
225 tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The study sought to identify
226 sector-specific differences in customer perceptions and explore performance gaps to guide
227 managerial improvements.

228 **Locale of the Study**

229 The study was conducted in Patna and Bodhgaya (Bihar, India), both of which are important
230 centers of tourism and hospitality. Patna represents a growing urban hospitality market and
231 capital of the State, while Bodhgaya is an internationally renowned religious destination,
232 attracting domestic and foreign tourists.

233 **Sampling Design**

234 A purposive sampling method was used to capture the perspectives of customers who had
235 recently experienced hotel and/or tourism services. A total of 90 respondents participated,
236 divided equally into three groups:

237 30 respondents who had used hotel services,

238 30 respondents who had used tourism services, and

239 30 respondents who had used both services.

240 This distribution allowed for a balanced comparison across service sectors.

241 **Tools and Techniques for Data Collection**

242 Primary data were collected using a structured SERVQUAL-based questionnaire, in which
243 respondents rated service quality attributes on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree,
244 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire covered all five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibility,
245 reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. To complement quantitative data, semi-
246 structured interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents to gain qualitative insights
247 into service experiences.

248

249 **Data and Statistical Analysis**

250 Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to identify
251 perception patterns, and a one-way ANOVA to test for significant differences across

252 respondent groups. Findings were then discussed in light of existing literature, highlighting
253 areas of alignment and divergence with prior studies.

254 **Results and Discussion**

255

256 Table 1. Mean SERVQUAL Scores Across Hotels and Tourism Services

Dimension	Hotels (n=30)	Tourism Services (n=30)	Both (n=30)	F-value	p-value
Tangibility	4.21 ± 0.45	3.85 ± 0.52	4.05 ± 0.48	2.89	0.063
Reliability	3.92 ± 0.50	4.15 ± 0.47	4.02 ± 0.49	3.12	0.052
Responsiveness	4.00 ± 0.42	3.98 ± 0.44	3.99 ± 0.43	0.45	0.640
Assurance	4.08 ± 0.39	3.75 ± 0.46	3.92 ± 0.42	4.025	0.017
Empathy	3.95 ± 0.44	4.32 ± 0.38	4.20 ± 0.40	5.68	0.005

257

258 *Significant at $p < 0.05$, **Highly significant at $p < 0.01$

259 **Tangibility**

260 Hotels scored significantly higher in tangibility ($M = 4.21$) than tourism services ($M = 3.85$).
261 Customers valued modern infrastructure, clean rooms, and professional staff presentation,
262 confirming that tangible elements strongly influence hotel service perceptions (Zeithaml,
263 Bitner, & Gremler, 2013; Marković & Raspor, 2010). Tourism services, due to their reliance
264 on outdoor and cultural experiences, faced limitations in maintaining consistent tangibles,
265 echoing Chen and Chen (2010).

266 **Reliability**

267 Tourism services slightly outperformed hotels in reliability ($M = 4.15$ vs. 3.92). Respondents
268 appreciated punctual itineraries, dependable logistics, and accuracy in service delivery. This
269 finding aligns with Yoon and Uysal (2005), who emphasized reliability as critical to
270 destination loyalty. Hotels, however, occasionally faced issues such as delayed check-ins,
271 which supports Oh (1999), who found reliability to be an area of weakness in hotel
272 operations.

273 **Responsiveness**

274 Both sectors demonstrated similar responsiveness ($M \approx 4.0$), with no significant differences
275 ($p > 0.05$). Respondents acknowledged prompt service in hotels (e.g., quick check-in and
276 room service) and flexibility in tourism (e.g., adapting to weather or travel changes). This
277 result resonates with Cronin and Taylor (1992), who found responsiveness to be a universal
278 expectation across service industries.

279 **Assurance**

280 Hotels performed better in assurance (M = 4.08) compared to tourism services (M = 3.75).
281 Customers felt more secure and confident due to staff professionalism, multilingual
282 communication, and safety protocols. This is consistent with Tsang and Qu (2000), who
283 observed assurance as central to guest trust in hotels. Tourism services, in contrast, depended
284 heavily on the competence of guides, creating variability in assurance delivery (Albacete-
285 Sáez, Fuentes-Fuentes, &Bojica, 2007).

286 **Empathy**

287 Tourism services excelled in empathy (M = 4.32), significantly outperforming hotels (M =
288 3.95). Respondents valued personalized attention, cultural sensitivity, and the flexibility of
289 guides to accommodate special needs. These results are supported by Chen and Chen (2010),
290 who stressed the role of human interaction in tourism experiences. Similarly, Kandampully,
291 Zhang, and Bilgihan (2015) highlighted empathy as a driver of loyalty. In comparison, hotel
292 services, though customer-oriented, were perceived as more standardized, confirming
293 Grönroos's (1984) notion of the limitations of mass service personalization.

294 **Overall Discussion**

295 The comparative analysis reveals that each sector exhibits distinct strengths:

296 Hotels excel in tangibility and assurance, benefiting from infrastructure and standardized
297 training.

298 Tourism services outperform in reliability and empathy, leveraging personalization and
299 dependable itineraries.

300 Responsiveness is equally strong across both sectors**, underscoring its universal
301 importance.

302 These findings support Wang and Davidson (2010), who argued that service quality is sector-
303 specific and must be addressed with targeted strategies rather than a standardized approach

304 **Conclusion**

305 Service quality plays a vital role in determining the success and competitiveness of
306 businesses in the hospitality sector. This comparative analysis of hotel and tourism service
307 providers reveals that although both aim to deliver exceptional customer experiences, they do
308 so by leveraging different service quality dimensions. Hotels tend to excel in **tangibles** and
309 **assurance**, as guests expect clean, well-maintained facilities, modern amenities, and
310 professional, knowledgeable staff who can instill a sense of confidence and safety. These
311 elements significantly contribute to guests' perceptions of service quality in hotel settings.

312 In contrast, tourism service providers rely more heavily on **empathy** and **reliability**. Since
313 tourism experiences are often intangible and personalized, customers place high importance
314 on consistent, dependable services and providers who show genuine care and understanding
315 of individual preferences and needs. A timely, well-organized itinerary or a thoughtful guide
316 can significantly enhance the overall tourism experience.

317 This comparison underlines the importance of adopting a **sector-specific strategy** to improve
318 service quality. Rather than using a universal approach, hospitality businesses should tailor
319 their service improvement efforts based on their core strengths and the specific expectations
320 of their customers. Hotels should focus on upgrading infrastructure and enhancing
321 professional development for staff, while tourism providers should emphasize personal
322 interaction, flexibility, and reliability.

323 Ongoing **customer feedback and service quality monitoring** are essential to maintain high
324 standards. Feedback mechanisms such as surveys, online reviews, and direct communication
325 offer valuable insights into customer expectations and satisfaction levels. These tools help
326 businesses identify gaps and adapt to evolving market demands.

327 Furthermore, the integration of **technology** in service delivery offers new opportunities for
328 efficiency, personalization, and innovation. However, the human element remains
329 irreplaceable in delivering emotional value and building customer loyalty.

330 In conclusion, service quality remains a central pillar for sustainable success in the hospitality
331 industry. By recognizing and building upon their unique strengths, both hotel and tourism
332 sectors can achieve lasting customer satisfaction and gain a competitive edge in the global
333 market.

334 **Recommendations**

335 **For Hotels:**

- 336 • Enhance facility design and cleanliness.
- 337 • Provide multilingual and cross-cultural staff training.
- 338 • Implement technology for faster check-in/out processes.

339 **For Tourism Providers:**

- 340 • Develop personalized, flexible tour packages.
- 341 • Invest in cultural competency training for guides.
- 342 • Use mobile alerts to communicate itinerary changes promptly.

343 **For Both Sectors:**

- 344 • Establish ongoing customer feedback loops.
- 345 • Monitor and respond to online reviews.
- 346 • Promote a customer-focused service culture.

347

348 **Future Research**

349 Further investigations can explore:

- 350 • The influence of AI and digital tools on service quality.
- 351 • Evolving customer expectations post-pandemic.
- 352 • Cross-cultural differences in service quality perception.

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