Service quality analysis and its implications – A study on tourism services in Kodaikannal

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Abstract
Tourism is one of the top and fastest growing sectors in the world; it plays a very important role in the economy and stimulated the growth of other dependents This study aims to assess tourist perceptions towards quality tourism services provided by the Management of Kodaikannal by examining the influence of quality tourism product on overall tourist satisfaction at Kodaikannal. In this study, five dimensions of SERVQUAL model were concentrated i.e. Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. The empirical data were collected from tourists via a survey that yielded 150 usable questionnaires. The data were analysed using a series of multiple regressions to determine the influence of service quality on tourist satisfaction. The findings confirmed that service quality directly influenced tourist satisfaction throughout destination facilities, destination accessibility and destination attraction. As a result, the researcher came to a conclusion that there is a significant influence of the service quality on satisfaction of tourists, and therefore service quality plays an important role in tourism by increasing the level of tourist satisfaction. The results in this study supported the evidence that there are positive implications of components of tourism product on satisfaction of tourists.

Key words: SERVQUAL, tourism, destination facilities, destination accessibility, destination attraction

1.Introduction

Tourism is one of the top and fastest growing sectors in the world; it plays a very important role in the economy and stimulated the growth of other economy. it is growing faster than manufacturing, retail, financial services and communications. The industry has grown its total contribution to GDP by and increasing the number of jobs from five million to 260 million, and therefore one in 11 of all jobs in the world are now supported by Travel and Tourism. the number of foreign tourist arrivals in the country in 2013 showed an increase of about 4.1 % over 2012. During the period January- December 2013, 68.48 lakh (Provisional) tourists visited India against 65.78 lakh in 2012. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism in rupee terms during 2013 were Rs.1,05,836 crore (Provisional) with a growth of 12.0% over the same period in 2012.The foreign exchange earnings during 2012 was to the tune of Rs.94,487 crore.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council's economic research, Service quality is considered as a standard used to assess the effectiveness of a particular leisure service agency, including the tourism service sector and therefore the quality of service involved with tourism plays an important role in the process of delivery. Further, the quality of service influenced customers' image that had an effect on the process from expected quality to perceived quality and therefore the implication of service quality will be customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction can be defined as satisfaction based on an outcome or a process. Tourism is arguably one of the largest self-initiated commercial interventions to create happiness on the entire planet. Happiness is directly related to satisfaction, and therefore overall happiness is highly linked to satisfaction in leisure travel sector. According to Laws, 1995, the majority of tourists have experiences with destinations, and their perceptions are influenced by comparisons among facilities, attractions, and service standards. This study will present and analyse three main dimensions of factors affecting tourist satisfaction, and they are: destination facilities, destination accessibility and destination attraction. The purpose of this paper is to measure the quality of tourism services

1.1 Literature review:

Service quality is defined as what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for" rather than "what the supplier puts in (Ducker, 1991). In some earlier studies, service quality has been defined to the extent where the service fulfils the needs or expectation of the customers (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990; Dotchin and Oakland, 1994). While Zeithaml et al. (1996) has conceptualized service quality as the overall impression of customers towards the service weakness or supremacy. Therefore service quality frequently has been conceptualized as the difference between the perceived services expected performance and perceived service actual performance (Bloemer et al., 1999; Kara et al., 2005). Parasuraman et al. (1988) introduced the SERVQUAL model to measure service quality including 22 items in five dimensions: reliability, tangible, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions have specific service characteristic link to the expectation of customers. The SERVQUAL scale was developed in the marketingcontext and this was supported by the Marketing Science Institute (Parasuraman et al., 1986). Even though this model as an instrument has been used in various studies in across industries, the SERVQUAL has

received many criticisms from other scholars (e.g., Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Brown et al., 1993). However, there are many researchers opposed the use of SERVQUAL to measure service quality due to the industry characteristics differences. Other previous researches confirmed that SERVQUAL instrument is applicable in tourism industry (Fick and Ritchie, 1991; Yuan et al., 2005; Shaikh and Khan, 2011). Medlik and Middleton (1973) noted that „the tourist product is to be considered as an amalgam of three main components of attractions, facilities at the destination and accessibility of the destination'. In other words, the tourist product is 'not as airline seat or a hotel bed, or relaxing on a sunny beach… but rather an amalgam of many components, or a package'. While, Middleton and Clarke (2001) indicated that there are five main components in the overall product, and they are: destination attractions and environment, destination facilities and services, accessibility of the destination, images of the destination, and Price to the consumer.

Bernadette et al., (2008) India is well known for personal bonding and relations with their tourist customers. What will be promising for India is the effectiveness of proactive relationship building strategies undertaken by India. India should focus on building and maintaining strong tourists relationships should note that the selection and training of tour guides who are directly dealing with the tourists. Sandeep Das (2011) in his article explains that tourism provides opportunities of job creation directly and indirectly. So this sector should be provided with incentives for sustainable and overall economic growth along with creation of jobs. Barna maullick (2012) in his article highlights about the tourism as strategy for rural development. He has given more priority of tourism sector and its contribution to earn foreign exchange and the accelerating trend of this sector towards attracting the foreign tourist arrival in India from 2001 to 2010.

1.1.2 Objectives and Methodology of the study:

This study aims to assess tourist perceptions towards quality tourism services provided by the Management of Kodaikannal by examining the influence of quality tourism product on overall tourist satisfaction at Kodaikannal. In this study, five dimensions of servqual model were concentrated i.e. Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. The empirical data were collected from

tourists via a survey that yielded 150 usable questionnaires,

The objectives of the study are:

- ❖ To analyse the Service Quality Dimensions of Tourism services at Kodaikannal (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy) destination facilities, destination accessibility and destination attraction
- ❖ To analyse the Implications of service Quality on Satisfaction of tourists.

The data were analysed using a series of multiple regressions to determine the impact of service quality and tourist satisfaction.

2. To the Hills of Kodaikannal…

Kodaikanal is a city in the hills of the taluk division of the Dindigul district in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Its name in the Tamil language means "The Gift of the Forest". Kodaikanal is referred to as the "Princess of Hill stations" and has a long history as a retreat and popular tourist destination. Kodaikanal was established in 1845 as a refuge from the high temperatures and tropical diseases of the plains. Much of the local economy is based on the hospitality industry serving tourism. The total area is 21.45 km^2 (8.28 sq mi) and the Elevation is 2,133 m (6,998 ft). the density of the population is 1,100/km^2 (3,000/sq mi). The Avg. summer temperature 19.8 °C (67.6 °F) and the Avg. winter temperature is 8.3 °C (46.9 °F)

The tourist destinations at Kodaikannal are Berijam Lake where very useful medicinal plants like Digitalis, Pyrethrum, Dioscorea are grown here. , Bryant Park and it is named after a British officer Glenn Bryant, Bryant Park holds an annual flower and vegetable show each year which attracts a large number of tourists all across the country., Shenbaganur Museum depicting rare pieces of architecture from South of India., The Boat Club which is known for giving rented boats for the purpose of entertainment. , Kodaikanal Lake which is a magnificent man-made lake, spreads out in the shape of a star over an area of sixty acres among the greener surroundings of the place. Boating and Angling facilities are available at the Kodaikanal Lake.

Coaker's Walk. It derives its name from Lt. Coaker, who prepared the map of Kodai runs

along a steep slope on the southern side of the Kodai This place is a heaven for the lovers of nature and all those who seek few moments of tranquility far away from the crowd and noise of the city., Guna Cave (Devil's Kitchen) named so because it is a hidden ravine and has a deep fall but it looks like a small gutter, Kurinji Andavar Temple where one can get a picturesque view of the northern plains and the Palani Hills., Silver Cascade falls from a height of 180 feet and it is a great delight to look and hear the loud noise of these falls amidst the tranquility that surrounds the place and Bear Shola Falls is the place where once the bears used to come and drink water, hence it was named so.

3.Findings

In this study, three main destination dimensions have been selected as factors that could affect tourist satisfaction and that are shown in the chart:
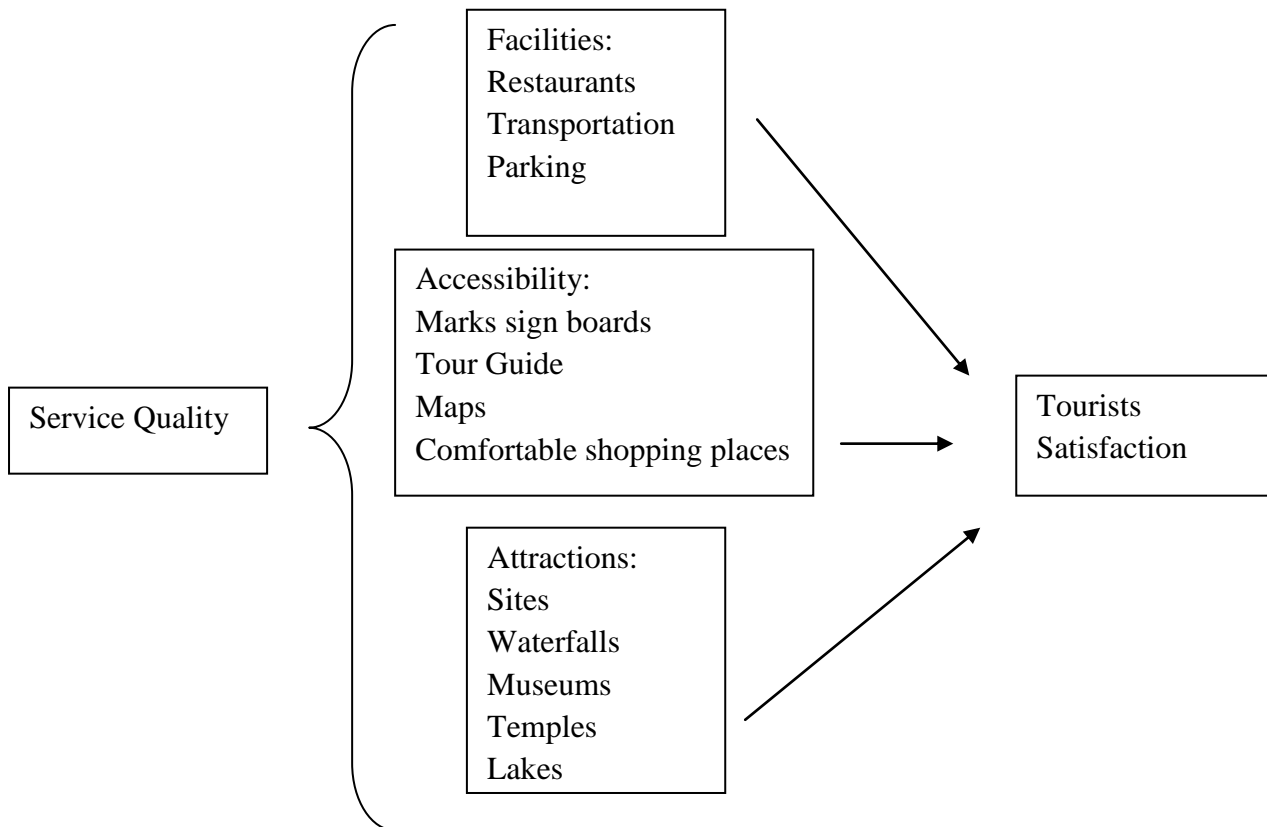
the chart implies the service quality dimensions i.e. Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy.

The values of means and standard deviations for each variable in the study are presented in the table below.

3.1 **Means and Standard Deviations for the Study Variables**

Slang	Service Quality	Mean	SD	Order

1	Destination Facilities (Restaurants, Transportation, Parking)	3.46	.85	3
2	Destination Attraction (Sites,Waterfalls,Museums,Temples,Lakes	3.68	.89	1
3	Destination Accessibility (Marks sign boards, Tour Guide, Maps, Comfortable shopping places)	3.57	1.01	2

Source: primary data.

The tourist attraction satisfaction was the highest mean (3.68) indicating its importance from the point of view of the sample individuals while the Accessibility was the least mean (3.57) indicating less importance upon the sample individuals. The tourism facilities (as dependent variable) were expressed by a mean of (3.46) and are considered as a very good satisfaction.

The following hypothesis were tested and by using a linear regression analysis. The results of correlation analysis revealed that there were very high significant correlations between all variables of this study, since the significant level was ($P<.05$). The framed hypotheses are:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the destination facilities (Restaurants, Transportation, and Parking) and tourist satisfaction.

H2: There is a positive relationship between the destination attractions (Sites, Waterfalls, Museums, Temples, and Lakes) and tourist satisfaction

H3. There is a positive relationship between the destination accessibility Marks sign boards, Tour Guide, Maps, Comfortable shopping places) and tourist satisfaction.

And the results are specified as:

3.2 Linear Regression for Impact of Destination Facilities, accessibility, and attraction on Tourist Satisfaction:

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Tourist Satisfaction						Hypothesis decision
	R	R^2	F	β	t	P	
Destination Facilities	.739	.546	206.499	.739	14.37	000	Accept
Destination attraction	.755	.57	227.855	.755	15.09	000	Accept
Destination	.561	.314	73.844	.561	8.593	000	Accept

accessibility.							

Source: Primary data.

Table shows that destination Facilities (Marks sign boards, Tour Guide, Maps, Comfortable shopping places) is a significant predicator of tourist satisfaction. The regression results indicated that destination facilities had a positive relationship with tourist satisfaction (β =.739, P=.000). More specifically, destination facilities explain (R²) 54.6% of the variance in tourist satisfaction, this means destination facilities are a moderate predictor in tourist satisfaction. Consequently, the overall statistical results confirmed that relationship, and therefore hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Regarding destination attractions (Sites,Waterfalls,Museums,Temples,Lakes) it shows that there is a good significant predicator of tourist satisfaction as shown in Table 5, destination attractions is positively related to tourist satisfaction (β = .755, P=.000). More specifically, destination attractions explains (R²) 57 % of the variance in tourist satisfaction. However, the overall statistical results indicated that destination accessibility positively influenced tourist satisfaction. Accordingly, hypothesis 2is accepted.

Destination Accessibility (Marks sign boards, Tour Guide, Maps, Comfortable shopping places are moderately positively related to tourist satisfaction (β =.561, P=.000). The regression results showed that destination Accessibility is a significant predicator of tourist satisfaction, more specifically, destination Accessibility explain (R²) 31.4% of the variance in tourist satisfaction. However, the overall statistical results indicated that destination attractions positively impacted tourist satisfaction. Thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted

The study findings concluded that service quality (destination facilities, destination accessibility, destination attractions) has great effect on overall tourist satisfaction. This study implies that service quality has a positive relationship with tourist satisfaction. These results suggest that tourist satisfaction can be enhanced by raising the level of service quality throughout destination facilities, destination accessibility and destination attractions.

It was also found that Destination facilities (restaurant, transportation and parking) and attractions (Sites, Waterfalls, Museums, Temples,

and Lakes) are positively related to tourist satisfaction

Conclusion:

Therefore, this study suggests that the quality of tourism services has a positive impact on the level of tourist satisfaction by enhancing destination facilitates, destination accessibility and destination attractions.

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