

A Study On Service Quality And Customer Satisfaction Gaps In Restaurants Of Varanasi

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Abstract

Restaurant business has emerged as one of the most competitive sectors. An organisation must look into needs and wants of customers to be successful. It becomes imperative to understand the components of quality service experience as critical to long term business health in the Hospitality organisations. The lifeblood of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure industry is the customer. Ensuring that the customer receives an appropriate level of service is critical to success. Therefore this study attempts to investigate existing levels of service quality by analysing the Gap between Perceptions and Expectations of guests (P-E gap) along with suggestion to assist policy makers, the restaurant authorities focusing on specific areas/dimensions where lagging. The data for the study will be collected through self-administered questionnaires using DINESERVE model. This study aims to provide clear thoughts on appropriate recommendations to develop framework of their service quality indicators and implement an effective strategy to meet the customers' expectations.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Dineserve, Gap Analysis, Service Loyalty, Service Quality.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing significance of the services sector to the global economy has led to a heightened concern by practitioners as well as consumers regarding the quality of services being offered. According to tenner and De Toro(1992), growth of an international entrepreneurialism and an increased supply of more "sophisticated" customers has caused the

firms to seek competitive advantage by relying more upon their employees to satisfy and even exceed client expectations. The restaurant industry has observed intense competition and guests demand for high service quality. The food and beverage sector has experienced remarkable progress as a result of the noticeable rise in the standards of living of a huge section of the population globally. The clients have begun to give consideration to the background in which they receive or consume the goods, and the food service is not an exception. The guests these days ask food and beverage to be brought to them in a way that will give them spiritual happiness and satisfying involvements. This spiritual happiness can be content by getting food service with international essences like Spanish, Chinese or Continental as an instance and/or associated distribution of food service with music, games and sport as themes, thus conveying to customers various experiences. Consumers usually give consideration to the style in which the food is presented during service delivery. So the management must sustain service quality in order to guarantee guests to get active service experience. Restaurants service providers establish standards. Standards, however are “changing benchmarks as customers’ expectations increase and the organisation responds to such changes (Callan, 1994, p.482).” Appropriate service standards hinge on upon mission of the company. Standards achieved, however, further depend upon two factors: the service policies of the organisation and the actual performance by the service providers. Customer satisfaction with the service quality provided by restaurants has become the most significant factor for success and existence in this industry. Customer satisfaction, from Oliver (1997) is derived from the Latin term Satis (enough) and Facere (to do or make). Quality is meeting or exceeding consumer expectations. To meet or go beyond customer expectations, establishments must fully recognize all service attributes that contribute to customer value and lead to satisfaction and loyalty (Evans & Lindsay, 1996). Through the last few periods there is remarkable change skilled in the hospitality business and the reason being is Service Quality. A customer's expectation of a specific service is determined by features such as recommendations by peers, personal needs and past experiences. The expected facility and the observed service occasionally may not be identical, thus leaving a gap. The service quality model or GAP model established by authors- Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry at Texas and North Carolina in 1985 explains the main requirements for delivering major service quality. The increased wisdom of consumer satisfaction headed to the use of great values of service in business. The new service parameters made the restaurants to implement quality

management as an effective aid. Kotler (2001: 58) stated “satisfaction is the sensation of pleasure or discontent resulting from associating the presentation (or outcome) of a product or service perceived quality in relation to the buyer’s expectation”.

Customers’ observations of service quality vary extensively. Likewise, customers’ observed satisfaction with performed services also differs extensively. Two separate variables effect their perceptions: customer expectations and service standards/performance is the main indicator of general service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithmal, and Leonard, 1994b). Consumers are the judges of service quality (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991). Their prospects of services significantly affect their resulting level of satisfaction. Lewison (1997) describes service expectations in three levels: essentials, expected, and optional. Zeithmal, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) include three similar levels in their conceptual model of customer service expectations: predicted, adequate, and desired. Business complexity, pressures to decrease costs, rise productivity, decrease turnover, increase sales growth and maintain a competitive advantage over competitors in the market is pushing restaurateurs to formulate strategy essential to achieve organizational aims (National Restaurant Association, 2006).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Varanasi, the holy city of India, also known as “Kashi”, “City of Light”, “Anandvan”, “Eternal City” is one of the oldest city of the world. It occupies prominent place since ancient time due to trade, pre-eminent religious position for Hindus & pilgrimage routes, important center of Knowledge and Historical, Mythological tales describes prosperity and opulence. Varanasi is an eclectic mix of the Tangible and Intangible, manifested in its rich Cultural Landscapes. Due to increasing competitions every year, the better Quality Services can play an important role in attracting more customers and ensuring overall high satisfaction levels along with repetitive visits. However, an insufficient service provide will lead to dissatisfaction thereby generating ‘GAPS’ which is needed to be addressed and framework is to be adopted so as to provide an experiential visit for guests.

Peters (1987) and many others have pointed out today’s customers are searching for quality, which in service industries, such as hospitality, tourism, and leisure, equates with service quality. It has become a major issue for managers in these areas, with many people arguing that service quality has a central role in the success or failure of such organisations. (Lee and

Hing,1995; Ford and Bach, 1997; Hudson and Shephard,1988) and that successful organisations will have to compete on basis of quality of the service they provide.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To analyse customer perceptions of service quality in the restaurants of Varanasi.
- To investigate existing levels of service quality by analysing the Gap between Perceptions and Expectations of guests (P-E gap) along with suggestion to assist policy makers and restaurant planners, the restaurant authorities focusing on specific areas/dimensions where lagging using DINESERVE model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality has been described as “the delivery of excellent or superior service relative to customer expectation”(Zeithaml and Bitner 1996). It is difficult to measure service quality by the service providers and customers because of Intangible nature. The services are produced and consumed at the same time. This is the condition which restaurant workers face in determining the quality of their services (Markovic et al. 2010). Based on the conceptualizations of service quality there are some representations in the literature that have been used to measure the quality of the services. Gronroos (1984) stated that the technical and functional aspects are significant components of evaluating and determining the service. He recognised three dimensions of service quality: technical quality, functional quality and image. In terms of restaurants quality is created at the process of service delivery. The information requires an instrument to measure service quality should have an operative means of measuring customer's perception of service quality during the service execution. Food is generally supposed as the core component of having a meal in restaurants. The following characteristics has been reflected as the most usually taken by customers in adjudging the quality of food in restaurants, these characteristics are: presentation, taste, freshness, and temperature. (Kivela et al., 1999)states that presentation is described as how appealingly food is offered as a tangible sign for customer perception of quality. Lemmink (1998) cites an instance of a restaurant visit, which is characterized by personal interaction; others are described in non-personal terms (e.g., a wide selection of food). Research on service quality has rapidly grown in the last four decades. Parasuraman et al. (1988)

established a model for evaluating service quality called SERVQUAL. The SERVQUAL model has been used by researchers more than any other instrument, but most of the studies have critiqued the model for its unsuitability for assessing all types of services. The model was also criticized by the original authors themselves for not taking into consideration the restaurant industry. Stevens et al. (1995) developed a 29-item scale named DINESERV. The DINESERV was abstracted by Stevens et al. (1995) as an instrument to evaluate service quality in restaurants. Many researchers have used DINESERV studies to evaluate service quality. These include the works of Kim et al., (2003, 2009), Markovic et al., (2010), Vanniarajan (2009) and many others.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction is described by Oliver's (1997) as the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, offers a pleasant level of consumption related fulfilment. In other words, it is the overall level of contentment with a service/product experience. Cronin & Taylor (1992) states as a judgment made on the basis of a specific service place. Customer satisfaction has been of great attention in services marketing because fulfilment links purchase/consumption to post-purchase phenomena such as attitude change, repeat purchase, positive word-of-mouth, and loyalty. Service quality plays an important role in creating customer satisfaction. The linking between service quality and customer satisfaction has been well recognized in service marketing literature (Antony et al. 2004; Ladhari 2009). It is commonly notion that a high level of service quality leads to a high level of customer satisfaction. According to (Taylor & Baker, 1994; Mattila, 2000), Satisfaction was established to be moderating the quality perception and purchase intention relationship.

CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Many firms started reflecting making customer loyalty as their major objective, specifically those operating in the service sector (Bove and Johnson 2000). The view that customer satisfaction leads to loyalty is founded on the evidence that by growing customer satisfaction, customers are likely to remain loyal to the service provider (Eriksson and Vaghult, 2000). Dick and Basu (1994) segmented loyal customers into four categories based on their attitudes and behaviours. These categories are of varied attributes described as: loyalty, latent loyalty, spurious loyalty, and no loyalty. Of the four categories, loyalty and spurious loyalty are

linked with high levels of repurchase. Vijayvargy (2014) in his study with the goals of recognising the factors of the service quality in restaurant chains and significance level of each of them in making a revisit decision (Customer Loyalty Measurement), using SERVQUAL as a scale for measuring service quality. The study reveals three factors: tangibles, convenience and empathy as most significant dimensions of service quality amongst the youth of Jaipur, Rajasthan.

Loyalty status at any point is influenced by diverse factors collectively referred to as loyalty supporting and repressing factors (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997). Loyalty-supporting factors are those components (customer satisfaction, commitment etc.) that work to sustain or enhance customer loyalty (Nordman, 2004). Loyalty repressing factors, on the other hand, decrease customer loyalty status by causing disloyal behaviour (Nordman, 2004).

GAP MODEL

From the outcome of the research organised in the companies of four different service segments: banking, telecommunications, insurance companies and repair and maintenance of appliances (Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007), Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, in a number of works explained in the duration between 1985 and 1994, established a so- GAP models which evaluates “gaps” between quality service expectations among the service process and perception of service quality later the service process.

The basic feature of the Gap model is that it places an accent upon the oversights in the quality between the guest and service provider and are straight associated with the opinions to the perception and expectations. This model demonstrates the procedure of the progress of the service quality (Ljubojević, 2004).

The first model was presented in 1985, where the service quality was explained as a difference between the way a costumer experienced a service (perception) and expectations which a costumer created before using the service. The variations in the process of service offer according to this model are as follows (Parasuraman et al., 1985):

Gap 1 (the positioning gap)	Managers' perceptions of consumers' expectations and the relative importance consumers attach to the quality dimensions.
Gap 2 (the specification gap)	The difference between what management believes the consumer wants and what the consumers expect the business to provide.
Gap 3 (the delivery gap)	the difference between the service provided by the employee of the business and the specifications set by management
Gap 4 (the communication gap)	the promises communicated by the business to the consumer do not match the consumers' expectations of those external promises
Gap 5 (the perception gap)	the difference between the consumers internal perception and expectation of the services

Table 1: Definition of the SERVQUAL Gaps (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

The service quality is the function of expectations and perception and can be presented as (Nitin et al., 2005):

$$SQ = \sum_{j=1}^k (P_{ij} - E_{ij})$$

Where, SQ (service quality) – overall service quality,

k – number of attributes,

P_{ij} (perception) – perception of performances of stimulus i under the influence of attribute j,

E_{ij} (expectation) – expected service quality for attribute j compared to standards for stimulus i.

The lower the mean score, the larger the gap in service quality and on the other hand the higher the mean score, the smaller the gap in service quality. Gaps 1 to 4 are within the mechanism of an company and need to be investigated to regulate the sources and variations to be employed which can reduce or eliminate Gap 5, which is the gap reflecting the difference between customers perceptions and expectations of the company's level of service. Surveying of employees can help to measure the extent of Gaps 2 to 4 (Zeithmal et al.,1990).

Reasons for GAP in Restaurants

Every specific gap influences the entire perception of service quality and customer satisfaction.

Gap 1 represents the general incompatibility between company management and customers.

The basic reason of its appearance does not understand the real customers' expectations.

The first gap is actually the result of Wrongly inferred information concerning guests expectations.,Non-existence of demand analysis and inadequate perception of the relationship between the company and its customer, Not understanding the customers' expectations can be as well the result of a bad management of customers' complaints (Veljković, 2009).

Example, management can adequately evaluate the time that guests are willing to spend when checking in at the menu of a restaurant, but do not have enough staff to fulfil those expectations.

Gap 2 occurs due to variation between perceptions of the management about the expectations of customers and specifications of service quality are the following:

Badly designed services, Unclear, undefined service design, badly designed service design,Unsystematically process of new service development.

Moreover, problems can be caused by the lack of resources, too growing demand and inadequate engagement of company management (Veljković, 2009; Ćosić, 2007).

Possible emergence of **Gap 3** is the following:

Oversights in the human resources management, Unclear roles and conflict of interests, Poor system of evaluation and praising, Lack of team work, inadequate jurisdiction.

This gap generates when guest do not understand or do not know what their role and responsibility in the service process, Problems with servicing agents and control of quality and consistency; **Example**, management of a restaurant orders that a specific dish needs to be delivered within 20 minutes while the waiter delivers the same dish after the period demanded.

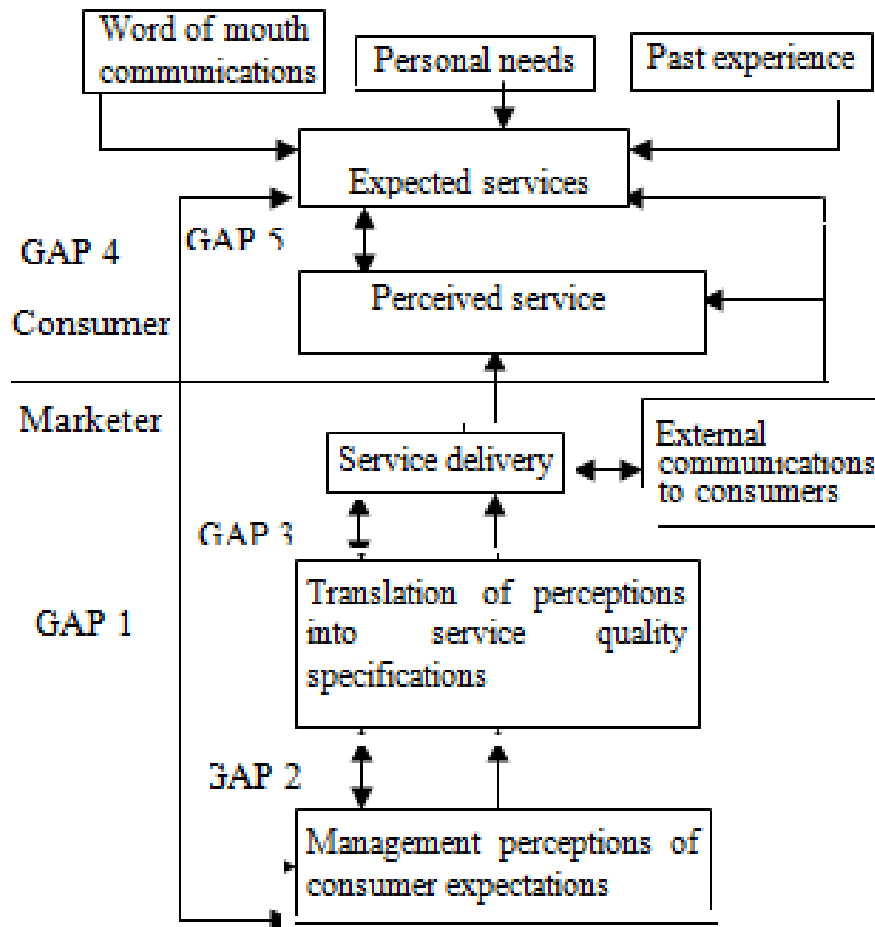
The reason for occurrence of **GAP 4** is due to:

Lack of integrated service marketing communications i.e. Interactive marketing not in part of communication plan; Lack of a developed programme of internal marketing, Lack of the management of customers' expectations through all forms of communication, Customers are not educated in an adequate way, Unreasonable promises in marketing activities, personal sale etc; Poor communication between people responsible for promotional campaign and people responsible for operational activities.

Unreasonable promises and inadequate management of customers' expectations lead to the appearance of too demanding expectations which leads to Formation of GAP 4.

Gap 5 occurs as difference between the expectations of customers concerning the services and their perception of the service received in the company itself which is an outcome of any of the above mentioned or combination of GAPs.

According to this model, consumers' quality assessment will be influenced by a series of five distinct "gaps" in this co-service process. Quality Management Systems must attempt to close the five gaps in the model and to improve the quality of service as experienced by means of comparison between expected and perceived quality after the customer has received the service.



Source: Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A., Berry L.L. 1985.

METHODOLOGY

A self-administered questionnaire, DINESERVE scale (developed by Stevens et al. (1995)) was used in this study to analyse the service quality expectations and perceptions of the restaurant diners. A total number of 29-item measuring five dimensions of service: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. The items were measured on 5-point Likert –type scale from 5= ‘strongly agree’ to 1= ‘strongly disagree’. A pilot test was undertaken to assess the reliability of the attributes, and to ensure that the wordings of the questionnaire were clear. Twenty questionnaires were completed by the guests in accompaniment of researcher. Some problems were identified with the wordings and implications of some questions, so some minor revisions were made to avoid confusion.

A convenience sampling approach was employed and 360 questionnaires were distributed to the guests, in which 318 were returned. Of these 318 questionnaires, 12 were not included in the analysis because of incompleteness, and 306 were usable for further analysis. The

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 16.0 was used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics analysis was used to measure guests' expectation and perception scores. Paired t-test was carried out to test the significant difference between the two means of expectations and perceptions.

According to Steven et al. (1995), the final version of DINESERV consisted of total of 29 items covering five dimensions as under:

S. No.	Dimension	No. of Items
01.	Reliability	05
02.	Assurance	06
03.	Tangibles	10
04.	Empathy	05
05.	Responsiveness	03

FINDINGS:

	Age	gender	no. of visits
N Valid	306	306	306
Missing	0	0	0

Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid less than 24	93	30.4	30.4	30.4
24 – 40	127	41.5	41.5	71.9
40 – 60	82	26.8	26.8	98.7
more than 60	04	1.3	1.3	100.0
Total	306	100.0	100.0	

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid MALE	157	51.3	51.3	51.3
FEMALE	149	48.7	48.7	100.0
Total	137	100.0	100.0	

No. of visits

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid First Time	73	23.8	23.8	23.8
2 to 5 Times	90	29.4	29.4	53.2
More than 5 Times	143	46.5	46.5	100.0
Total	306	100.0	100.0	

Table shows the demographics of the respondents from the total 306 valid samples, Gender distribution was 48.7% female, 51.3% male. The highest proportion of the respondents (41.5%) fell into the 24–40 year age group, followed by the “less than 24 year” age group (30.4%). Regarding the respondents’ frequency of arrivals a major part of the respondents reported that they have arrived more than 5 times (46.5%) followed by “2 to 5 times” (29.4%). Descriptivestatistical methods were used to research guests’ expectations and perceptions. The means, standard deviations, and the difference scores were computed.

Values for each attribute obtained through analysis (n =306)

Attribute	Expectation		Perceptions		Gap	t – value*
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Has a visually attractive parking areas and building exteriors.	4.10	.740	3.92	.737	-0.18	13.525
Has a visually attractive dining area.	4.16	.709	4.19	.764	0.03	13.119
Have staff members who are clean, neat, and appropriately dressed.	4.26	.684	4.18	.795	-0.08	14.422
Has a décor in keeping with its image and price range.	3.92	.742	3.88	.736	-0.04	14.514
Has a menu that is easily readable.	4.01	.695	3.95	.663	-0.06	12.205
Has a visually attractive menu that reflects the restaurant’s image.	3.81	.644	3.70	.772	-0.11	14.180
Has a dining area that is comfortable and easy to move around in.	4.28	.685	4.22	.770	-0.06	14.996
Has restrooms that are thoroughly clean	4.08	.686	4.05	.742	-0.03	10.302
Has dining areas that are thoroughly clean.	4.19	.737	4.28	.682	0.09	16.041
Have com fort able seats in the dining room.	4.14	.661	4.05	.775	-0.09	13.260
Serves you in the time promised.	4.19	.644	4.11	.748	-0.08	9.120
Quickly corrects anything that is wrong.	4.23	.597	3.98	.736	-0.25	12.899

Is dependable and consistent.	4.12	.674	4.18	.653	0.06	10.904
Provides an accurate guest check.	3.90	.658	3.86	.730	-0.04	13.975
Serves your food exactly as you ordered it.	4.12	.599	4.19	.732	0.07	13.394
During Busy times has employee shift to help each other maintain speed and quality of service.	4.20	.716	4.16	.716	-0.04	13.195
Provides prompt and Quick service	4.08	.671	4.10	.768	0.02	12.915
Gives extra effort to handle special requests.	4.15	.617	4.20	.750	0.05	13.164
Have employees who can answer your questions completely.	4.01	.712	3.92	.797	-0.09	11.802
Makes you feel comfortable and confident in your dealings with them.	4.08	.717	4.11	.803	0.03	12.967
Have personnel who are both able and willing to give you information about menu items, their ingredients, and methods of preparation.	4.20	.767	4.08	.732	-0.12	13.937
Makes you personally safe.	3.92	.813	3.91	.790	-0.01	10.836
Has personnel who seem well-trained, competent, and experienced.	4.03	.756	3.98	.825	-0.05	12.249
Seems to give employees support so that they can do their jobs well.	4.10	.785	4.12	.796	0.02	8.540
Have employees who are sensitive to your individual needs and wants, rather than always relying on policies and procedures.	4.21	.770	4.27	.810	0.06	10.289
Makes you feel special.	4.16	.743	4.10	.770	-0.06	11.438
Anticipates your individual needs and wants.	4.20	.759	4.18	.762	0.08	12.137
Have employees who are sympathetic and reassuring if something is wrong.	4.13	.765	4.16	.819	0.03	13.743
Seems to have the customers' best interests at heart.	4.21	.736	4.16	.683	-0.05	10.895
Overall mean for 29 attributes	4.10	.109	4.07	.094	-0.03	12.572

Remark: t – test (2 tailed Sig.) $p < 0.01$ for all attributes.

From the above table the mean scores of expectation ranges from 3.81 to 4.28. The lowest expectation item was “Has a visually attractive menu that reflects the restaurant’s image.” which implies the customers were not much concentrated upon the attractive menu designs or signboards. On the other hand, the highest expectation was regarding “Has a dining area that is comfortable and easy to move around in.” followed by “Have staff members who are clean, neat, and appropriately dressed”. This indicates that diners are concerned regarding movement spaces and hygienic appearances of the workers, i.e. Tangibility was the dimension where the highest expectations were observed.

The mean score of customer perception ranges from 3.70 to 4.27. The lowest perception item was “Has a visually attractive menu that reflects the restaurant’s image” followed by “Provides an accurate guest check.” which implies the menu designs still not reflect the

restaurant image. The menu signboards and design needs to be evaluated and the focus should be on re-designing such a menu that items should reflect the restaurants soul. Also policies related to security measures need to be reframed as it is concerned raised by customers in the restaurants. On the other hand, guests had higher perceptions regarding “Has dining areas that are thoroughly clean”. This infers to proper maintenance, cleaning and upkeep of the dining areas. Followed by “Have employees who are sensitive to your individual needs and wants, rather than always relying on policies and procedures.” which shows the staffs were keen to serve the guests and were ready to give their individual attention and solutions. As per the table Dinerserve Gap in restaurants of Varanasi had negative gap score for 17 items explaining perceptions were less as compared to the expectations. On the other hand, In 12 items, Perceptions were greater as compared to the expectations. The highest positive gap was in “Anticipates your individual needs and wants.” This indicates that staffs were giving personalised attention. The widest negative gap was found in “Quickly corrects anything that is wrong” indicating guest dissatisfaction to the process of correction of any mistakes. The Standards Operating Procedure needs to be re-strategize regarding customer feedback system. The overall DINESERVE scale indicated -0.03 score which infers the restaurants to improvise the service quality and standards to the guests.

SUGGESTIONS

Restaurants managers should make quality service top significance both for them and their staff. Recommendations for better guest services towards successful and profitable results include: focus on quality service and guest satisfaction; retention of existing guests by exceeding their expectations; continuous quality improvement; employment, regular training and empowerment of service-oriented staff, etc.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The restaurants managers can use this instrument to assess the restaurants service quality. Moreover, the findings of present study could be employed by the restaurant managers to improve their marketing strategies.

LIMITATIONS

The present work has some limitations that should be considered. The sample size of the current study is on casual dining segment and limited to the restaurants customer at selected restaurants in Varanasi city. For generalizing the implications for the restaurant sector, a study that would include more restaurants in different geographic locations could be

conducted as well as the inter-relationship between DINESERVE with Service Quality and Service Loyalty is needed to be carried out using gaps model to explore more about service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

CONCLUSION

Designing service quality for restaurants is very crucial. In today's highly competitive world Thus it is essential to evaluate the service quality for a particular service provider. This study led to investigate the gaps in the service quality at restaurants of Varanasi. This study has contributed to the theoretical and methodological advancement of service quality and hotel industry literature by analysing some pivotal service quality issues in Casual dining restaurants of Varanasi. To sum up, this work tends to clarify the GAP model as not only providing the managers with a clear picture of the quality of the provided service, but also helping in discovering the needs, wishes and expectations of the guests. It can be said that it helps managers in setting the criteria for the delivery of services in the hospitality industry.

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