

Customer Perception on Service Quality: An Emperical Study At Selected 3-Star Hotels in Kakinada City

Krishna Babu Sambaru*1

Assistant Professor

Department of Management Studies,

Aditya P.G College, Kakinada,

E.G.Dist,A.P-INDIA

Email:krishnababusambaru@gmail.com

Cell No:78930 54009

Dr.N.Udaya Bhaskar*2

Head and Assistant Professor

School of Management Studies,

Adi Kavi Nannaya University,

Rajamahendravarm,E.G.Dist,A.P-INDIA

Email:nudaybhaskar@yahoo.com

Cell No:9490 450 510

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify the service quality of 3-star hotels in Kakinada city using the service quality model approach. The delivery of quality service is one of the most difficult task in the service organizations which consisting of its unique characteristics i.e intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption of services. Service quality is the degree to identify the consumers' perceptions and expectations through service quality model. The providers must understand the consumer expectations and perceptions and what are the factors which influence their evaluation and satisfaction by the provided service to the consumers by the provider. This Empirical study has been used to evaluate the customers' expectations and perceptions about the quality of service. "SERVQUAL" is evaluated empirically for its usefulness in the 3-star hotels of Kakinada city. Findings of this research is based on observing the differences between the scores of expectations and perceptions of 3-star hotels by receiving the opinions from the visited customers through the questionnaire. This paper would help the hotel managers of Kakinada city and across the country who have been doing their businesses in the service organizations to understand their customers in a better way and to improvise their service quality to sustain in the market for a longer period.

Keywords: *Empirical Study, Hotels, Customer Expectations, Customer Perceptions, Service Quality*

INTRODUCTION

All service organizations are trying to provide the optimum possible and high level degree of quality services to their loyal customers but still they could not reach the customers' expectations even the customers are aware of their needs of requirements and also

demand for services. In the highly competitive hospitality industry, service sector becomes one of the most important influenced element for gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace. However, the efforts of service managers and academic researchers are directed towards understanding how customers perceived the quality service. In most the cases, service quality is opined by the customers, the definition for service quality is based on perception of customers how well a service meets their expectations by the service providers. Recent studies have shown that service delivery has changed drastically due to Globalization, information and communications technology, Tourism, Customer Tastes and Preferences are creating demand by the customers for quality of goods and services by (Mensah, 2009).

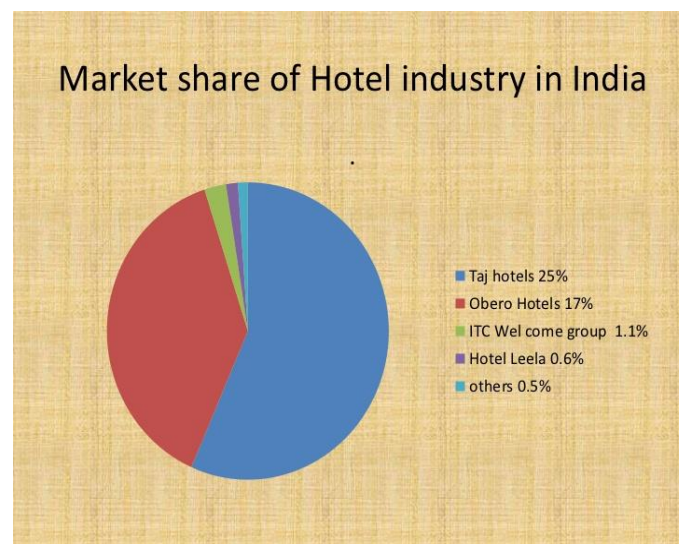


Fig: 1-Market share of Hotel industry in india

Source: compiled by secondary data (google)

India is services industry an attractive destination for tourists because of its rich heritage, which includes the famous Taj Mahal, Red Fort, various temples and caves, wildlife places, peaceful coastal area and many other famous monuments in India .

Kakinada is formerly called as Cocanada. As of 2018 sensus of india, Kakinada had 4,43,028 of which 2,22,461 were male and female were 2,20,567. Tourism in Kakinada city is one of the main contributors to the Andhra Pradesh state in India, with 11 km of long coastline. Kakinada city is one of the major tourism sectors of India, with various tourists' attractions, ranging from wildlife reserves, beaches, temples, monuments, the arts and festivals. Government of Kakinada is also developing tourism sector of Kakinada city in India. Since Kakinada city is an important tourist destination of India, it attracts a number of tourists not only the states but also the nearest countries. (Wikipedia- Tourism in Kakinada city). Thus it requires not only a good number of 3-star hotels but also good quality hotels where the tourists can stay with pleasure. Looking at the importance that Kakinada city has as

a tourist destination. The perceptions of customers towards quality service has been changing in the service sector industry in India as well as whole world irrespective of the countries.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The recent years are witnessing how the service sector faces the real problems in providing the expected services to their customers by providers. In the 21st century, Information Technology, Globalization, Customer preferences, Tastes, Tourism plays a vital role irrespective of the businesses or organizations in the market as well as those are the real problems which has arisen in the service quality and even service industry . Now a days, customers needed and wanted high level of degree of service quality by the service providers for their customers which requires delightness but not a matter of satisfaction from the providers side. In present scenario of service organizations could not provide what customers have expected the services by the provider. There is a gap between customer expectations and customer perceptions found in several service organizations through their quarterly, half yearly and yearly reports, data provided by the organizations to the government and in the market.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The service providers could not reach the customer expectations due to lack of service quality in changing arena of taste, preferences, likes and insights of the behavior of customer.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1.Are the business firms in the hospitality sector ready to face the challenging paradigm of customer perceptions towards quality services?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

However, the customer orientation towards the service quality has been changing the respective business organizations need to satisfy their customers and need to reach their customer expectations and to know the present service gaps through this study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By this present study , customers are benefited by knowing the gap between customer expectations and customer perceptions, businesses are flourished to know and identify the needs to the customers by the service providers, our national income will increase through collecting the service tax or now GST, Tourism may be increases by offering best quality services, the whole service industry will grow up by the this study, it is useful for customer satisfaction and retention ,it is useful to enhance the image of the company, establishing the

customer loyalty toward organization and also providing competitive advantage in the market to a business, by hook or crook it is a chain link of the economic development of india.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To evaluate the customer's perception of service quality of selected 3-star hotels of Kakinada city.
2. To ascertain the service gaps with respect to hotel industry in the different dimensions of service quality.

HYPOTHESIS

Ho: Hospitality sector has been responding positively in accordance with the changing paradigm of customer satisfaction in quality of service.

H₁: Hospitality sector has not been responding positively in accordance with the changing paradigm of customer satisfaction in quality of service.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

These timely operations will make the better part of the Indian economic system. It is viewed that most of the studies are at the macro level and very few of them are at the micro level with empirical studies. It is observed that most of the studies are on the role of service sector in the national level and some in the state level. In fact, there are no significant studies on the status of service quality in the present selected Kakinada city of East Godavari district in Andhra Pradesh. The East Godavari District is located in the North Coastal part of the state of Andhra Pradesh. The District boundaries are Visakhapatnam, West Godavari, Khammam Districts and Bay of Bengal. The District is known as rice bowl of Andhra Pradesh with lush paddy fields and coconut groves. It is also known as another Kerala. East Godavari, it is the Rice Granary of Andhra Pradesh, beckons tourists to have a glimpse of its rich cultural heritage. The headquarters of the East Godavari district is Kakinada. The District is a residuary portion of the old Godavari District after West Godavari District was separated in 1925. As the name of the district conveys, East Godavari District is closely associated with the river Godavari, occupying a major portion of the delta area. East Godavari district is having the area of 10,807 Sq Kms with 5 Revenue divisions, 60 Revenue mandals and 1012 Grama panchayats with a population of 4,43,028 of which 2,22,461 were male and female were 2,20,567 as per 2018 provisional census figures

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Number of service quality models can be developed by the many scholars in the literature. Parasuraman et al (1985, 1988) described that Service quality is the difference between customers expectations and evaluation of the service received. Service industries are gained through their loyal customers by influencing them (Anderson and Zeithaml, 1984).

Gronroos (1982) argued that customers are evaluating the service and compare the service what they expect and receive by them. Service quality is measured in two ways (Urbany et al, 1999): (i) evaluation of quality of service and (ii) a range of opinions through their service experience (opinions of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy). Juran (1999) said that the features of services meet customers' needs and necessities which provide and increase the levels of customer satisfaction." Thus, the service quality has been an attitude formed through received which gave our evaluation of a firm's performance (Hoffman and Bateson, 2001).



Fig: 2-Service sector GDP

Source: compiled by secondary data (google)

Hospitality services are a mix of three important components such as material products, behavior and attitude of employees and the environment (Reuland et al, 1985). Farra in 1996 found that price was the most important factor to influence by the customers in hotel industry. Juwaheer in 2004 said that we have to give the strategic importance of service quality in hotels. Davidson (2003) emphasized that there was a link between good organizational climate and the level of service quality in the hotel. Davidson (2003) told the service quality in hotels have incorporated the customer satisfaction in organizational culture and climate as well as. SERVQUAL is the best tool for measuring service quality in hotels (Fernandez, 2004). Markovic and Raspor (2010), the main dimensions of perceived service quality in hotels are reliability, empathy and competence of staff, accessibility, and 'tangibles. It is necessary to measure customer satisfaction in order to assess the service providers' performance (Molah and Jusoh, 2011). Gunaratne (2014), most important factor is predicting service quality evaluation was tangibility, followed by empathy, reliability, and responsiveness in service industry.

For this reason, we have to study and utilized the “SERVQUAL” model and to identify the gap scores in the hotel visitors i.e expectation and perception. Assuming and comparing the perceptions of the hotel visitors with actual served service quality will help the hotel managers to find the gaps and to improve their quality of services with respect to 3-star hotels of Kakinada city.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Hotel guests’ perceptions were measured with a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of the SERVQUAL model was used by Parasuraman (1988).

The questionnaire consisted of two parts .The first part was designed to capture respondents’ demographic and characteristics of travelling, which included residence, age, gender, purpose of visit, duration of staying at a hotel, level of education, and hotel category. The target population of the survey was the guests staying in few selected 3-star hotels (hotels belonging to 3 star categories only) of Kakinada city. Questionnaires were distributed in eight(8) 3-srar hotels.

The second part measured guests’ perceptions of hotel attributes using a modified SERVQUAL model. It is based on five dimensions of service quality, namely, ‘Tangibility’ (physical facilities, equipment and personnel appearance), ‘Reliability’ (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), ‘Responsiveness’ (willingness to help customers and prompt service), ‘Assurance’ (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to gain trust and confidence) and ‘Empathy’ (providing individualized attention to the customers) and it is having 24-items and 5 constructs to measure customer expectations and perceptions. Service quality perceptions were measured on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 ‘strongly agree.’

1= strongly disagree 2= Disagree 3= somewhat agree 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree.

The respective hotel managers agreed to participate in the study. Reception employees were asked to distribute and collect the filled questionnaires from the overnight staying guests. Overall 250 questionnaires were distributed to the guests by using convenience sampling method. Out of 250 questionnaires that were distributed, 194 were returned and was found to be useable, yielding a response rate of 77.6%. With this background, this study aims to determine the service quality of 3-star hotels in Kakinada city.

The profile of the sample respondents is shown in table no.1 and revealed that 58.76 percent of them were male, 50.52 percent of them were between 36-50 years old and 45.88 percent had graduate degree as educational qualifications. 44.85 percent of the respondents have an annual income of more than Rs. 8 lakhs. 66.49 per cent of the

respondents indicated that the main purpose of their visit was vacation and most of them stayed at 3-star hotels (55.67 percent), for between four and seven days (57.73 percent).

DATA ANALYSIS

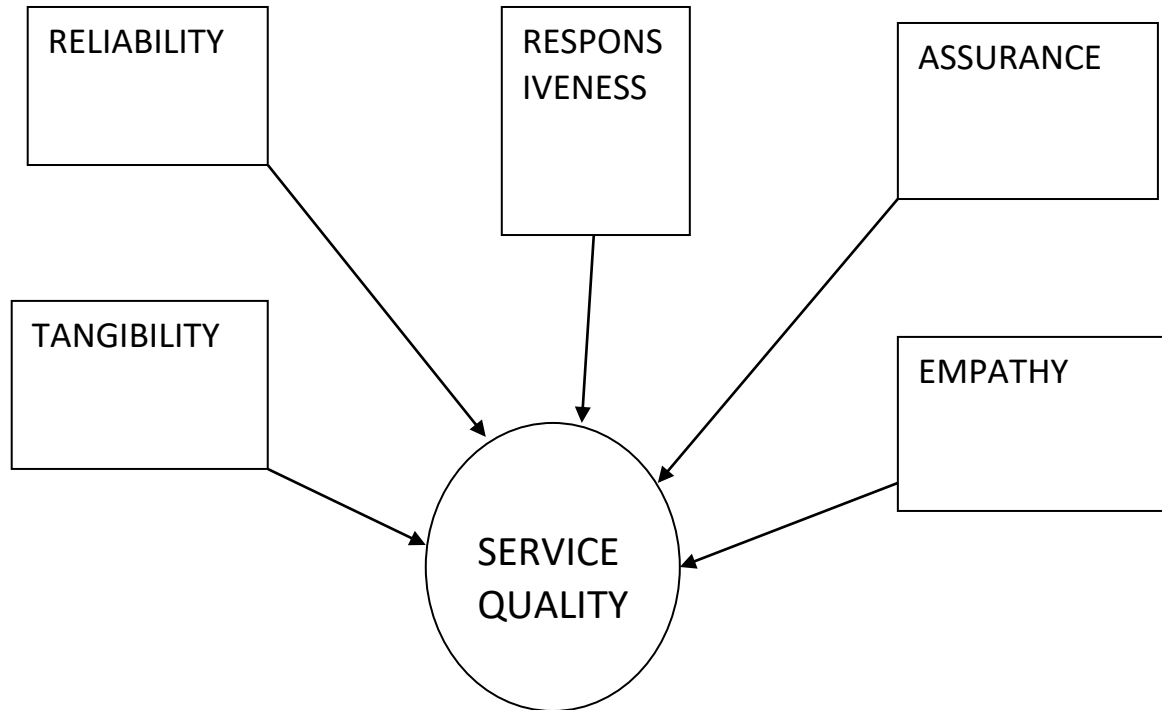


FIG: 3- RESEARCH FRAMEWORK ON THE MAIN DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY TOWARDS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table No.1. Demographic profile of Respondents

VARIABLES	CATEGORIES	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
Gender	Male	114	58.76
	Female	80	41.24
Age	18-35	40	20.62
	36-50	98	50.52
	51 and above	56	28.86
Educational Qualification	Under Graduate	32	16.49
	Graduate	89	45.88

	Post Graduate	61	31.44
	Others	12	6.19
Annual Income	<4 lakhs per annum	28	14.43
	4-8 lakhs per annum	79	40.72
	>8 lakhs per annum	87	44.85
Purpose of visit	Business/Official work	30	15.46
	Visit friends and relatives	24	12.37
	Vacation	129	66.49
	Others	11	5.67
Duration of stay at hotel	1-3 days	57	29.38
	4-7 days	112	57.73
	8 days and more	25	12.89

Expectations, Perceptions and Gap Analysis for 3-star Hotels

Table No.2. *Expectations, perceptions and gap scores of 3-star hotels.*

Attributes	Mean Expectation Score (E)	Mean Perception Score (P)	Mean Gap Score (E-P)	t-value
T1. Hotel has adequate facility and supplies.	4.233	2.969	1.264	5.26
T2. Visually appealing physical facilities.	4.108	3.112	0.996	3.80
T3. Visually appealing materials (pamphlets, statements and web-sites).	4.126	2.881	1.245	4.92
T4. Large parking area.	4.357	2.848	1.509	5.78
T5. Neat, clean and tidy hotel premises.	4.382	3.356	1.026	5.11
RL1. Performing the service	3.991	2.453	1.538	6.04

within the promised time duration.				
RL2. Solving the problems of the guests with interest.	3.886	2.679	1.207	5.34
RL3. Performing services right from the first time.	4.082	2.817	1.265	5.06
RL4. Providing service without any delays.	4.295	2.948	1.347	5.70
RL5. Providing error free service.	4.176	3.054	1.122	4.69
RL6. Guests know the exact time when the service would be performed.	3.713	2.428	1.285	5.19
RS1. Hotel staff always willing to help the guests.	3.974	2.575	1.399	5.53
RS2. Hotel staffs devote their time to answer the questions asked by guests.	3.819	2.672	1.147	4.38
RS3. Hotel staffs provide prompt service.	4.168	3.149	1.019	4.46
AS1. Hotel staffs have adequate knowledge to answer questions.	3.762	2.498	1.264	4.99
AS2. Hotel staffs' behavior instills confidence in guests.	4.059	2.934	1.125	4.78
AS3. Guests feel safe and secure during their hotel stay.	4.558	3.461	1.097	4.03
AS4. Availability of clear	3.675	2.473	1.202	4.81

information in the hotel.				
AS5. Courteous hotel staff.	4.195	3.116	1.079	4.16
EM1. Providing individual attention to guests.	3.993	2.717	1.276	5.14
EM2. Hotel staffs provide personal attention.	4.165	3.094	1.071	4.88
EM3. Convenient opening hours.	4.269	3.241	1.028	4.59
EM4. 3-star hotels have their guests' best interests at heart.	4.297	3.174	1.123	4.61
EM5. Understanding guests' specific needs.	4.071	2.997	1.074	3.97

Note: T = Tangibility; RL = Reliability; RS = Responsiveness; AS = Assurance; EM = Empathy t-test two tailed with probability < 0.05.

Table.2 presents the means for the perception and expectation items relating to the five dimensions of service quality in the SERVQUAL model. The means for expectations ranged from 3.675 (=somewhat agree) to 4.558 (=strongly agree). The lowest mean of 3.675 was in the 'Assurance' dimension on item AS4, about the availability of clear information in the hotel doesn't affect too much on the employee expectations regarding service quality of 3-star hotels. The highest expectation mean of 4.558 was on assurance item AS3 indicates that the guests give maximum importance to safety during their stay at hotel.

For perceptions the mean scores ranged from 2.428 (=disagree) to 3.461 (=somewhat agree). The lowest mean was on item RL6 of 'Reliability' which referred to the 'guests knowing the exact time when the service would be performed' which some of the respondents disagreed since according to most of the respondents in some of the services the actual service deviates from the predefined service time resulting in slight delay in service delivery. The highest mean score for perception was on item AS3 of 'Assurance' dimension indicates that the guests give maximum importance safety during their stay at hotel to which most of the guests somewhat agreed to it.

The gap score (E-P) is equal to expectation minus perception. In Table no.2, all items showed positive gap scores, which means that the expectations of the customers of the 3-star hotels on service quality items as suggested by Parasuraman et al. (1988) were higher than

their perceptions. Higher the gap score, the less desirable is the performance. The t-statistics were also calculated to test for significant difference between expectations and perceptions. All the gap scores were statistically significant at 5% probability level. All the items recorded gap scores of which suggest that the hotels need to attend to all the dimensions and their items. However, in terms of magnitude of the gap scores, it was found that the gap scores ranged from 0.996 to 1.538.

The lowest gap score of 0.996 was for item T2 (i.e. visually appealing physical facilities) in the ‘Tangibility’ dimension followed by gap score of 1.019 which was for item RS3 of ‘Responsiveness’ dimension which stated that hotel staffs provide prompt service to the customers. This signifies that these are some of the areas where the 3-star hotels are doing relatively well from customer’s perspective and the hotels should uphold what they are doing to sustain quality service delivery.

The highest gap score of 1.538 was for item RL1 of ‘Reliability’ dimension (i.e. performing the service within the promised time duration) followed by the gap score of 1.509 for item T4 of ‘Tangibility’ dimension which indicated the parking space near the 3-star hotel. According to some of the respondents, there are not enough parking spaces near the 3-star hotel. In short these are some of the service gaps which the hotels should address to ensure that the customers are satisfied with the quality service delivery in the hotel industry.

Factor Analysis on Gap Scores

In order to explore and recognize the factors that have the most effect on customer perceptions, factor analysis was conducted on the gap scores of the 24 items in the questionnaire. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.793 and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.05$, indicating that the data is appropriate for factor analysis.

Table No.3. Results of Factor analyses of gap scores

Attributes	Factor loadings				
	Tangibility	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
T1. Hotel has adequate facility and supplies.	0.741				
T2. Visually appealing physical facilities.	0.709				
T3. Visually appealing	0.692				

materials (pamphlets, statements and web-sites).					
T4. Large parking area.	0.727				
T5. Neat, clean and tidy hotel premises.	0.776				
RL1. Performing the service within the promised time duration.		0.711			
RL2. Solving the problems of the guests with interest.		0.585			
RL3. Performing services right from the first time.		0.652			
RL4. Providing service without any delays.		0.661			
RL5. Providing error free service.		0.635			
RL6. Guests know the exact time when the service would be performed.		0.692			
RS1. Hotel staff always willing to help the guests.			0.571		
RS2. Hotel staffs devote their time to answer the questions asked by guests.			0.586		
RS3. Hotel staffs provide prompt service.			0.558		
AS1. Hotel staffs have				0.562	

adequate knowledge to answer questions.					
AS2. Hotel staffs' behavior instills confidence in guests.				0.725	
AS3. Guests feel safe and secure during their hotel stay.				0.601	
AS4. Availability of clear information in the hotel.				0.547	
AS5. Courteous hotel staff.				0.534	
EM1. Providing individual attention to guests.					0.691
EM2. Hotel staffs provide personal attention.					0.628
EM3. Convenient opening hours.					0.605
EM4. 3-star hotels have their guests' best interests at heart.					0.579
EM5. Understanding guests' specific needs.					0.511
Eigen value	5.142	4.373	3.506	2.674	2.018
Variance extracted %	21.43	18.22	14.61	11.14	8.41
Total Variance extracted %	21.43+18.22+14.61+11.14+8.41=73.81				
Cronbach's alpha	0.854	0.816	0.781	0.746	0.872
Number of items	5	6	3	5	5

The exploratory factor analysis extracted five factors, which accounted for 73.81% of variance in the data. The first factor ('Tangibility') contains most of the items and explains most of the variance (21.43%). Thus, hotel service tangibility is an important determinant of perceived service quality.

Most of the factor loadings were greater than 0.60, implying a reasonable high correlation between extracted factors and their individual items. All factors with Eigen values were greater than 1.0 and factor loadings are greater than 0.5. So all the Eigen values and factor loadings were considered. The results of the reliability analysis showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the extracted factors ranged from 0.746 to 0.872. That is well above the minimum value of 0.60, which is considered acceptable as an indication of scale reliability. Thus, these values suggest good internal consistency of the factors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of hotel services are the degree to which guests find out various hotel attributes in enhancing their satisfaction levels with the hotel staying. In this study, it was revealed that the main dimensions of perceived service quality in hotels were found to be 'tangibility' which explained 21.43% of the variance, 'reliability' which explained 18.22% of the variance and 'responsiveness' which explained 14.61% of the variance followed by 'assurance' (11.14% of variance explained) and 'empathy' (8.41% of variance explained).

Hence, the studies conducted in the hotel sector has identified several outcomes with interpretation of several behavioral dimensions in the guests to assess perceived hotel service quality. Akan (1995) reported a seven-dimension structure, as 'courtesy and competence of the personnel,' 'communications and transactions,' 'tangibles,' 'knowing and understanding the customer,' 'accuracy and speed of service,' 'solutions to problems' and 'accuracy of hotel reservations.' Wong Ooi Mei et al. (1999) identified 'employees,' 'tangibles' and 'reliability' as key dimensions of service quality in the hospitality industry. So with respect to the analysis and interpretation made in this study, it is recommended that all the dimensions need to pay attention towards all the service quality dimensions for customer expectations and customer perceptions. Several suggestions and recommendations were given in these contexts which were as follows:-

1. The services must be reached within the promised (stipulated) time duration.
2. The 3-star hotels have to occupy more space for the parking space.
3. Services must be delivered without any late (delay) to the visitors who have come and stay.
4. Individual attention must be required for guests since the hotel belong to the 3-star category.
5. The hotel managers must stress on empathy to create loyalty towards customers.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, knowing how consumers perceive service quality and able to measure service quality can help the management of 3-star hotel service. Using the service quality model to assess service quality enables management to better understand the various dimensions and how they affect on service quality and customer satisfaction. The concept of measuring the difference between expectations and perceptions in the form of the SERVQUAL gap score proved very useful for assessing levels of service quality. Parasuraman argued that, with minor modification, service quality can be adapted to any service organization. This study has conducted a survey in selected 3-star hotels in Kakinada city by using five service quality dimensions that represent the evaluative criteria which guests use to assess service quality of 3-star hotels. It is necessary to continuously measure customer satisfaction in order to assess the service providers' performance. This paper has helped better understanding of these performance drivers' nature that can be used by hotel managers in a practical sense. Service organizations can achieve a strong reputation for quality service only when they consistently meet customer service expectations. Having knowledge about these areas can help managers to improvise their service quality in their businesses.

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