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Understanding customer satisfaction through service quality in a Sri Lankan hotel

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in a 30 year old Sri-Lanka hotel based on Hilton Colombo as the case study. The research is a reaction to the intensive competitiveness in the luxury hotel industry in the country and the necessity to learn what service specificities guests value the most. I applied a quantitative and descriptive design, which required gathering 164 online guest reviews on major travel sites at the end of 2025 and analyzing them through the SERVQUAL model tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. I was given the opportunity to visualize the pattern in the form of the evaluations by coding each review on the presence and the strength of these dimensions and compare them with its overall star rating.

The results indicate that the overall guest satisfaction is clearly good portion of the visitors rated their stay as good or very good. The most prominent dimensions are reliability and assurance that imply that the guests are confident that the hotel can provide what is promised and aware of the employees as professional and skillful employees, and the tangibles are also doing well. The responsiveness and empathy are significantly lower, and it can be indicated that speed of the service and personal warmth are not always equally good as the other quality dimensions. Therefore, Hilton Colombo has a good and reliable basic service, but it should secure quick and personal contact to go beyond fulfillments into perfect experiences. I would suggest to keep protect the current advantages, enhancing handling time, enhancing the level of empathy towards the staff, and employing online reviews as a continuous management instrument.

Keywords: Service quality, Customer satisfaction, SERVQUAL model, Luxury hotels, Online guest reviews

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1 INTRODUCTION

The world hospitality sector has experienced an incredible transformation in the past few decades and as a key of competitive advantage and customer satisfaction the quality of service companies have transformed. In a world where travellers have never had more access to information and options than they do now, hotels need to go above and beyond guest expectations to guarantee that they will be loyal and that they make favourable recommendations to others. Such a situation is especially acute in the segment of luxury hotels, where guests pay high prices and, as a result, have higher expectations of services (Anwar et al., 2024.)

Sri Lanka is a top tourist destination that has witnessed significant growth in the tourism market. The blend of natural beauty, heritage and strategic location provided by the island nation has led to large investments in luxury hospitality facilities. The most successful of these developments is the five star hotels in Sri Lanka, especially those that services international tourism such as those of Hilton, which assure international and domestic clients of the finest service standards (Munasinghe et al., 2020). Hilton Hotel chain was selected for this study because it is a highly recognized hotel brand in Sri Lanka as well as internationally. Since it has international value, Hilton's services need to be provided according to the corresponding standards and adapted to local cultures. The Hilton Colombo Hotel provides a good environment to examine how service quality operates in a developing tourist destination, adapting to these different standards.

There is however, because of this increase in luxury accommodations need to know where in the dimensions of service quality, the aspect that impact more on customer satisfaction comes in play within the Sri Lankan context. Cultural characteristics, regional practices of service delivery, as well as the

expectations of various foreign customer groups, provide a specific setting, which should be investigated on a systematic basis. These dynamics may be critical because learning and appreciating dynamics enables organizational management to streamline processes to channel resources needed to maximize guest experiences and improve competitive standing in a relatively saturated market (Anwar et al., 2024).

The SERVQUAL model is the model created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) giving an in depth framework of measuring service quality under five different dimensions known as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. This model is highly tested and confirmed in numerous service sectors throughout the world, but there are limited investigations on the application of this model in Sri Lankan luxury hotels. Investigating the role of these dimensions in generating customer satisfaction in this setting, the given research would complement an essential gap within the body of literature on management in hospitality and offer practical implications to the industry representatives (Chatterjee et al., 2022). In this research, 150-200 online reviews submitted by guests were expected and 164 reviews were filtered, using a quantitative and descriptive approach. The SERVQUAL model is analysed through online reviews to study the trends between overall customer satisfaction and service quality.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM, AIM AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Research problem

The competition in the luxury hotel industry in Sri Lanka is accelerating due to the presence of both the established international chains as well as the new emerging boutique hotels. Whereas hotels are placing significant investment in infrastructure, amenities, and training of staff, little empirical knowledge exists about what aspects of service quality contribute to customer satisfaction

to the greatest extent. The knowledge gap also means that hotel managers cannot make sound decisions on resource allocation and priorities on service improvement. Also, the multicultural tourist market of Sri Lanka makes it more difficult, because tourists of various cultural origin might value service qualities in different ways (Karunaratne & Jayawardena, 2011; Thivanka & Ba, 2020).

Without a systematic study defining the link between given dimensions of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction, hotels assume the risk of allocating resources in areas of service that yield a little payoff to the resorts at the expense of areas of service that are important on matters of customer satisfaction and loyalty. The given research problem is especially urgent in the five-star hotels that do not simply expect the excellence of the services provided but establish the demand of this kind of care as one of the elements of the value offer (Nagendrakumar & Rathnayake, 2022; Prakash et al., 2016).

2.2 Research aim

The main aim of the study would be to determine the impact of five dimensions of SERVQUAL namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy on customer satisfaction within five-star hotels operating in Sri Lanka, but specifically Hilton hotels. This exploration will determine the dimensions that have the greatest impact on total guest satisfaction and thus allows service enhancement programs that are evidence-based (Setiono & Hidayat, 2022).

2.3 Research objectives

To evaluate how the five SERVQUAL dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) influence customer satisfaction in Sri Lankan five-star hotel, Hilton.

Research Questions:

- How do the five SERVQUAL dimensions individually affect customer satisfaction?

- Which dimension of service quality has the strongest impact on customer satisfaction?

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is not that easy to get your hands around service quality in hotels. This is unlike purchasing a single piece of equipment as guests are literally purchasing an experience that changes by the time and server who delivers it to guests. This chapter establishes the theoretical framework of how customer satisfaction at Hilton is driven by service quality. This study is necessitated by the fact that the luxury hotels in Sri Lanka have to work in a niche environment where they are forced to strike a balance between international branding demands and the local hospitality demands. In this chapter start by finding out what service quality actually entails in the tourism and hospitality business, then get into the SERVQUAL model, which is the one that is primarily applied here. Then gloss over the customer satisfaction theories to understand what the customers think of their stay. Lastly, examine past researches on luxury hotels to identify what has been covered and what has not to know, particularly in Sri Lanka where a very limited number of studies have made use of SERVQUAL.

3.1 Service quality in tourism and hospitality

One of the most important success factors of the hotels is service quality, and nobody has been able to come up with a clear definition or measurement of service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988) framed it as the difference between the expectation and the experience of the customers and this was the flagship of quality measurement in service world. What is interesting is that there are four quirks of hospitality that make it unlike manufactured goods, namely intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability (Zeithaml et al.,

2010). These quirks give rise to some unique management headache which directly influences the way guests perceive their stays at the hotels.

The concept that anyone cannot observe, feel, or sample a service prior to purchasing it is intangible, and therefore, people rely on hints such as the appearance of the personnel, the tidiness of the establishment, and online reviews to arrange their expectations (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). In the case of Hilton Colombo, this implies that clients have formed an image of the hotel prior to getting in the lobby based on the Hilton brand, photos on the site, and comments on TripAdvisor. When the actual experience does not work out, guests will be disappointed regardless of the objectivity of the good service. That is a huge challenge in Sri Lanka where the foreign tourists have very high expectations of Hilton properties in other countries and the locals, may have a different contentment of luxury.

The inseparability implies that the service is produced and consumed simultaneously, thus guests experience the service that is in progress, and the staff is present on the spot, as the service is being done (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). It is impossible to take a snapshot of a hotel room and correct a mistake later, when the front-desk attendant is rude during check-in, the bad impression is made immediately and cannot be erased, because the guest will see it. This is why training, and regularity will never be negotiable in the case that a hotel is interested in maintaining its quality.

Heterogeneity implies that it is possible to have variations in service since humans give it, you will hardly get the same experience one night to another even when you are in the same room (Zeithaml et al., 2010). One night his front-desk is pleasant to you, the next he is embarrassed. That inconsistency is a problem in Sri Lanka where one can find a property that is extremely service-oriented and a property where the service culture and training is horrendous. Hilton also attempts to make everything uniform with the use of procedures, yet human diversity makes the experiences not to be exactly similar.

Perishability means that you cannot store a service, you are getting a room empty, and you are losing the revenue that you will never see again (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011). This pressure may lure hotels to overbook or reduce staff when slow causing risk to quality of service. Handling perishability and at the same time providing high quality requires proper planning and people budgeting such that you do not cut corners to save money at the expense of the guest. The literature demonstrates that service quality is the motivator of such important consequences as customer satisfaction, repeat patronage, word-of-mouth, and readiness to pay high-end prices (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Service quality in the luxury hotels is not merely the neat room or the functional Wi-Fi connection. It also includes emotional touches and the experience in general (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). Therefore, to succeed in Hilton Colombo, he has to do better than to meet the bare minimum, he has to create the moments to remember, which customers will share with others.

Ali et al. (2016) discovered that cultural expectations of warmth, respect and interpersonal connection determine the relationship between service quality and satisfaction in the context of Asian hospitality. That perfectly fits Hilton Colombo since the Sri Lankan culture values the hospitality culture of Ayubowan which means warm welcome and personal care. The question is: do international hotel standards in which the focus is on efficiency remain relevant when it comes to Sri Lankan and Asian guests who want the experience to be more relational? I would say that hotels in Sri Lanka should be glowing in terms of international standards of service received by foreign visitors and traditional hospitality of locals and other regional visitors.

3.2 SERVQUAL model and applications

Still, the SERVQUAL model, introduced by Parasuraman et al. (1988) remains the model of choice in monitoring the quality of service in most industries, including the hospitality sector. It also had ten dimensions initially, but it was subsequently reduced to five fundamental categories including tangibles,

reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1991). The best thing about SERVQUAL is that it is able to capture the entire physical and human side of a service encounter, demonstrating that quality is not mono-bullseyed. In my Hilton Colombo work, SERVQUAL provides a convenient method to identify which of the dimensions is the strongest to satisfy customers in a Sri Lankan luxury environment.

SERVQUAL considers service quality as the difference between the expectations and perceptions of customers in every dimension (Parasuraman et al., 1988). When the perceptions exceed expectations, guests regard high quality and become satisfied. Being over expectation and under-perception will make them believe that service is bad and get bump in the road. Such gap attitude implies that the possible way of enhancing perceived quality is either by improving actual service or by raising the expectations to be more realistic. In the case of Hilton, it means to be two fold: to keep the promise of the hotel and to form the expectations of guests through marketing, brand positioning, and previous stays.

The tangibles include such things as facilities, equipment, personnel look-and-feel and promotion materials (Parasuraman et al., 1991). This in the case of hotels includes hotel room furnishings, lobby design, restaurant design, technology equipment, hygiene and coats. In the case of Hilton Colombo, tangible excellence plays a significant role since it demonstrates the high status of the brand and the price worthiness. However, the studies in the Asian luxury hotels indicate that beyond a specific limit, additional material upgrades bring less happiness than the human service (Ali et al., 2016). Hilton so should maintain its rooms and lobby to the best, but people are the ones who will give true satisfaction and not things.

Reliability is the aspect of promise keeping that is always accurate and always true (Parasuraman et al., 1988). That includes such aspects as proper booking information, consistent housekeeping, proper bills, punctual service maintenance, and fulfilment of special requests. According to Parasuraman et al. (1991), reliability is the most important dimension as it responds whether to

trust the hotel. Trust is lost quickly when dependability fails, as in the case of a room being wrong or a bill being wrong. Nagendrakumar and Rathnayake (2022) conducted the research in Sri Lanka. The best predictor of satisfaction in 4 and 5 star hotels is found to be the reliability sounding. It implies that Hilton has to map all the touchpoints, train employees, and secure quality controls. The reliability is likely to be more important as the foreign travellers would trust the hotel to provide them with safety, transportation, and correct services.

Responsiveness refers to the readiness of staff to be fast and responsive (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It is the speed of your reaction and solving problems, the adjustment to needs that are coming without red tape. According to Zeithaml et al., (2006) responsiveness informs customers that time matters to the organisation and empowers the employees. In the case of Hilton, it might be reflected in a fast and convenient room service, immediate maintenance, or hassle free check in (Torres & Kline, 2013). The problem in Sri Lankan culture is the need not to have hierarchies that hinder the frontline decision. In the case of Hilton, empowering front line employees, to make decisions on their feet with reduced references to their superiors is essential, as it enhances training and organisational culture.

Assurance refers to the knowledge, courtesy and confidence of the staff on how they present themselves (Parasuraman et al., 1991). It is all the more important when guests are forced with uncertainty, as it is in the case of foreign visitors in a new country. Surety is a combination of ability (skills, knowledge) and etiquette (politeness, respect) (Zeithaml et al., 2010). Hilton demonstrates confidence by the professional behaviour of its staff, multilingualism, obvious safety precautions, and dependable information about services and local attractions. In Sri Lanka where lots of foreign tourists might be concerned about safety or health, assurance will be a trust giver. Al-Ababneh (2013) perceived assurance greatly influenced satisfaction in the Middle East luxury hotels. In the case of Hilton, the constant training process, both hard and soft skills, and cultural and language awareness, will assist the staff to deal with diverse guests in a competent manner.

Giving personalised treatment and demonstrating that you understand what the guest needs is what empathy is (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This dimension transforms an ordinary purchase into a pleasant experience. According to Mohsin and Lockyer (2010), the empathy factor in luxury hotels was personal greetings, recalling preferences, foreseeing what needs before being mentioned and paying sincere attention. In the case of Hilton, empathy may be recalling the name of a veteran guest, taking the initiative to respond to dietary needs or even assisting travellers who appear lost. Empathy in an Asian family-oriented setting is enormous due to the importance of warmth and relationships in the given structure (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003). The Ayubowan hospitality philosophy of Sri Lanka emphasizes respect, warmth, and attention to the individual, which can suggest that empathy is the dimension of the Sri Lankan culture most culturally potent in terms of SERVQUAL. I believe empathy will soar greater in predicting satisfaction within Hilton than the tangibles or even reliability since the local vibe heavily relies on personal connection.

SERVQUAL usually applies two surveys, namely, what was anticipated by the guests before coming to the hotel, and what they actually received. This results in a gap score (expectation-perception). However, only perception is provided about what happen online in reviews. Tourists not often write about how they expected to receive and received instead.

This research applies perception only SERVQUAL. You receive good or bad service feelings on your reviews, Room dirty because of low tangibles perception, Staff was fast because of high responsiveness perception. Perception is met when positive words are used. There are negative gaps that are complained about. This is equivalent to Expectancy Theory.

Table 1 Why reviews work for SERVQUAL

Normal SERVQUAL	This Study Ver- sion	Why OK
Survey: Expect + Per- ception	Reviews: Percep- tion only	Reviews show good/bad feelings
Gap = E - P	No gap score	Complaints = bad gap any- way
Needs 100s surveys	Uses 164 real re- views	Cheaper, real guest words

3.3 Customer satisfaction theories

Customer satisfaction refers simply to the way people feel following a service, it is a psychological state that arises as a result of analyzing the experience (Oliver, 1980). Understanding how the satisfaction judgments are formed by the guests is important in that it determines repeat stays, word of mouth, price tolerance, and brand loyalty (Zeithaml et al., 2010). In case of Hilton Colombo, understanding the source of satisfaction will assist the hotel to develop superior services and ensure that resources are used wisely. Expectancy -Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) is the most popular theory in explaining the formation of satisfaction and has been experimented on by a number of other researchers in the hospitality industry.

Oliver (1980) introduced Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) that states that satisfaction is based on the comparison of the real occurrence with expectations. When the hotel performs more or less better than anticipated, then you receive positive disconfirmation that, normally, follows with high satisfaction and perhaps delight. When it only satisfies expectations, then you receive neutral feedback and mediocre satisfaction. When it is smaller than you thought, the bad disconfirmation will cause you dissatisfaction and perhaps complaints or negative reviews. Ekinci et al. (2008). The latter was confirmed in EDT in

hotels and indicated that disconfirmation indeed predicts satisfaction more than performance by itself.

The best thing about EDT in the context of luxury hotels is that it claims that the sole determinant of satisfaction is the raw quality not the performance compared to what was anticipated (Torres & Kline, 2013). In the case of Hilton Colombo, it is important since customers enter the premises with an already developed hype based on the Hilton brand name, marketing, online reviews, word of mouth, and past experiences in other Hilton hotels. Foreign visitors who currently occupy Hilton Colombo could be anticipating such like services as they would at the Hiltons in their home country, and when the local experience seems to be poorer than that, it is a negative disconfirmation that negatively affects satisfaction. Conversely, the domestic guests or first time luxury users may not be as high-end in their expectations and therefore the same service may actually result in positive disconfirmation and increased satisfaction to the two groups.

Global hotel brands in emerging markets such as Sri Lanka face a huge challenge of this expectation dynamic. In the case Hilton positions all its properties as having the same level of luxurious services, yet the Sri Lankan conditions (labor, infrastructure, supply chains) cannot afford the level of service that guests experience in the developed countries, negative disconfirmation is a near certainty among the visitors who happened to live in any other region. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) maintained that the strategy that is most appropriate is to be realistic in the marketing expectations and attempt to surpass these expectations through the actual service delivery. In the case of Hilton Colombo, it could involve the focus on the distinctly Sri Lankan hospitality and cultural experiences rather than struggling to match the standardized service metrics that are difficult to reach due to resource constraints.

EDT further elaborates the fact that service quality and satisfaction are different concepts despite level of association (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). High quality of the service does not necessarily guarantee the happiness of the guests in case they are talked too much about, and the real performance is worse

than it should be. Conversely, average service may be content when the expectations were made low and achievable. Oliver et al. (1997) introduced the concept of delight when performance actually exceeds expectations that it leads one to feel more than normal satisfaction. Such delight may be a necessity to luxury hotels such as Hilton Colombo, where the market is highly competitive, and clients are highly savvy, it can lead to loyalty and positive word-of-mouth that can justify higher prices.

I am delighted by the fact that expectations are influenced by cultural background in EDT in Sri Lanka. Their Asian guests, including Sri Lankan, may have different expectations that are pegged to a cultural expectation of warmth, respect and personal connection, whereas Western guests may be efficiency, professionalism and functional reliability oriented. Thus, the same quality of service at the Hilton Colombo might cause various disconfirmation consequences and satisfaction rates based on the nationality of the guest. My personal opinion is that the hotel with a mixed audience either has to serve the groups of people representing different cultures with specific attention, or it must attempt to satisfy all the expectations, which is a resource intensive approach, yet it can be required of a high end brand.

3.4 Previous studies in luxury hotels

Case studies that employed SERVQUAL in luxury hotels have reported both positive and negative findings as to what dimension influences satisfaction the most and hence context is important (Mohsin and Lockyer, 2010). The awareness of such patterns will allow one to conjecture on what Hilton Colombo will discover and what will become unexpected. According to Saleh and Ryan (1991), in Europe, the highest ranked items were tangibles and reliability, which can be adapted to the preferences of guests desiring to see great physical facilities and reliable service. However, in Asian studies, empathy and responsiveness were found to be more important than tangibles (Ali et al., 2016). That demonstrates that culture is modifiable that influences most in overall satisfaction about service dimensions.

In the Middle East, studies emphasized assurance and reliability as major influences, with the guests selecting the staff professionalism and reliable providing over emotional and physical settings (Al-Ababneh, 2017). However, Indian studies made empathy the highest dimension since guests appreciate a personal approach and true care (Torres and Kline, 2013). Malaysian studies also supported the empathy and responsiveness, as opposed to tangibles, which mirrored the tendency of Asian situations to value relational quality more than the physical location (Mohsin and Lockyer, 2010). In the case of Hilton Colombo an Asian hotel, it may be more productive to invest in the training of the staff to be more emphatic, responsive, and assuring than investing in the fancy renovations, which we should also test.

Very little research has been done on Sri Lankan specific, so we have piece-meal evidence. Umasuthan et al. (2017) examined four and five star hotels in Sri Lanka and detected that tangibles and reliability were the most significant predictors which point that physical facilities and reliable services remain important. However, that research did not target global luxury brands such as Hilton, so it is not clear whether the results are applicable to the properties with the global brand standards. Nagendrakumar and Rathnayake (2022) has analysed domestic tourists and discovered empathy to be most closely associated with repeat stays, where customers are interested in being treated with warm and personal attention according to local hospitality traditions.

I am interested in the seeming mismatch between the two Sri Lankan studies. Umasuthan et al. (2017) refer to tangibles and reliability, whereas Nagendrakumar and Rathnayake (2022) attach importance to empathy. It could be attributed to the differences in samples (international and domestic tourists) or to the types of hotels (mid tier and luxe). In the case of Hilton Colombo that operates with international and domestic customers, this indicates that segmentation could be relevant, international travellers seek reliability and tangibles to assure of international quality, and domestic customers seek empathy and responsiveness. In this scenario therefore, Hilton Colombo must be

outstanding in every aspect in order to capture the two markets, and that is a challenging operational task but a necessity to remain in the luxury segment. One of the main gaps in the current body of literature is that it did not focus on more recent studies that would zoom in on the drivers of service quality at the international luxury brands, which are active in Sri Lanka (Nagendrakumar and Rathnayake, 2022). Those studies revolve around mid tier or home based brands and it is unclear whether all the findings are applicable to a Hilton property that has to balance both global standards and local adjustments. Moreover, the post pandemic research is lacking now guests are much more concerned with safety, hygiene, flexibility, and online delivery of services. The pandemic disrupted the game, and the Sri Lankan hospitality research is yet to catch the disease.

Such shortcomings of methods complete the picture. Most of the studies employed convenience sampling only guests who happened to be there during the data sampling time hence the sample may not represent business travelers, foreign tourists or returning customers. Small samples hamper detecting the small effects or interaction terms. The number of studies that tested such moderators as the guest nationality, purpose of travel, or length of stay that might influence the quality satisfaction relationship was very limited. Good research would employ a systematic sampling and a bigger pool to provide more weight to the findings.

I believe that this study of Hilton Colombo would occupy a significant gap. It explores and excavates a global luxury brand in Sri Lanka with SERVQUAL - an existing gap in current literature. Understanding what the most important dimensions of service are in this particular property will provide practical understanding to the Hilton managers and will further our theoretical knowledge on service quality in the emerging luxury hotels in the market. Also, addressing this issue immediately after the pandemic allows the research to capture the way in which the expectations and priorities of guests changed after 2020.

3.5 Synthesis

The chapter provide a comprehensive analysis of service quality and customer satisfaction theories as applied to Hilton Hotel Colombo, Sri Lanka, highlighting the complex dynamics of operating a global luxury hotel brand in a local context.

Service quality is considered to be the key to success in hospitality and is challenged by the elements of Intangibility, Inseparability, Heterogeneity, and Perishability. In the case of Hilton Colombo, a hotel with a high brand image, its guests have high expectations, especially international guests, who expect services in line with global standards, which determines the consistency and quality of the services provided. The cultural aspect of Sri Lanka's warmth and personal hospitality (Ayubowan) must blend with international service standards to meet diverse guest expectations effectively.

The SERVQUAL model is a valuable tool for measuring service quality in the hospitality industry and it helps Hilton measure and improve service quality by measuring its five dimensions. It includes five dimensions: Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, with tangibles and reliability being particularly important for international guests to ensure their trust and compliance. Empathy and Responsiveness are given more attention for local and Asian guests and are influenced by culture. Hilton needs to maintain excellence across all dimensions of service quality to satisfy both market segments.

Among the customer satisfaction theories, Expectancy-Disconfirmation theory (EDT) in particular emphasizes the importance of managing guest expectations. International guests come with high expectations based on the global reputation of Hilton Hotels, and failure to deliver on those expectations can lead to dissatisfaction. Local guests, on the other hand, can be more satisfied with culturally diverse hospitality experiences. The challenge for Hilton Colombo is to balance marketing promises with exceptional service, including a distinctive Sri Lankan experience that is unique to its hotel, and to meet guest expectations.

Previous studies on service quality have shown that hotels in Asian countries often prioritize empathy and responsiveness over physical things, while those in foreign or Western countries focus more on amenities and reliability. Findings from Sri Lanka indicate that international tourists value and value reliable and tangible qualities, while domestic tourists value empathy and warmth. It is important to focus on both of these customer segments to effectively engage and maintain the luxury status of Hilton Colombo, while maintaining excellent service.

Overall, the management of Hilton Colombo has adapted culturally and has developed an understanding of quality services, empathy and responsiveness, and trained staff who can emphasize them, operating in a consistent and reliable manner, and focusing on meeting expectations through a clear marketing plan to create a memorable experience for customers in a competitive market through customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word of mouth. This study also aims to fill the gaps and changes that have occurred in hospitality in Sri Lanka after the pandemic period, and focuses on the changing guest priorities such as safety, hygiene and flexibility that are now required for service quality and customer satisfaction. Accordingly, Hilton Colombo in Sri Lanka has to face both the expectations set by a global brand and local cultural expectations to provide a very high level of service quality.

4 RESEARCH METHODS, DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Research methods

The study employs a descriptive, and quantitative research method to examine the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in a hotel in Sri Lanka which is a luxury hotel. This approach analyse existing numbers and textual data to comprehend trends in the customer comments and satisfaction levels

that had been gathered through online platforms such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com. Such a method was selected due to the possibility to work with significant information that people have already given, which is why this research becomes feasible and relevant to discover what guests say about hotel services. The analysis by quantitative review is the most effective when the objective is to quantify satisfaction and compare the outcome of the result on various factors such as the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

This study begins with previously existing theories and concepts such as the SERVQUAL model of service quality and customer satisfaction expectations. According to these theories, the studies establish distinct theories that determine the research. The hypothesis under consideration is that the dimensions of SERVQUAL influence the customer satisfaction rates with their hotel experiences in a quantifiable way. Examples include the physical aspects of the hotel (tangibles), consistency in the services offered, or the attentive care given to the guests (empathy) which can have different effects on the satisfaction levels. The deductive approach adds structure and clarity to the study through the articulation of the hypotheses followed by search of evidence to prove or disprove the hypotheses.

The study has a positive approach that is, it is based on objective and empirical data rather than opinions. This implies that these are all based on the real reviews and ratings of the guests, not the interviews, personal thoughts and opinions. Hospitality studies that adopt the positive approach are usually applied to minimize bias and foster credibility and make the results derived on the basis of objective evidence rather than speculation or personal beliefs (Bryman, 2016).

The research question that will lead this work is as follows: How can the five SERVQUAL dimensions independently and in combination lead to customer satisfaction within Hilton Colombo? The research presupposes that the evaluation of guiding reviews in terms of SERVQUAL will help understand what

features of service will be appreciated the most and which aspects the hotel should target to reach higher satisfaction. Concisely, the methodology will make the research findings simple to interpret, practical to hotel management and relevant to researchers wishing to comprehend customer satisfaction based on the real-life evidence and solid theory.

4.2 Data collection process

Secondary data in the form of online guest reviews were used to collect necessary information in this study to comprehend the service quality and customer satisfaction in the five star hotels in Sri Lanka with emphasis on Hilton Colombo. The reviews have been collected on the extensively reputable and well-developed sites, including TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Expedia, and Google Reviews. The choices of these platforms hinge on the fact that they have a wide international coverage and credibility that will give access to actual and varied feedback on customers based on actual lodging experiences (Del Chiappa et al., 2016).

The last data set was about 150-200 reviews that would be gathered within a specific time frame during October and November 2025. Only selecting reviews from November and October is strategic because these months often represent peak or critical periods for hotel performance, such as holiday seasons or major events when customer experiences are most impactful. Focusing on these months ensures the data reflects current trends and relevant season-specific factors affecting guest satisfaction. This targeted approach provides insightful, timely analysis that can help identify immediate areas for improvement or success during key operational times. This data set of 150-200 online reviews, which was manageable and sufficient for detailed analysis. In order to increase the quality and relevance of the gathered data, specific inclusion criteria were used. These were the exclusion of any reviews that were not in English in order to be consistent in the analysis and that filtered out reviews that had less than 30 words because the feedback would not be detailed and substantial to be interpreted. These online reviews are only available

in English, and it is an internationally used language, only data in English is retrieved. This has assisted in the prevention of overly short remarks which are not complex or contextual as is the case in online review sites.

Data cleaning was done procedurally to eliminate duplicate reviews, which may be because after posting the feedback on the platforms, the customer may post it again with slight modifications. Also, any unrelated reviews like advertisements or otherwise unrelated comments had to be removed in order to keep the dataset focused as well as avoid bias that might be created by the advertisements or unrelated customer comments.

This paper used SERVQUAL model as the main analytical concept and divided guest comments into five service quality dimensions, namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy originally developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988). Systematic coding of each of the reviews was done with reference to these dimensions, and it served to analyse in a systematic way what specific dimension of service quality had affected customer satisfaction. The process of data coding and organization was done satisfactorily in Microsoft Excel, and a detailed codebook was developed to give instructions on how variables are coded and described. This ensured an assurance in the likelihood of consistency and repeatability in the treatment of the data.

The descriptive statistics was measured in order to provide the background information on the data set such as the count of reviews (n) read by each platform as well as the duration of data collection. Reporting of these statistics helps to put these statistics into perspective and to realize the nature and the size of the sample which would increase the transparency and the validity of the analysis that will follow.

To conclude, this systematic and transparent data gathering shows a believable and valid input on evaluating the effects of the SERVQUAL dimensions on guest satisfaction that offers significant information regarding the luxury hotel industry in Sri Lanka.

4.3 Data analysis

In this research, the perceptions (not comprehension gaps) will be coded by five dimensions of SERVQUAL. Guests leave what they observed/experienced and that is the reason why the scores demonstrate the perceived quality of the services. For analysis the data, quantified reviews by the guests and took the form of numbers based on the SERVQUAL service quality model. In every of the reviews, there was a general satisfaction rating of 1 to 5, and 1 indicated that a person was very dissatisfied, and 5 showed that this person was very satisfied. Then reviewed five categories in each of the reviews: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy to understand what was discussed by service guests. These were rated out of 0 to 3 with 0 to 3 indicating that the area was not mentioned at all, was mentioned weakly, clearly mentioned and mentioned very strongly.

Once all the reviews had been scored then will find the average(mean), mode and median of the five areas of service. In order to facilitate easier comparisons of these average scores I converted them into percentages of the actual highest rate (then divided the average by 3 and then multiplied it by 100). The average overall score of the satisfaction rating on the 1 to 5 scale was also calculated by me. So, in short these figures indicate the most discussed issues by the guests and the connections to their star ratings.

The analysis was descriptive and simple. To make things uncomplicated and easy to comprehend I did not engage in complicated statistics such as correlations, regressions etc. The data was organized, analysed with the assistance of the Microsoft Excel that helped to organize the review scores and calculate the averages. I have also created graphs and tables in Excel to visually demonstrate the service areas that the guests value more.

This approach provided an idea of the relationship between various elements of the service offered by the hotel and guest satisfaction according to actual reviews. It also enabled repetition of the process, then can repeat the same process on new data. Although this type of analysis does not demonstrate the

cause and effect, it allows to determine the main areas of service, which should be addressed to leave the guests happier.

This methodology can be well used in the context of secondary data such as using guest reviews and can provide a helpful input to the hotel management seeking to increase the quality of the services provided in a practical sense.

In other words, I made a codebook to assist us in labelling all the reviews in accordance with the five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. I read each of the reviews, and I would write down any of the pieces that belonged to all dimensions. In which case, I rated each dimension on 0 to 3: 0 was nothing said or negative, 1 was weakly said, 2 was strong mention, and 3 was super strong said. I used the same rules on all the reviews to ensure that another person could do the coding in the same way.

Table 2 Codebook used for review coding

Dimension	What it means in this study	Example of score 1	Example of score 3
Tangibles	Room, lobby, cleanliness, facilities	“Room was ok”	“Room and lobby were perfectly clean”
Reliability	Correct booking, bills, promises kept	“Check-in a bit slow”	“Everything worked exactly as promised”
Responsiveness	Speed of service, help when needed	“Had to wait”	“Staff helped immediately when we called”
Assurance	Staff professionalism, feeling safe/confident	“Staff polite”	“Felt completely safe and in good hands”

Empathy	Personal care, attention, warm behaviour	“Staff friendly”	“They remembered my needs and took special care”
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As a measure to ensure that the data was reliable, I subjected the same rules of coding to all the reviews and also processed a couple of the reviews on different occasions to ensure that the scores remained constant.

4.4 Ethical considerations and data management

The publicly available data were used exclusively, i.e. all reviews were found on official TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Expedia, and Google Reviews websites where users leave reviews about the product freely. This paper has chosen public online reviews of the leading travel websites only. The only information collected and analysed in an excel sheet was the review text and date with the star rating.

Since the data was not confidential, the principle of anonymization was already present, since the researchers did not target any particular reviewer, but emphasized general impressions and dimensional levels of service quality. This practice mitigated the issues of data misuse or breach.

Also, there was a referencing and citation practice that complies with high standards of academic conventions. The style used was the APA (American Psychological Association) style in order to have a consistency and accuracy in citing all sources used throughout the thesis. Special care was also taken to eliminate any inconsistency in references, ensure that all DOIs (Digital Object Identifiers) are correct, and my citations in the text appear correctly in my reference list. Such diligence in citation not only enforces the integrity of academics, but also helps the readers to find, as well as substantiate references.

5 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Overview of the data collected

The current study has analysed 164 online customer reviews that related to Hilton Colombo and were collected in three main online review platforms; Google Reviews, TripAdvisor, and Booking.com, thus covering the months of October and November 2025 that guaranteed current customer experiences and reviews.

The platforms which the 164 reviews were distributed by included the following as mentioned: the greatest number of reviews were made available by TripAdvisor which stood at 84 reviews (51.2% of the total set of reviews); Google Reviews showed 69 reviews and Booking.com came with 11 reviews. This trend highlights the high status of TripAdvisor as a reliable travel review platform and the high use of Google Reviews by travellers. The relatively small sample size of Booking.com indicates a reduced tendency of guests to make use of the latter in the period of the data collection.

Table 3 Overview of the data collected (Survey data, 2025)

Platform	Number of Reviews	Percentage
TripAdvisor	84	51.2%
Google Reviews	69	42.1%
Booking.com	11	6.7%
Total	164	100%

After process all reviews were coded and tested using SERVQUAL model which is a tool to examine service quality based on five dimensions namely, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The scores that were given to each dimension varied between 0 to 3, with 0 representing no mention, 1 representing weak mention, 2 was clear mention and 3 was very strong mention.

Furthermore, there was a general customer satisfaction rating that was on a scale between 1 and 5 with 1 implying extreme dissatisfaction and 5 extreme satisfaction. This method of grading helped to identify systematically the service quality dimensions, which have the greatest impact in customer satisfaction at Hilton Colombo.

5.2 Scoring result of SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction

The section establishes the scoring results of overall customer satisfaction and five dimensions of SERVQUAL, based on a sample of 164 reviews of Hilton Colombo. It includes analysis of mean, median, and mode thus it will take part in the variability of each variable.

Table 4 Scoring results for overall satisfaction and SERVQUAL dimensions (n = 164)

Variable	Mean	Median	Mode	Percentage (%)
Overall Satisfaction	3.86	4.0	5.0	77.20%
Tangibles	2.18	2.0	3.0	72.67%
Reliability	2.38	2.0	3.0	79.33%
Responsiveness	1.88	2.0	2.0	62.67%
Assurance	2.32	2.0	3.0	77.33%
Empathy	1.86	2.0	2.0	62.00%

The overall satisfaction level among guests of Hilton Colombo was found to be positive as the mean overall satisfaction score of the guests was 3.86 on a scale of 5, which corresponds to 77.20%. The mid-range score of 4.0 demonstrates that the tendency of the responses was conducted in the middle. A mode of 5.0 indicates that the best possible rating was the most frequent and a good amount of guests had perfect level of satisfaction.

The tangibles dimension consisting of physical facilities, room quality, cleanliness, and decorative value had a mean score of 2.18, which is considered to be 72.67% when picked out of 3 or rated. This implies that visitors tended to view and enjoy the material features of the hotel. The median of 2.0 and a mode of 3.0 suggest that physical features had a high frequency of being mentioned in review texts, but it did not always receive the top rating.

The best mean of 2.38 out of 3 points, or 79.33%, was realized in reliability, which is associated with promise keeping and availability of uniformity in services of the hotel. This means that the reliability of service at Hilton was highly ranked by the clients. The median of 2.0 and the mode of 3.0 both emphasize the fact that the reliability is an attribute that was commonly mentioned in reviews.

The second-lowest dimension score is the responsiveness with staff willingness to help and speed of service with a mean of 1.88 out of 3 or 62.67% which is also low at 62.67%. A median 2.0 and a mode of 2.0 indicate that there is a medium level of mention in reviews. This relatively lower score call that, however, in general the staff were useful, there can be improvements in velocity and efficiency of service delivery.

Assurance which encompasses professional behaviour, knowledgeability of the staff and trustworthiness achieved a mean of 2.32 out of 3 the same as and equivalent of 77.33%. This good outcome shows that customers were confident in and valued professionalism of the work of the hotel staff. The combination of a median and 2.0 and a 3.0 mode shows that professionalism and courtesy on the part of the staff was a strong point raised in many reviews.

Empathy with personalized attention, warmth, and concern about the guests scored the least at 62%. The median of 2.0 and the mode of 2.0 indicate that empathy was mentioned in the reviews but the importance of empathy was not so emphasized compared to other dimensions. The low score was relatively low and indicates that staff relations were professional with the guests

potentially needing a higher level of individualized and warm relations to the needs of the guests.

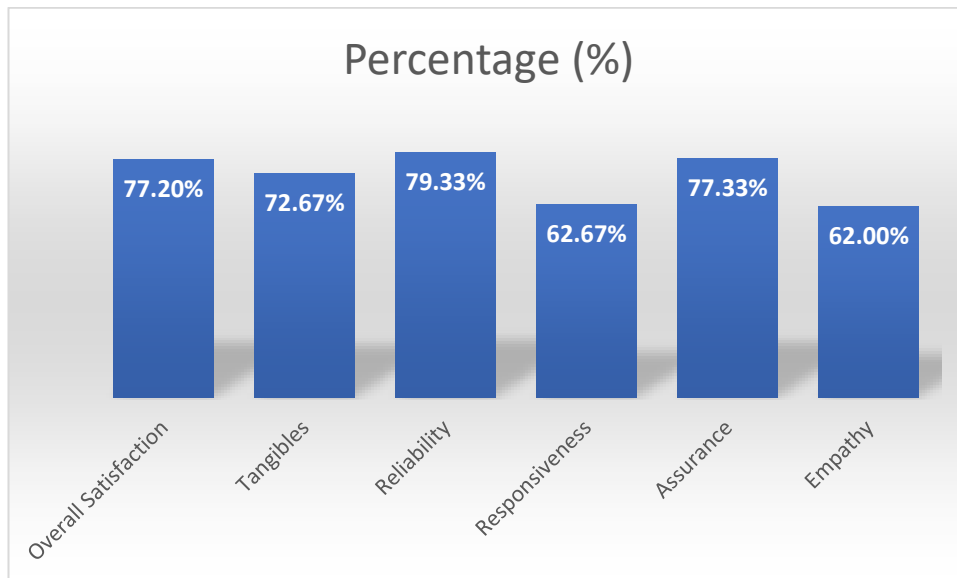


Table 5 Percentages of each variables (Survey data,2025)

Overall, in Hilton Colombo, the level of overall satisfaction was positive (77.20%). Reliability was the strongest service dimension (79.33%), then Assurance (77.33%), and Tangibles (72.67%). Comparatively lower scores were observed in Responsiveness and Empathy (62.67% and 62.00% respectively) and indicate where to focus on the services to service improvements. The standard deviations are usually low on all dimensions which means that there are similar trends of guest experiences.

5.3 Distribution of scores and guest satisfaction levels with SERVQUAL

The dimensions of SERVQUAL took the code of 0 to 3. A score of 0 is when the dimension was not incorporated in the review, 1 when it was incorporated in the review with a weak mentioned, 2 strong mentioned, and 3 strongly mentioned. Tables indicated frequency of each score to occur on the five service quality dimensions.

Table 6 Distribution of tangibles scores (n = 164)

Score	Meaning	Count	Percentage
3	Very strongly mentioned	80	48.78%
2	Clearly mentioned	46	28.05%
1	Weakly mentioned	28	17.07%
0	Not mentioned	10	6.10%

Almost fifty percent of the guests have indicated the physical features of the hotel as very strong, and a quarter of guests stated that they are clearly mentioned. Few reviews disregarded tangibles. It indicates that rooms, facilities, and overall look formed good speaking points and they were fairly viewed in a positive light.

Table 7 Distribution of reliability scores (n = 164)

Score	Meaning	Count	Percentage
3	Very strongly mentioned	88	53.65%
2	Clearly mentioned	28	17.07%
1	Weakly mentioned	25	15.24%
0	Not mentioned	23	14.02%

The most mentioned dimension is reliability. Around 53% of the reviews spoke highly on the hotel upholding promises and giving quality service and another 28% stated clearly. Reliability was not observed by many guests. That implies that the ability to fulfil what was pledged is one of the strengths of Hilton Colombo.

Table 8 Distribution of responsiveness scores (n = 164)

Score	Meaning	Count	Percentage
3	Very strongly mentioned	78	47.56%
2	Clearly mentioned	38	23.17%
1	Weakly mentioned	27	16.46%
0	Not mentioned	21	12.80%

It is a clear picture with responsiveness. It was mentioned strongly and clearly by only 47% and 23% of the guests of willing and quick help offered by the staff. 16% of the reviews had weak responsiveness and 12% of the reviews did not have responsiveness at all. This trend implies that the speed of response and proactive assistance are high as reliability or tangibles.

Table 9 Distribution of assurance scores (n = 164)

Score	Meaning	Count	Percentage
3	Very strongly mentioned	82	50%
2	Clearly mentioned	42	25.60%
1	Weakly mentioned	24	14.63%
0	Not mentioned	16	9.75%

Fifty percent of the reviews highly appreciated staff professionalism, confidence and a sense of safety and nearly another half named it quite clearly and weakly. Similarly to reliability, assurance can be frequently used and in a positive manner, meaning that the guests tend to trust the personnel and feel safe when at the place.

Table 10 Distribution of empathy scores (n = 164)

Score	Meaning	Count	Percentage
3	Very strongly mentioned	76	46.34%
2	Clearly mentioned	42	25.60%
1	Weakly mentioned	19	11.58%
0	Not mentioned	27	16.46%

Empathy is in the weakest profile amongst the five dimensions. Only 46% of guests reported strong personal care/special attention, and around 12% called it weak. The other 25% were obviously aware of some amount of care and warmth in what they experienced and nearly 16% did not mention on empathy at all. In comparison with reliability and assurance, empathy is not as consistently strong and appears among guests.

As observed in all dimensions, reliability and assurance are the most emphatic in terms of mentioning. They represent the biggest proportion of score 3 and low figures of score 0 and this implies that guests commonly discuss reliable service and competent, trustworthy employees. The tangibles are also doing well with a lot of the reviews showing quality of the rooms and facilities.

However, responsiveness and empathy demonstrate distributions of mixed character. They contain less very strong mention and more weak mentions and non mentions. This leads to an idea that even though the most customers are satisfied with the way employees react and treat them, these factors are not as consistent as reliability and assurance. This, to the management, indicates the opportunity to retain the existing high standard in reliability and assurance and enhance speed of service and personal and warm relationship to uplift responsiveness and empathy to the same measure.

5.4 Percentage analysis: Comparing SERVQUAL dimensions with customer satisfaction

In this section of the analysis, it will consider the percentage of customer satisfaction and the five SERVQUAL dimensions. It is considered simple to convert the scores into percentages and understand which areas are the most powerful, and which ones require further improvement.

To begin with, mean scores of the above section are translated into percentages. The overall satisfaction has a mean score of 3.86 of a 1-5 scale. After this has been translated with $(3.86/5) \times 100$, the percentage of satisfaction would be 77.20%. In the SERVQUAL dimensions, the maximum score is 3 thus all the means are divided by 3 and multiplied by 100. The mean of tangibles is 2.18 resulting in 72.67%. The mean of reliability is 2.38 that will be turned into 79.33%. The means of responsiveness are 1.88 with a giving of 62.67%. The mean of assurance is 2.32 and the assurance is 77.33. Empathy has a mean of 1.86, giving 62.00%.

The table presented below summarises these results.

Table 11 Percentage scores for overall satisfaction and SERVQUAL dimensions (n = 164)

Variable	Mean Score	Max Score	Percentage (%)
Overall Satisfaction	3.86	5	77.20%
Tangibles	2.18	3	72.67%
Reliability	2.38	3	79.33%
Responsiveness	1.88	3	62.67%
Assurance	2.32	3	77.33%
Empathy	1.86	3	62.00%

In the occasions that these percentages are displayed in a table, reliability and assurance bar are a little higher than the overall satisfaction bar. The tangibles bar is just lower than the satisfaction, but the responsiveness and empathy bars are significantly less in length. Already this visual pattern shows the factors that are driving the satisfaction and restraining it.

To emphasize this further, SERVQUAL dimensions may be ranked as highest percentage to lowest percentage.

Table 12 Ranking of SERVQUAL dimensions by percentage

Rank	Dimension	Percentage (%)	Short comment
1	Reliability	79.33%	Strongest contributor
2	Assurance	77.33%	Very strong and close to satisfaction
3	Tangibles	72.67%	Supportive but not leading
4	Responsive-ness	62.67%	Clear area for improvement
5	Empathy	62.00%	Weakest, needs most attention

Reliability is the obvious winner in the show with whopping 79.33% beating all other dimensions of SERVQUAL. In essence, customers will rejoice when their reservations strike the right chord, payment checks bounce correctly and all things turn out to be what they expected. As this number even exceeds the overall satisfaction percentage, it informs us that reliability is able to drive satisfaction higher than any other thing.

The figure of assurance comes closely after that at 77.33%, virtually, right next to the figure of satisfaction. This implies that the professionalism, knowledge and the trust that these workers are in good hands are significant drivers of the contentment of the guests. Once individuals have faith in the employees and are reassured of their safety, the entire experience is heightened. Combined, reliability and assurance really do support the quality of the hotel.

Tangibles score 72.67%, which is slightly lower than the score of satisfaction, but not very weak. It only demonstrates that the physical things the rooms, cleanliness, facilities, the general appearance are good enough to facilitate the satisfaction, yet it is not the primary cause that make people to smile. Many people would be content even when the environment is not ideal provided they feel that they are served with a sense of reliability and professionalism. Tangibles therefore contribute but not drive.

At the least, the lowest scores are in responsiveness (62.67%) and empathy (62.00%). The responsiveness is slightly below satisfaction average, which implies that many guests do not receive immediate or responsive assistance all the time. Some receive quick response and others have to wait or follow-ups so that the average is dragged. The same can be said of empathy which implies that warm feeling, individual consideration, and the added extra care are less reliable. Some of the reviews are boasting of the staff caring about guests, yet in the general picture, this aspect is not so pronounced.

As add all those percentages to the 77.20% level of satisfaction, the image is as clear as day. The pillars that boost the most satisfaction are reliability and assurance, it is just above the satisfaction line with high levels of agreement to

the general feelings of the guest. Tangibles can be convenient and reasonably solid but placed a little further back. Responsiveness and empathy come far behind satisfaction, that is, they are not as close to the overall feel guests have with the hotel and are therefore constraining.

In such simple, Hilton Colombo succeeds to please its guests primarily because it is a place where a person can trust and who are served by professionals. The positive feeling is also supported by the physical environment. But, in order that the hotel can raise the level of satisfaction to the excellent one, it should accelerate the service and increase personal contact. Make responsiveness and empathy go hand in hand with reliability and assurance and you will an experience that no dimension will withhold at all to deliver satisfaction, resulting in a high quality of experience that will be always remembered as a guest.

5.5 Key findings and answers to research questions

Table 13 Summary of key findings and links to research questions

Aspect	Key finding	Link to research questions
Overall satisfaction	Mean 3.86/5 (77.20%); majority of guests rated 4 or 5	Shows general level of satisfaction with Hilton Colombo
Tangibles	72.67%; many strong mentions of rooms and facilities	Physical environment supports satisfaction but is not the main driver
Reliability	79.33%; most strongly mentioned dimension	Main factor pushing satisfaction upwards
Responsiveness	62.67%; mixed scores, more weak mentions	Limits satisfaction when service is slow or not proactive
Assurance	77.33%; strong, consistent comments on professionalism and safety	Key factor building trust and comfort

Empathy	62.00%; least strong, many weak or no mentions	Area needing improvement in personal, warm attention
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This section therefore consolidates all the key findings of the data, score distributions and percentage distributions in order to answer the research questions.

In general, it is quite obvious that clients are satisfied with Hilton Colombo. Majority rated them 4 or 5 stars and the satisfaction in general is about 77 percent of the possible total. Here is where the SERVQUAL analysis comes in to demonstrate that this is not mere luck but it is connected to certain quality elements of service.

Examining each SERVQUAL dimension, the tangibles are positive, however, more of a facilitator. Customers continue to report about the rooms and facilities being clean, comfortable, and designed. Such physical sensations create a good initial impression and support satisfaction, still, people discuss more the treatment they receive.

Reliability is the giant in terms of satisfaction. It leads the charts with 79.33%, and there are a lot of big testimonials. Customers are sincerely wishing that the hotel can fulfil its promises, the right bookings, correct bills, and working services. The strong reliability of the business will help the guest to be sure and that will intensify his satisfaction.

Responsiveness approaches satisfaction in a different manner. Having a lower mark of 62.67% and a few weak mentions, slow service or the necessity to request several times drags down the satisfaction. However, when employees are prompt and efficiently rectify problems, the customers receive more quality experience.

Assurance also strikes above its weight. The 77.33% hit rate indicates that professionalism, politeness, and safety sense have a close relationship with

the happy guests. When employees appear informed and respectable, the visitors relax and have a better time at the hotel.

The weakest point in this case is empathy with 62.00% and a collection of weak or missing mentions. It implies that individual warmth and care are not as experienced as the other dimensions. As soon as empathy appears, the level of satisfaction increases, but it is not a strong quality.

Conclusion, the most influential is reliability and closely behind it is assurance. Satisfaction is promoted by tangibles and not met by responsiveness and empathy. In the case of Hilton Colombo, it is easy to grab the lessons: maintain the rates of reliability and assurance at their already high levels, ensure sound physical standards, and push the process of responding to calls quicker and treating guests more personally and with caring.

5.6 Answer to research questions

The highest rate of scores on the review coding is reliability (79.33%), followed by assurance (77.33%), and tangibles (72.67%). Less mentioned and lower scores are given to responsiveness (62.6%7) and empathy (62.00%). That is, the most discussed reasons by the guests are a reliable and professional service, and less the speed or personal warmth.

I was not able to statistically show that any dimensions can be as powerful in star ratings as other ones, but the trends in the data indicate that high scoring dimensions (reliability at 79.33% and assurance at 77.33%), but the lower scoring ones (responsiveness and empathy at around 62%) do seem to accompany the majority of positive reviews with high star rating.

6 DISCUSSION

Findings of this research indicate that SERVQUAL model indeed performs reasonably well in explaining how guests can evaluate the quality of services offered by Hilton Colombo. The overall rating is good, with a group of customers rating four or five stars, however not all of the five dimensions of SERVQUAL are performing equally. The highest score is reliability and assurance, tangibles are obviously positive, responsiveness and empathy are lower and mixed. This trend confirms the fundamental concept of SERVQUAL according to which service quality is multi dimensional and that every dimension affects the overall satisfaction in different ways (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The strongest dimension that appeared in the findings was reliability. Guests would frequently complain that the rooms had been booked through, rooms prepared, bills correct and their service provided as promised. This demonstrates that Hilton Colombo is doing things right the first time which precisely represents reliability according to SERVQUAL. High reliability would make the guests trust the hotel and not worry about such minor things as check-in, room quality, payment, etc. Reliability was also one of the key satisfaction drivers found in previous SERVQUAL studies in the hotel industry, as it makes guests expend more money and less time on the hotel or business trip safer.

Another obvious strength of the results is the assurance. There are numerous reviews, which talk of professional and pleasant staff, well communication and the sense of being safe within the premises. Assurance in SERVQUAL is related to knowledge of the staff, courtesy and trust creation. Guests are less tense when they realize that the employees are aware of what they are doing, acting in a professional way and respectful manner.

Tangibles also are not as high as reliability and assurance. Clean rooms, comfortable beds, nice public space and good facilities are the words used by the guests to describe it. Tangibles according to SERVQUAL are the visible

aspects of quality that the guests can see and touch like buildings and furniture and equipment. Excellent rating on tangibles implies that Hilton Colombo realizes the minimum level of the five-star hotel and relies on physical surroundings to produce a powerful first impression. The slightly low score than reliability however indicates that beyond a certain level of luxury a hotel may achieve that additional investments in the area of a hotel or decors can deliver minor benefits to satisfaction than investments in staff behaviour.

The results of the weaker performance of responsiveness and empathy reveal the areas of the greatest gaps in the case of applying the SERVQUAL framework to the results. Responsiveness which deals with the speed and readiness of staff to assist the guests gets a significantly lower rating. There are few reports of fast service and easy problem solving by some guests but others are complaining of delays and slow check-in and check-out as well as having difficulties locating help at times of high occupancy. The implication of this inconsistency is that the level of speed and flexibility is not always equal at the hotel during various days, departments and shifts. According to SERVQUAL, the perceived quality provided by low responsiveness may cut down on strong dimension at other times as guests believe that their time is not respected.

With the lowest score, empathy is less frequently mentioned as well in guest comments. There are good examples of personal attention, recalled preferences or special attention, although they are not prevailing. Empathy in SERVQUAL translates to the staff members treating every guest as a person and listening attentively and expressing concern. The low empathy score would indicate that Hilton Colombo is not as personal as a system that focuses more on relationships and is more of a professional yet standardised system. This is significant in a Sri Lankan setup, since the culture of local hospitality tends to place emphasis on warmth and personal association. The Asian and Sri Lankan hotel research has found strong repetition and strong word-of-mouth to be fuelled by empathy and personal care in the case where they are incorporated regularly (Umasuthan et al., 2017). The results of this research demonstrate that this potential is yet to be exploited.

Committing all of the five dimensions into one, SERVQUAL framework can seem to explain not only the strengths, but as well as the weaknesses identified in the data. The overall satisfaction is evidently positive and many of the guests refer to their stay as comfortable and secure, which is due to high reliability, strong assurance and good tangibles. Meanwhile, reduced responsiveness and empathy also justify why not all guests are delighted, but only satisfied, and why some of the reviews state that service is slow or personal touch is not exercised. According to SERVQUAL theory, gaps in any of the dimensions will drag down the perception of quality in general (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This trend in this study is consistent with that concept: Hilton Colombo is recording a high score on the hard dimensions of service quality, yet performance on the soft ones is still uneven and contraindicates the maximum levels of satisfaction and loyalty.

Hilton Colombo Hotel Sri Lanka needs to focus more on the dimensions of responsiveness and empathy, and further strengthen the dimensions of reliability, assurance and tangibles, this research points out. Accurate check in and check outs, hassle-free procedures are important to increase guest satisfaction. Also, with the necessary training for employees and a good understanding of quality control, the reliability can be justified in a way that is commensurate with the price paid. Highlighting the professionalism and safety of the staff increases the attractiveness of the Hilton hotel. Furthermore, improving the physical environment of the hotel can further attract guests. Finally, Hilton Hotel needs to focus on developing staff training to improve responsiveness and empathy, which will further attract guests through positive feedback that guests leave about the hotel in online reviews.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary of main findings

The primary result is that, the general guest satisfaction regarding Hilton Colombo is obviously good. Its average satisfaction level is 3.86 out of 5 which translates into 77.20%. The median is 4.0, which means that 50% of the reviews have a rating of 4 or higher and the median is 5.0, where the highest possible rating is used the most. All these numbers suggest that the majority of the visitors found their stay in the hotel satisfactory and viewed it as good or very good. A smaller percentage of the reviews tells about the low level of satisfaction, and there is no indicator of serious situation with crisis of satisfaction.

The second most important observation is that service quality does not always have equal strengths. Upon generalizing the SERVQUAL scores into percentages, reliability is the most performing dimension with 79.33%. Assurance comes next with 77.33 % which is nearly similar to overall satisfaction. Tangibles is scored solid at 72.67% and the other two, responsiveness and empathy are rated lower with the score of 62.67% and 62.00%. This trend indicates that Hilton Colombo has stronger promise performance, offering a consistent service and introducing serious and reliable staff, whereas physical responsiveness and personal affection are lesser strengths.

Considering reliability further, the mean and the distribution of scores show that this is the best aspect. The average of 2.38/3 and a mode of 3 imply that the hotel has high ratings in the fact that many reviews highly appreciate the hotel on specifics connecting the reviews to bookings pertained correctly and all housekeeping and services performed exactly as intended. 53.65% of the reviews indicate reliability as very strongly mentioned and another 17.07% as clearly mentioned in the distribution table with only 14.02 % mentioning it at all. It demonstrates that customers recognize and value the fact that this hotel

provides what it promises and the reliability is one of the motives of customer satisfaction.

Another significant strength is assurance. Assurance is most strongly stated in 50 percent of the reviews with a mean of 2.32 (77.3%) and mode of 3 and crystal clear with near a quarter. The professionalism of the staff, as well as their confidence, proficiency in languages and safety that guests experience at the hotel, is often discussed. This implies that the guests have confidence in the employees and are not afraid to seek their assistance or consultation. Reliability and assurance are the two pillars which consist of the high degree of overall satisfaction in Hilton Colombo.

The support is also added by tangibles which are not considered as the dominating factor. The average of 2.18 (72.67%) indicates that the physical aspect of the hotel including rooms, cleanliness, facilities and overall looks have been positively rated by majority of the guests. Tangibles are very strongly mentioned in 48.78% and clearly in 28.04% of the reviews and not mentioned at all in 6.09% of the reviews. This implies that the hotel is performing as or better than five-star environment. Nonetheless, since the scores of tangibles are slightly less than reliability and assurance, it is present that the effects they bring are more of an addition than the causation factor behind guest satisfaction.

Responsiveness and empathy demonstrate a more divided performance and are the key spheres of improvement. Responsiveness, having a mean of 1.88 (62.67 percent), has more weak or absent mentions than strong mentions than reliability and assurance. It is distributed with 47.56% of the reviews mentioning the responsiveness as very strongly mentioned and 23.17% as clearly mentioned though 16.46 percent mentioned it weakly and 12.80% not mentioned at all. It means that a lot of guests can get prompt and efficient answers, yet some people have something to wait, get less fast or have to request something more than once.

The lowest dimension is empathy. It has an average of 1.86, which is an equivalent of 62.00% and its distribution is 46.34% empathy very strong, 25.60% empathy clearly, 11.58% empathy weakly and 16.46% empathy not at all. Though nearly fifty percent of the visitors express the belief in actual personal care and attention, a good portion of the guests fail to comment on the emotional warmth or personal treatment. This implies that employee relations are most of the time kindly and professional but do not necessarily go beyond pleasant and tailored to the individual guest.

Ranking the percentages, reliability is first (79.33%), then assurance (77.33%), then tangibles (72.67%), and lastly, responsiveness (62.67%) and empathy (62.00%) precede other aspects of the percentages. This ranking provides a clear image of service profile of the hotel. Hilton Colombo is largely successful as a place where the guests can place their trust on the systems, and the staff. Good physical environment compliments the positive experience. But, there is a slowness of response and a diminished homogeneity of personal cordiality to fasten on satisfaction on an even higher plane.

Overall, the key results indicate that the satisfaction level of Hilton Colombo guests is quite high, as the overall results indicated a 77.20% level of satisfaction and a high number of five-star qualifications. The best contributors towards this satisfaction are reliability and assurance, tangibles is a serious side support, and responsiveness and empathy are the main weaknesses. To the management, the message is simple keep reliability and assurance where they were and are, high physical standards, and to work upon improvements, namely, faster service and more personal and caring service interactions to make satisfaction not good, but excellent.

7.2 Conclusion

It was all a study of determining how the quality of service determines the extent of guest satisfaction in a five star hotel in Sri Lanka and therefore, I narrowed it down to the deepest study in Hilton Colombo. I chose this hotel as the

luxury market there is highly competitive, and hotel managers are in dire need to have tangible evidence of what services most effectively matter to the customers. Striking authentic reviews of the guests and linking them with an explicit framework provides a practical picture of the way that individuals experience Hilton in reality and which aspects should remain firm or improve further.

I have extracted the remarks of the guests of large online sources and categorized them according to the SERVQUAL model that divides the quality of service into five portions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. The reviews were accompanied by their star rating as well, meaning that the reviews and the general level of satisfaction went side by side. The examination remained purposely straightforward and descriptive, as it was not about a lot of numbers but trends, and therefore results remain simple to understand and to literally apply as a manager in a hotel.

Most Hilton customers are usually satisfied with their room. Majority of the reviewers place the hotel in the upper end of the star scale and declare their experience to be good or very good, which implies that the simplest agreement of a five stars facility is being achieved. Nevertheless, it is not always the case that all guests are weird, certain neutral and negative reviews have appeared, and this only proves that the hotel is not providing extremely good experience but a perfect one. It has the majority of the folks satisfied and allows sufficient leeway to go between mostly good and consistently excellent.

One of the lessons is that the strengths and weaknesses of the hotel are not distributed uniformly throughout the five dimensions of SERVQUAL. It is evident that the victor is reliability with many guests saying that, bookings, rooms, bills and facilities all run smoothly. The other huge gain is assurance, that is, guest overlooks the professionalism, has confidence in the staff and feel safe. Satisfaction is also enhanced by the tangibles such as the building, rooms, and common grounds, which make the building have a comfortable and appealing feel. All of these three aspects demonstrate that Hilton Colombo is a very

consistent, reliable, and well polished service that surpasses what a global corporation would provide.

On the other hand, the problem state is adopted by responsiveness and empathy. Traditions of speed of service, problem solving and exceptional level of personal attention are mentioned less frequently and there is more argument on how these qualities are characterized by the guests. There are those who think they are well attended and speedily assisted and those who complain of waiting, slow procedures or lack of personal, person touch. Whereas the hotel itself is cooperative and trustworthy, human aspect of service does not necessarily form any deep emotional connection or a sense of being taken care of.

Generally, the analysis concludes that currently Hilton Colombo has a hard side of service quality, which needs keeping promises, keeping standards and making a solid physical product, but it must strengthen on the soft side, in particular, the speed of response and personal warmth. In case the management manages to maintain the existing advantages in reliability, assurance and tangibles but increase responsiveness and empathy, the result would probably be the increase in guest satisfaction to the next level as solid. The study reveals that at one of the renowned luxury hotels, there is still the necessity of continual enhancement of the working relationships between the staff and guests to achieve the long-range success in the competitive hospitality industry in Sri Lanka.

7.3 Recommendations

The first one is to continue to keep focus on which Hilton Colombo is already dominating based on what we had learnt. Meanwhile, the reliability and assurance can be discussed as the greatest strengths of the place, therefore, we can retain the existing systems that correct bookings, billing, housekeeping and safety, and review it periodically. The management team must continue to challenge the training of staff on behaviour and effective communicating so

that everybody department in the company acts upon the same level, even when things become difficult.

The second is to ensure that responsiveness is the primary concern. The customers should feel that check in and check out, response time to phone calls and messages, and maintenance request speed are shorter. To support this, we can establish some simple service time targets, enhance the scheduling of the staff during the peak time, and allow the front line staff to resolve the normal problems without the need to have a lengthy approval. We would also keep track of guest reviews regarding the speed of service as well to understand whether they really remain.

Third, the hotel needs to aim at establishing deeper empathy in daily experiences. Employees are able to develop the value of the use of guest names, memorizing frequent visitors, interest in the reason they are staying, and following up after issues are solved. Even little things such as welcoming notes, assisting with general information, and consideration of special events or occasions can make you have special experiences during a journey. It needs to be noted by the managers that there are those who care and as such should be rewarded and thus an empathetic attitude is to be instilled in service culture.

Lastly, online reviews need to continue to be used by Hilton Colombo as a tool to manage the company. The hotel is recommended to observe reviews which are the general scores or rather the specific comments related to the SERVQUAL dimensions. This constant line of feedback will enable the execution of a spot where the improvement is being realized or solving of new problems are emerging in order to facilitate adjustments in the training, process and marketing messages in time an appropriate manner.

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