

# Investigating the Moderating Effect of Satisfaction on Service Quality and Behavioural Intentions in Tourism Industry

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## ABSTRACT

With the increasing role of tourism in the global economy, service quality has become one of the most important elements for gaining competitive advantage. The importance of providing high quality service is being recognized as a way to expand and maintain a loyal customer base for long-term success. For tourism enterprises, it is not sufficient now just to maintain a business but to have systematic processes to manage quality and to gain and maintain competitive position. Quality in tourism services attracts large number of tourists and ensures tourist satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction brings tourist loyalty in terms of repeat visitation which in turn leads to higher profitability. Moreover, foreign exchange earnings in this industry have a high added value which contributes to the growth of the GDP of an economy. In view of the importance of service quality for the sustenance and promotion of tourism business, present study is an attempt to study the moderating effect of satisfaction on service quality and customer satisfaction. The study has been carried out in Kashmir. Both primary as well as secondary data has been utilized for the present study. Secondary data has been gathered through a self-administered questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed that satisfaction moderates the relationship of service quality and behavioural intentions in tourism industry.

**Keywords:** Behavioural Intentions, Kashmir Valley, Satisfaction, Service Quality, Tourism.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism has become one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It generates substantial economic benefits to both host countries and tourists' home countries. In developing countries, one of the primary motivations for a region to promote itself as a tourist destination is the expected economic development. Tourism creates employment opportunities, reduces poverty, brings foreign exchange to the host country, and improves standard of living. Also, it helps in improving infrastructure, conservation of wild life and preservation of traditional customs, handicrafts and festivals that might otherwise have been allowed to vanish. Tourism promotes the business of other service enterprises also such as accommodation, hotel and railway booking, restaurant services, hospitality, guide service, recreational services, communication and transportation.

Tourism sector holds immense potential for Indian economy. India has been witnessing steady growth in its travel and tourism sector over the years. About 8.89 million foreign tourists arrived in India in 2016 compared to 8.027 million in 2015, recording a growth of 10.7%. According to World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism contributed 9.6% (US\$220 billion) of the India's GDP in 2016 and supported 40.343 million jobs i.e., 9.3% of its total employment [1]. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism in India during 2016 were US\$ 23,146 million as compared to US\$ 21,071 million in 2015, showing a growth of 9.8% [2].

Due to intense competition in tourism business markets, service quality has become one of the most important sources of competitive advantage. Research has extensively revealed that higher levels of service quality produce higher levels of customer satisfaction, which in turn lead to higher levels of customer patronage, positive word-of-mouth, employees' satisfaction and commitment, enhanced corporate image, reduced costs and improved profitability [3-5]. Consequently, all tourism enterprises need to focus on various ways to increase the level of service quality, tourists' satisfaction and their revisit intentions. Recognizing the importance of service quality and customer satisfaction for the growth and development of the tourism business and also of the economy, the study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- To study the relationship between service quality, satisfaction and behavioural intentions;
- To study the moderating effect of satisfaction on the relationship of service quality and behavioural intentions; and

- To suggest the ways for improving tourism service quality and tourist satisfaction which in turn bring about repeat visitation and positive word of mouth communication.

## **1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Service quality and customer satisfaction**

The service quality construct is mostly conceptualized in the context of services marketing literature [6]. Parasuraman, et. al., [7] proposed a formal definition of customer service quality as “the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers’ service perceptions and expectations”. Yet, Service quality is a difference between customer expectations of ‘what they want’ and their perceptions of ‘what they get’ [8], [9]. Ostrowski, et. al., [10] mentioned that service quality is a way of thinking about how to satisfy customers so that they hold positive attitudes toward the service they have received.

Satisfaction can broadly be defined as a post-purchase evaluation of product quality given pre-purchase expectation [11]. Customer satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which one believes that an experience evokes positive feelings [12]. Bitner and Hubbert [13] described customer satisfaction as a feeling or an attitude of a customer towards a service after it has been used. According to Choi and Chu [14], “a consumer is considered satisfied when his weighted sum total of experiences shows a feeling of gratification when compared with his expectations. On the other hand, a consumer is considered dissatisfied when his actual experience shows a feeling of displeasure when compared with his expectation”.

Although many researchers use the terms “service quality” and “customer satisfaction” interchangeably, these concepts are different, yet connected [15]. Palmer [16] stated that divergent results have been presented in studies conducted on service quality and customer satisfaction. Some studies noted that service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction [17], while others found reverse relationship [18]. However, there is a general thought that satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceived service quality and business performance [19-21].

Service quality and customer satisfaction are critical factors for the success of any business [22], [23]. As Valdani [24] points out: enterprises exist because they have a customer to serve. The key to achieve sustainable advantage lies in delivering high quality service that results in satisfied customers [25]. Service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors in the battle to obtain competitive advantage and customer retention which is one of the biggest challenges for managers in the hospitality industry as well [26]. There are several studies that analyze service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry:

Amin and Isa [4] attempted to examine the relationship between service quality perception and customer’s satisfaction by using SERVQUAL measurement scales consisting of six dimensions viz., tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, compliance and empathy and found that reliability is the key driver of service quality followed by empathy, tangible, responsiveness, assurance and compliance respectively. The findings of the study indicate that the service quality is positively associated with customer satisfaction and suggest that the establishment of higher levels of service quality will lead customer to have a high level of satisfaction.

In order to assess the tourists satisfaction and its link with service quality, Chen, et. al., [27] used a hierarchical model that combines four primary determinants (Personal Interaction, Physical Environment, Technical Quality and Access Quality) and eight corresponding sub-dimensions on service quality. Results confirm that service quality has a positive and significant relationship with tourist satisfaction. Shing, et. al., [28] conducted a study to examine the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction with regard to tourism services in Melaka. The results of the study indicate positive and significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

The above cited literature leads to the conclusion that there is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction which leads to the formation of following testable hypothesis:

H1: Tourism service quality is positively related to tourist satisfaction.

### **2.2 Behavioural Intentions**

Behavioural intentions can be defined as, “indicators that signal whether customers will remain with or defect from the company” [29]. Madhavaiah, et. al., [30] stated that behavioural intentions can be positive or negative, depending on the quality and satisfaction rating that the customer has for the service. Favourable behavioural intentions are associated with a service providers’ ability to make its customers: say positive things about them [9], recommend them to other customers [22], remain loyal to them [31], spend more with the organization and pay price premiums [32]. Conversely, Lobo, et. al., [33] indicate that unfavourable behavioural intentions include customer switching behaviour and complaint behaviour. The behavioural intentions are one of the most important factors that allow managers to increase profits in the services sector. Understanding the behavioural intentions of customers after experiencing services is important because they are seen as a prime determinant of a firm’s long term financial performance and is considered a major source of competitive advantage [34].

### **2.3 Service Quality, Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions**

Several researchers found that service quality was an antecedent of customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction exerted a stronger influence on favourable behavioural intentions [14], [35]. Further, previous research on customer satisfaction-behavioural consequences maintained that customer satisfaction directly influences behavioural intentions [11], [18], [36-40]. Service-related research based on interpersonal interaction showed that customer satisfaction positively influenced behavioural intentions [11], [18], [19], [29], [32], [36], [38], [41-51]. Hence, Suhartanto [52] and

Kandampully and Suhartanto [53], [54] concluded that there was a positive link between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions in the hospitality industry. In addition, Chou [55] and Kang, et. al., [35] proposed that customer satisfaction was a powerful factor that influenced behavioural intentions in the hospitality industry. Thus, there appears to be a consensus that satisfaction is an antecedent to future intentions in service environments [11], [56]. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been framed:

H2: Tourist satisfaction is positively related to tourists' behavioural intentions.

Further, substantial empirical and theoretical evidence in the literature suggests that there is a direct link between service quality and behavioural intentions [18], [41]. Among the various behavioural intentions, considerable emphasis has been placed on the impact of service quality in determining repeat purchase and customer loyalty [57]. As pointed out by Bolton [58], service quality influences a customer's subsequent behaviour, intentions and preferences. When a customer chooses a provider that provides service quality that meets or exceeds his or her expectations, he or she is more likely to choose the same provider again. In addition to this, several other studies [17], [29], [38], [59], [60] also found that service quality has a significant effect on repurchase intentions. Hence, the following hypothesis has been framed:

H3: Tourism service quality is positively related to tourists' behavioural intentions.

However, Gonzalez et. al., [61] mentioned that the relationship between behavioural intentions and service quality could involve direct or indirect effects or include interactions with other variables. If the relationship between perceived service quality and behavioural intentions is not direct, customer satisfaction may serve as a moderator or even interference in the service quality-behavioural intentions relationship [5], [36], [62]. Such reasoning provides the basis of and rationale for next hypothesis:

H4: satisfaction moderates (strengthens) the relationship of service quality and behavioural intentions.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Instrument and Measurement

For carrying out present study, a self-administered questionnaire covering all the three variables was developed. To measure the service quality construct, the twenty-two (22) item SERVQUAL scale was modified to suit the tourism environment in Kashmir. In order to measure the satisfaction construct, a scale developed by Westbrook and Oliver [62] for measuring consumer satisfaction has been adapted [49], [63], [64]. However, for measuring behavioural intentions construct, the elements proposed by Baker and Crompton [65] have been used [61], [64], [66]. All the items in the questionnaire were then arranged alphabetically. Ten-point scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was applied to measure the constructs. The purification of the scale was carried out in two steps. In the first step content and face validity was tested through a panel of experts. As a result, the questionnaire was finalized with 51 questions viz., 32 on service quality, 5 on satisfaction, 5 on behavioural intentions constructs, and 9 on demographics. In the second step, a pilot study was conducted on 50 respondents and Cronbach's alpha test was performed. The alpha scores for the constructs ranged from 0.97 to 0.93 which indicated the scale reliability as recommended by Nunnally [67].

In order to determine the underlying dimensions of tourism services, exploratory factor analysis was performed. R-mode Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation and Eigen value equal to or greater than 1 was used. In order to get clear factorial design, 3 items with factor loadings of less than 0.50 were dropped and loadings equal to or above 0.50 were retained [68]. The factor analysis got completed in 8 iterations, identified 5 factors on service quality construct consisting of 29 items and Explained 67.94% Variance. The 5 factors identified were labeled as per the items loaded onto it – F1-'Tangibility', F2-'Assurance', F3-'Reliability', F4-'Responsiveness' and F5-'Empathy'. Highest variance was observed on Tangibility (17.37%) and Assurance (16.33%) and as such these two dimensions are considered as the most important determinants of tourism service quality.

To measure the consistency of the scale in the present study, Cronbach's alpha test was used as a measure of reliability. The reliability scores for all the extracted variables were found high. The lowest range of Cronbach's alpha for SERVQUAL was 0.761 for the dimension of empathy and the highest was 0.839 for the dimension of reliability. Thus, fulfilled the minimum requirement level of reliability.

The appropriateness of factor analysis was confirmed with the help of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy reported a value of 0.948 which is higher than the suggested value of 0.6 [69]. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity revealed a Chi-square at 12158.612 ( $p < 0.000$  at 1% level) which confirmed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix.

### 3.2 Sample and Sample Technique

The survey has been conducted in Kashmir. By applying convenience sampling technique, (1043) filled in questionnaires were used for the purpose of the study. Questionnaires were distributed among the respondents at different tourist attractions like: Pahalgam, Daksum, Sonamarg, Gulmarg, Sinthan-top, Mughal Gardens. In order to make sample representative of the population, due care has been taken to ensure that respondents represent different socio-economic groups classified on the basis of age, gender, income, occupation, education etc. The data received from the questionnaires were then put into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 19.0 and analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests.

### 3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In order to test hypothesis 1 (service quality is positively related to satisfaction), simple linear regression analysis was performed (Table 1.1). The findings reveal an  $R^2$  (coefficient of determination) value of 0.777 which indicates that 77.7 % variance in satisfaction is explained by service quality. Moreover, positive beta coefficient of 0.882 with significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) t-value confirms that tourism service quality is positively, significantly and strongly related to tourist satisfaction meaning thereby that higher levels of tourism service quality result in higher levels of tourist satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

In order to test hypothesis 2 (satisfaction is positively related to behavioural intentions of tourists), simple linear regression analysis has been used. The findings [F (2.919,  $p < 0.001$ );  $R^2$  (0.737);  $\beta$  (0.859); t-value (54.029,  $p < 0.001$ )] reveal that tourist satisfaction is significantly, positively and strongly related to tourists' behavioural intentions (Table 1.2) meaning thereby that higher levels of tourist satisfaction result in positive tourist behavioural intentions in the form of repeat visits and recommendation. Therefore, H2 is accepted.

While testing hypothesis 3 (tourism service quality is positively related to tourists' behavioural intentions), the results (Table 1.3) of regression analysis [F (1.458,  $p < 0.001$ );  $R^2$  (0.584);  $\beta$  (0.764); t-value (38.189,  $p < 0.001$ )] reveal that tourism service quality is directly, positively and significantly related to tourist behavioural intentions which indicates that higher levels of tourism service quality lead to positive intentions of tourists to return and recommend the destination to others to visit. Therefore, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

In order to test hypothesis (H4) which is tourist satisfaction moderates (strengthens) the relationship of tourism service quality and tourist behavioural intentions. Since, many researchers [70-74] agree that one of the clearest ways to test moderating effect is using a hierarchical regression analysis based on Baron and Kenny's [75] methodology. Thus, hierarchical analysis using regression models was considered an appropriate approach in this study.

Before performing regression analysis, a new variable to represent the interaction need to be computed by forming the product of service quality and satisfaction constructs (service quality  $\times$  satisfaction). After forming the interaction term, the data was first explored using bivariate correlation analysis. Since, independent variables (service quality and satisfaction) were highly correlated (Table 1.4) in the present study, multicollinearity issues need to be tested [76]. The assumption of multicollinearity was checked from the collinearity diagnostics in the SPSS, using tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). Commonly, VIF values closer to 10 and tolerance values less than 0.20 indicate serious problems of multicollinearity [69], [77], [78]. As can be seen in Table 1.5 that VIF scores for all predictor variables range from 5.073 to 7.331 (closer to 10), and tolerance values were less than suggested cut off value (0.20), indicating that variables were affected by multicollinearity problem. In order to overcome this multicollinearity problem, the values of independent (service quality), moderating (satisfaction) and dependent (behavioural intentions) variables were centered. That is, the mean value of each variable was subtracted from the respected values of the variables. Kim, et. al., [79] and Keith [80] suggested that multicollinearity may be reduced by centering the values of the variables. After centering the variables, a new interaction term was formed by multiplying centered independent variable (centered service quality) with centered moderator variable (centered satisfaction). For confirming moderating effect, this interaction term should be significant and explain incremental variance in the dependent variable beyond the main effects [72]. Hierarchical regression analysis was then performed in three steps (Table 1.6).

First, the centered dependent variable (tourist behavioral intentions) was regressed on the centered independent variable (tourism service quality). Second, the centered independent and moderator (tourist satisfaction) variables were entered. In the third step, interaction term (centered service quality  $\times$  centered satisfaction) with centered independent variable and centered moderator variable was included.

As can be seen in Table 1.6 that  $R^2$  changes from 0.584 to 0.740 and explains incremental variance after the interaction term is included. Thus, it can be concluded that tourist satisfaction moderates (strengthens) the relationship of tourism service quality and tourists' behavioural intentions.

**Table 1.1:- Linear Regression Analysis Results (Dependent variable: Satisfaction)**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	6.018	0.029		210.498	0.000*
Service quality	1.838	0.030	0.882	60.312	0.000*
<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig</b>	
0.882	0.777	0.777	3.637	0.000*	

\*Significant at 1% level

**Table 1.2:- Linear Regression Analysis Results (Dependent variable: Behavioural Intentions)**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
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	B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	4.252	0.066		64.534	0.000*
<b>Satisfaction</b>	0.506	0.009	0.859	54.029	0.000*
<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig</b>	
0.859	0.737	0.737	2.919	0.000*	

\*Significant at 1% level

**Table 1.3:- Linear Regression Analysis Results** (Dependent variable: Behavioural Intentions)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
(Constant)	7.295	0.023		316.275	0.000*
<b>Service Quality</b>	0.939	0.025	0.764	38.189	0.000*
<b>R</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig</b>	
0.764	0.584	0.583	1.458	0.000*	

\*Significant at 1% level

**Table 1.4:- Correlations**

		Service Quality	Satisfaction	Behavioural Intentions	Inter_sq_sat
<b>Service Quality</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.882**	.764**	.912**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	1043	1043	1043	1043
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Pearson Correlation	.882**	1	.859**	.869**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	1043	1043	1043	1043
<b>Behavioural Intentions</b>	Pearson Correlation	.764**	.859**	1	.770**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	1043	1043	1043	1043
<b>Inter_sq_sat</b>	Pearson Correlation	.912**	.869**	.770**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	1043	1043	1043	1043

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 1.5:- Collinearity Statistics** (Dependent Variable: Behavioural Intentions)

Model	Tolerance	VIF
<b>Service Quality</b>	0.136	7.331
<b>Satisfaction</b>	0.197	5.073
<b>Inter_sq_sat</b>	0.150	6.676

**Table 1.6:- Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		



1	(Constant)	-1.786	0.020	0.764	0.000	0.999
	Cent_Service Quality	0.939	0.025		38.189	0.000
2	(Constant)	8.021	0.016	0.031	0.000	1.000
	Cent_Service Quality	0.038	0.041		0.912	0.362
	Cent_Satisfaction	0.490	0.020		24.680	0.000
3	(Constant)	-0.039	0.020	0.117	-1.917	0.056
	Cent_Service Quality	0.144	0.053		2.701	0.007
	Cent_Satisfaction	0.481	0.020		24.070	0.000
	Int_Cent_sq_sat	0.031	0.010		3.153	0.002
<b>Model</b>		<b>R</b>		<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	
1		0.764 <sup>a</sup>		0.584	0.583	
2		0.859 <sup>b</sup>		0.737	0.737	
3		0.860 <sup>c</sup>		0.740	0.739	

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Cent\_Service Quality  
b. Predictors: (Constant), Cent\_Service Quality, Cent\_Satisfaction  
c. Predictors: (Constant), Cent\_Service Quality, Cent\_Satisfaction, Int\_Cent\_sq\_sat

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The study attempted to measure service quality, tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. The analysis revealed higher levels of tourism service quality (0.43), higher level of satisfaction (7.37) and positive behavioural intentions of tourists (7.61). Moreover, the results brought to light that tourism service quality is positively related to tourist satisfaction and tourist behavioural intentions. These findings are consistent with the studies which demonstrated that service quality is positively, significantly, strongly and directly related to satisfaction [17], [27], [28] and behavioural intentions [51], [81], [82]. Moreover, it has been reported that tourist satisfaction is positively and strongly related to tourist behavioural intentions. According to regression results (Table 1.6), interaction term (Service Quality × Satisfaction) has a stronger effect on behavioural intentions (R<sup>2</sup>=0.740) than service quality and satisfaction indicating that satisfaction moderates (strengthens) the relationship of service quality and behavioural intentions. These findings support other researchers [5], [61] who stated that the relationship between service quality and behavioural intentions can be direct, indirect or moderated by other variables. Thus, it can be concluded that higher level of service quality leads to higher level of satisfaction and positive intentions of the tourists to revisit. Therefore, tourism managers should not only focus on improving service quality but also find ways to create customer satisfaction and customer delight which ultimately results in positive word of mouth, repeat visits, recommendations and overall success of the tourism business.

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