

# A STUDY ON DEPLOYMENT OF DIFFERENTLY-ABLED PERSONS IN INDIAN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN PURVIEW OF SERVQUAL MODEL

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## ABSTRACT

The consumer is a crucial factor in the promotion of any business. This paper is about consumers' perception and intention on the deployment of differently-abled persons (DAP) in the Indian hospitality industry. The modified SERVQUAL model was used to study the consumers' concern about accepting the services of DAP in the hospitality sector. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire in Google form among consumers all over the country, which was measured on a five-point Likert scale to find out their choice of the inclusive Indian hospitality industry. A quantitative analysis reveals that consumers all over India have a positive attitude towards DAP staff, but neither they assuring of return business nor are they empathetic towards them. This work identified that the management of such organizations needs to be more strategic and adaptable. This paper represents original research that encourages hospitality businesses to employ DAP.

## INTRODUCTION

Hospitality industries in most developed countries employ differently-abled persons (DAP) in various industry sectors. DAP is regarded as an alternate workforce resource to handle the problem of employee retention. Many hospitality players also use it as a sustainable or social service to create a brand image for marketing. (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014) The employment of DAP in the hospitality industry is booming, and the same is evident in many research papers from around the world. (Gröschl, 2013)(Groschl, 2011) Though the employment depends on deformities and their severity. The hospitality industry is particular about the physical appearance of their employees, which restricts DAP to specific departments only. (Boman et al., 2015) Employers' lack of knowledge about DAP as an employee also plays a significant part in their employment in the industry. (Bonaccio et al., 2020);(Kalargyrou, Kalargiros, et al., 2020)

Consumer satisfaction is the key to generating revenue in the hospitality industry. The same

service quality factor can be assessed differently by different consumers regarding satisfaction and importance. (Grujičić et al., 2014)

After the introduction of the RPWD Act 2016 in India, the employment scenario of the DAP has changed as more private players, as in the hospitality industry, are coming forward in employing them. (Sarkar, 2018) Though there is a change in the thought process of the employers, creating an inclusive environment in the workplace is still hindered by many factors, including consumer satisfaction level, support of top management, and the workforce of skilled DAP. (Vohra et al., 2015)

The SERVQUAL model has been extensively used to study service quality, consumer expectations, and satisfaction in the hospitality industry. (Stefano et al., 2015) Many researchers have studied consumer perceptions of DAP from different perspectives, but no study has previously been documented in the Indian context, which instigates this research. (Madera et al., 2020); (Akbaba, 2006);(Kalargyrou et al., 2018)

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### **DAP in the foodservice industry (Challenges, Issues, Concerns, Positivity)**

According to studies, online customer reviews of restaurants that hire differently-abled frontline staff are positive. As a result, the differently-abled staff appears to be essential to base their opinions on service quality. This frontline personnel may even act as a buffer against poor client feedback and service failures. This study has used the 'DINESERV' scale. (Rosenbaum et al., 2017) Consumers are more comfortable with physically disabled staff than mentally challenged ones. They also prefer to visit restaurants with

differently-abled staff for family programs only and not romantic occasions or corporate meetings. (Kuo & Kalargyrou, 2014)

A study on the impact of consumer characteristics like gender, educational qualification, ethnicity, age group, and presence of differently-abled friends or family on the opinion of the quality of service by the type of differently-abled staff in the hospitality industry shows no significant differences except for staff with visual deformity. (Kalargyrou et al., 2018)

Research confirms that service disappointment does not matter much for the consumer when served by differently-abled persons in the hospitality sector. (Kalargyrou, Trivellas, et al., 2020)

In the American hospitality sector, consumers assess services of DAP lower than other employees. Consumers did not accept DAPs with different visions in the service sector. The researcher has used SERVQUAL and LODGSERV models to identify consumers' perception of DAPs service quality approval and establish that consumers react negatively in the case of service failure only. (Madera et al., 2020) Studying the above literature, we can conclude that consumers are optimistic about DAPs as an employee in the hospitality industry but are still reluctant to accept certain deformities or occasions.

### **Importance of service quality (Consumer Expectations /Acceptability towards staff in general & DAP)**

Akbaba discovered it to be a remarkable tool as a concept in his research on service quality expectations of consumers in business hotels' using the SERVQUAL scale, but it needs to be tailored for the specific service environments and

cultural context. This study confirms that the magnitude of service quality, such as “tangibles,” “adequacy in service supply,” “understanding and caring,” “assurance,” and “convenience” are essential variables in hotel business performance. (Akbaba, 2006)

Research reveals the value of service quality in a hotel, considering consumer perception versus expectation, is critical for a successful business. To maintain a competitive edge, hospitality facilities should monitor the quality of service in meeting the demands and expectations of their clients at regular intervals. (Stefano et al., 2015) Saraswati’s study emphasized the significance of service quality in the foodservice sector; it is essential to satisfy customers since satisfied customers may promote positive word of mouth, acting as free brand advocates. (Saraswati, 2015) Service quality is an essential tool in the hospitality industry for their success in the business. Many researchers have used the SERVQUAL scale to assess service quality in the hospitality industry.

### **Acceptability towards DAP in the hospitality industry**

A case study of a café in Budapest, Hungary, reveals a close connection between workers with disabilities and general workers. DAP in the hotel business gives them confidence and provides an alternate workforce option. DAP can be used successfully in the hotel industry. (Sharma & Dunay, 2017)

In their research about the suitability of employing DAP in the hospitality industry, Bengisu and Balta stresses employing them regarding their merit, aptness, and competence of the contender, not considering the presence or degree of disability. This paper express that

DAPs can perform any task in the hospitality industry if they are professionally skilled and the type of work does not stress their deformities. (Bengisu & Balta, 2011)

According to a study conducted in the American hospitality industry, employers’ opinion incentives or tax benefits, training hospitality managers about DAP and professionally trained DAPs can change the stereotyped attitude of the employers. These changes will increase the employment possibilities of the DAP. (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012)

In her studies about hospitality managers’ attitudes, Paez found that they are positive about the training and working with DAP but have limited knowledge on the abilities of DAP. (Paez & Arendt, 2014)

A qualitative study on the acceptability of DAP with loss of hearing as workers by the managers with hearing ability in a restaurant found that they are compatible. Though the managers lack knowledge of sign language, with time, they learned it and found these workers very hard-working and hospitable. (Stokar & Orwat, 2018) Case studies of two firms based in Australia employing DAP for many services, including hospitality, found that managers are supportive as moral agents in these agencies. This paper argued that HRM policies should be adjusted to consider DAP strategies to facilitate a work environment that encourages inclusion. (Bartram et al., 2019)

According to the researcher, in Asian countries, the employment of DAP is still in its nascent stage. A study on employees’ perception of DAP as an employee in the hospitality industry gives intrinsic results. Managers were more apprehensive about the benefits of employing

DAP and the establishment's quality, whereas workers were worried about their work pressure and remuneration equality in the inclusive environment. (Hui et al., 2020)

Major players in the hospitality industry were studied for their inclusivity practices to find out the positive and negative aspects of employing DAP. The researcher cites the inability to sustain extended working hours in the hospitality industry, professionally trained workforce, and the cost of creating a barrier-free workspace as barriers to employing DAPs. (Kalargyrou & Volis, 2014)

Hospitality industries worldwide accept DAP as an employee, but there are still barriers in stereotype thought processes and reluctance to certain deformities.

The above empirical findings are essential to conduct additional research on consumer satisfaction in increasing DAP participation in the Indian hotel industry and propose recommendations.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. This research aims to determine how consumers feel about using DAP's services in the Indian hospitality industry.
2. Regional impact of consumers' perception and intention on DAP employees in the hospitality industry.

## RESEARCH ISSUES AND HYPOTHESES

A theoretical backdrop of the relationship between consumers' satisfaction with the constructs of the modified SERVQUAL model and the accompanying hypotheses are as follows:

**H1:** Consumers have mixed opinions on accepting DAP employees in the Indian hospitality industry.

**H2:** Service quality is essential for consumers in the hospitality industry around India.

**H3:** Hospitality industry consumers are willing to support establishments employing DAP.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Study design**– This study has scrutinized the consumer perspective of hospitality establishments employing DAP as a workforce. We are trying to explore the regional influence on the nature of consumers and their perceptions on employing DAP and how the quality of service influences these factors [H2]. The willingness of the consumer to support the hospitality establishments in the purview of the modified SERVQUAL model will be examined [H1 and H3]. A questionnaire was designed using Google form with the factors of the modified SERVQUAL model, and data was collected from 261 respondents from all over India. Research has evidence that the short questionnaire has more responses during an online survey, so only 18 questions were designed to assess. (Eubanks et al., 2021)

**Measurement**– Consumers' perceptions and intentions were measured using the modified SERVQUAL model (Akbaba 2006) in his study. The five components of the scale, namely Tangible, Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, and Empathy, were used to measure the consumer's response.

**Data collection**– Data was collected from India through an online survey. The questionnaire was designed in Google form based on the modified SERVQUAL model in a five-point

Likert scale distributed throughout the country. A snowball sampling technique was used for the distribution of the questionnaire. Data collected were based upon service quality attributes, such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles (Parasuraman et al., 1994).

**Data analysis**– Initially, t-test analysis was conducted to check the specific mean of the population. All the constructs of the modified SERVQUAL model are independent, and there are few differences; only a small variation has been observed among the demographic origin of the consumers'. So for H1 alternate hypothesis is accepted. Factor analysis was performed using principal components analysis to explore the dimensions of Indian hospitality industry consumers' perception and intention on DAP deployment. The results were subjected to varimax rotation. Initially, the factorability

of the 14 SERVQUAL items was examined, with eigenvalues greater than one extracted and criteria for the factorability used. For the SERVQUAL construct, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.874, above the commonly recommended value of 0.6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $\chi^2(66) = 1170.50, p < 0.01$ ) as shown in Table – I. The data collected is reliable as the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.899, as displayed in Table – II. The general pattern of loadings is shown in Table – III for each construct. None of the factors failed to meet the minimum criteria for a primary factor loading of 0.4 or above. So all the factors are considered. The p-value (Sig) of  $.000 < 0.05$ . Therefore the Factor Analysis is valid. Therefore, as  $p < \alpha$ , we accept the alternate hypotheses H2 and H3.

**Table: 1**

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.874
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1170.500
	df	91
	Sig.	0.000

**Table: 2**

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.899	0.903	45

**Table: 3**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Factor loading</b>	<b>Factor Extracted</b>	<b>Construct</b>
Tangible (perceptible by touch, appearance)		F-1	
Visual appearance of differently-abled employees	0.710		
Presentation and communication of the menu and for ordering of food	0.881		Tangible
Reliability (the quality of being trustworthy or of performing consistently well)		F-2	
Consumers prefer hospitality organizations with quality services by DAP	0.615		
Consumers' trust on timely and accurate services of DAP	0.743		Reliability
Consumers like to visit any hotel and restaurant employing differently-abled employees for family functions	0.811		
Consumers like to visit any hotel and restaurant employing differently-abled employees for professional functions	0.820		
Assurance (a positive declaration intended to give confidence; a promise)		F-3	
Consumers declare that DAPs services are very courteous.	0.526		Assurance
Consumers recommend and encourage friends and relatives to patronize hotels and restaurants employing DAP through electronic word of mouth promotion	0.580		
Responsiveness (the quality of reacting quickly and positively.)		F-4	
Consumers experience quick attention of DAP's in hotels and restaurants and their assistance for services	0.800		Responsiveness
Consumers willing to do more business with hospitality firms employing DAPs	0.745		
Empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings of another)		F-5	
Consumers' willing to pay a premium price to hospitality establishments employing DAPs as a community service	0.769		
Consumers want to patron any hotel and restaurant employing differently-abled employees as they give personalized attention	0.655		Empathy
Consumers' having DAP in their family or friends are more considerable for an inclusive environment	0.438		

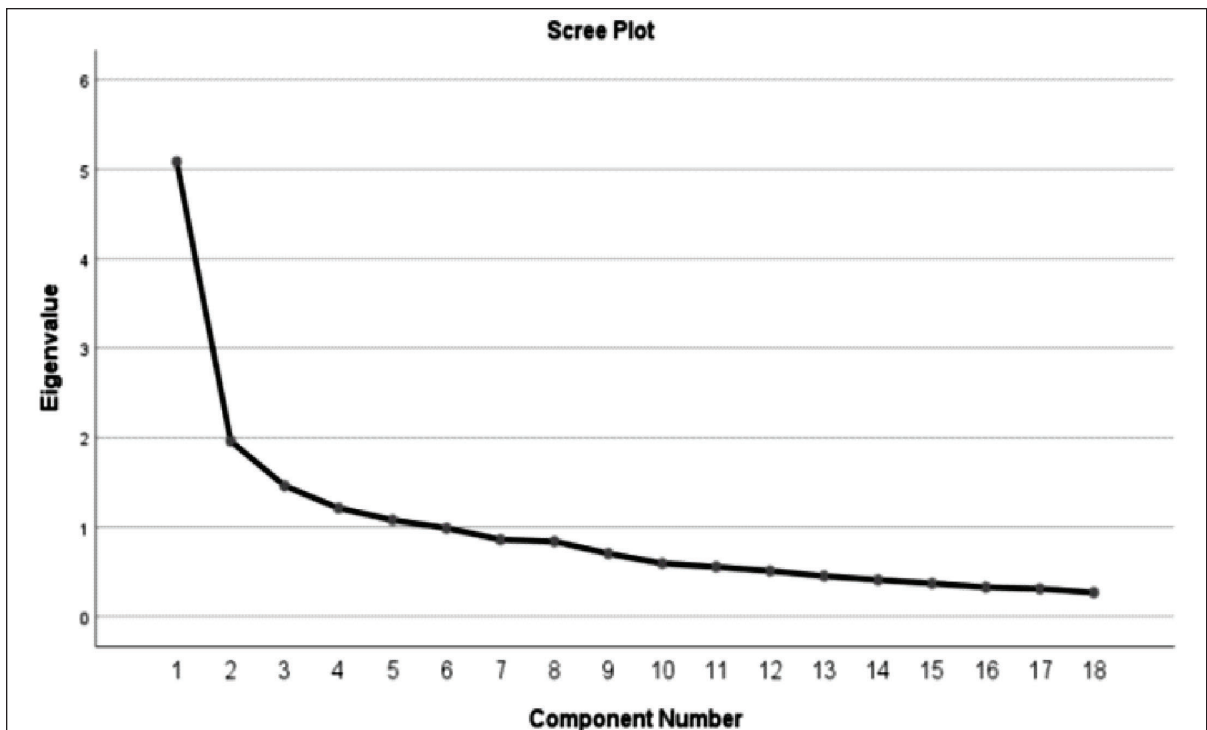


Figure 1: The scree plot graphs show the eigenvalue against the factor number in Figure:1. From the fifth factor onward, the line is almost flat, meaning each successive factor accounts for smaller and smaller amounts of the total variance.

## RESULT

Consumers' perception of DAP employment in the hospitality industry has a lesser impact on the 'Assurance and Empathy' constructs of the SERVQUAL model. There is no sign of difference among the four regions of India on consumer perception. The null hypothesis has been rejected.

The employment of DAP is increasing globally, and in India, too many hospitality players are coming up with new concepts of inclusive properties like ITC Hotels, Lemon Tree Hotels, IHG, etc. Many stand-alone restaurants are also coming up all over India like Echoes café

in Delhi, Mirchi & Mime – Mumbai, Ishaara – Mumbai, Sheroes Hangout – Agra, Lucknow & Udaipur, Café Toto – Kolkata, I can fly – Kolkata, Taste of Darkness – Hyderabad, Bangalore (Vohra, Lakshita. , 2020).

## RECOMMENDATION

Motivational training should be given to DAP to influence consumers and 'Can Do' techniques to assure quality service to the consumer. Hospitality players should use DAP services accompanied by non-differently abled employees to retain consumers and improve service delivery. In order to create an inclusive

society, organizations should promote corporate social responsibility activities. The government should provide subsidies or tax rebates to hospitality players and consumers’.

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