

## **Brand sustainability of three star hotels: tourists' experience of service quality**

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### **Abstract**

Sustainability of business has become an imperative concern for the marketers in this competitive atmosphere.. One of the major issues is the brand sustainability of service quality. Service quality has been studied by many researchers world-wide in various sectors. But does service quality have an effect on sustainability of brand name and brand image of service brands. The purpose of this research lies in determining the effect of experienced service quality on sustainability of brand name and brand image of the hotel industry. The present study included data mainly from primary sources although secondary data also facilitated the research. The research is exploratory as well as causal in nature. It was found that empathy dimension of service quality has the most positive significant effect on brand name and brand image where as assurance has the lowest significant effect on the brand name and brand image of hotels. The results imply that hoteliers need to focus on the improvement of service quality to build a better brand name and brand image. Since the hotels taken for the study were of three star categories the prominence of quality of service is of utmost importance to enhance their brand name and brand image. The hotel employees have to be more responsive to the guests' requirements to build the brand of the hotel. The services provided need to be more reliable. In the era of up growing social media not only promotion of the hotels but the quality of service also matters in brand sustainability.

**Keywords:** Brand name, SERVQUAL, Brand image, SEM, Brand Sustainability

### **Introduction**

Tourism industry is growing at a faster rate in comparison to other industries. This is due to the rise in disposable income of people and a relief from the boredom of their hectic lifestyle. This has led the industry to explore better and novel ways to allure tourists. Tourism contributes a lot to the economy of the world (Umbellina et.al, 2014). Travel and tourism industry contributed approximately 2.9 trillion U.S dollars in 2019 to global GDP (Lock, 2020). According to the "World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism has generated 194 billion dollars which is approximately 6.8% of GDP of India in 2019. This has led to 8 % increase in employment which is roughly 39.80 million jobs. This sector is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 6.9% to 460 billion dollars by 2028 which will be 9.9% of GDP" (Sood, 2021).

Hotel industry has become an integral part of the tourism industry. Hotel industry has contributed a lot to sustainable tourist development (Fotiadis & Vassiliadis, 2015). Tourists are seeking for a better accommodation and augmented services in return to the price they pay. This has built a competitive scenario amongst the hoteliers to combat the competition. Sustainability of business has become an imperative concern for the marketers in this competitive atmosphere. Sustainable competitive advantage is well achieved by organizations who aim for higher service quality. This also results in better customer value creation and satisfaction (Mishra & Chhatoi, 2017). Service quality has become an imperative issue for the hoteliers. There has been intrinsic research on service quality measurement and sustainability. But apart from service the brand of the hotel is also important. Since most of the bookings nowadays are being done online and through agencies the importance of the hotel brand and service has become essential. One of the major issues is the service quality and brand sustainability. Service quality has been studied by many researchers world-wide in various sectors. Service quality and brand image influence customer satisfaction and loyalty (Yulisetiarni & Mawarni, 2021). Some studies have been on effect of brand on service quality but there is a gap in literature when it comes to viceversa. This study has taken up the issue of service quality sustainability effect on branding strategies. The elements of brand name and brand image is taken for further study based on expert opinions. When customers are satisfied the brand name and brand image of the organization is eventually enhanced. Lots of challenges are faced by the service sector in maintaining their sustainability. But does service quality have an effect on sustainability of brand name and brand image of service brands.

#### Research aim

The purpose of this research lies in determining the effect of experienced service quality on sustainability of brand name and brand image of the hotel industry. Service quality has been measured in terms of the expectation or perception of the customers and their experience of the services. This research focuses on the views of the tourists based on their experience.

#### Literature Review

##### Service quality

Service is the behavior of the service provider to satisfy the needs and wants of the customers to achieve customer satisfaction (Prabow, et. al. 2020). “Service quality is defined as the degree and direction of incongruity between consumers’ perceptions and expectations regarding different, but relatively important dimensions of service quality, which affect their future behaviour (Zeithaml et al., 1988)”. Measuring service quality is cumbersome due to its abstract nature. Moreover the intangible, inseparable and perishable characteristic of service quality makes it all the more difficult in measurement (Mishra & Chhatoi, 2017; Yusof et. al. 2014). Reliability is a characteristic of service which is the trustworthiness of the service with minimum errors (Akrani, 2013). A reliable service adds to the profitability, customer satisfaction and customer support (Yuan et. al, 2020). A study by Vo, et. al. 2020 on e- service of upscale hotels websites in Vietnam confirmed that the service quality of website contributes to customer satisfaction that further influences the customer engagement behavior and brand loyalty. The relationship between website service quality and customer engagement behavior of the hotels is mediated by customer satisfaction. Service quality is of paramount significance for customer satisfaction of luxury hotels. They are the performance drivers of hotels (Wilkins et. al, 2007).

Sustainability is a derivative of latin word *sustinere* which means “to hold up” for the present and future (Mishra & Dash, 2014). A business to be sustainable requires to attain social, economic

and environmental sustainability (Svennson & Wagner, 2015). The main focus of sustainability of a product, brand or business is its valuable customers (Mishra, 2014). "Sustainability branding is the process of creating and maintaining an identity of a specific product, service, or business that reflects special added value in terms of environmental and social benefits. A sustainability brand must have an integrated culture for success (Wikipedia, 2021)".

### Service quality effect on brand name and brand image

The incorporation of branding strategies in service setting and services inclusion in branding research has been studied by Davis, 2007. Customers while choosing a destination, booking an airline or hotel, and other service brands refer to their brand names and book without knowing much about the quality of services provided. Quality is difficult to determine before purchase for service brands.

"Brand name is defined as a value that a name provides to a brand" (Pappu & Quester, 2008). It signifies the quality of a brand and builds in confidence in the customers towards the brand (Mishra & Datta, 2011). When consumers think about a brand name they relate it to the services provided by the brand (Yuan, et.al, 2020). Brand name helps in selecting the service and increases the efficiency of choosing a particular service brand. It also acts as a guestimate for pre-assessing brand and service quality before purchasing and consuming. Brand name clarifies the nature of the performed service acting as a means to capture attention and loyalty of service seekers and getters (Davis, 2007). Selecting a brand name is the centre piece of marketing programs and strategies. A good brand name can work wonderfully for a company whereas a poor one can demolish it (Mishra & Datta, 2011a). Services brand name should function efficiently as quality cues as customers donot have infinite time for studying about a particular service.

Brand image has been defined as the perception of a particular brand remembered by the public, collection of associations that customers connect to the brand name (Mishra & Datta, 2011). Brand image of service is described as quality dimension that consumers used to assess the service quality. The short-term experience may sometimes contradict the long term image (Davis, 2007). Brand image is not only important for a company's long-term competitive advantage but also its customer satisfaction which is the customer affection towards the service quality (Lahap et.al, 2016; Ramadhan & Muthohar, 2019). Because of the intangible characteristic of service, it is difficult to determine the brand iamge. Service brand image need to create tangible clue, easy comprehension and continuity. Further the brand should position the services provided in comparison to its competitors (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989). It has been found that brand image has a positive relationship with service quality and customer satisfaction (Yuan, et. al, 2020). Polycova and Mirza, 2015 suggested that consumers usually rely on extrinsic signs like brand image to determine and recognize the quality of service. Brand image is very much important for attracting new customers and retaining valuable customers. Measuring brand image is important as it helps marketers to identify the perceptions of customers regarding the products and services (Yuan, et. al, 2020). Lahp. Et.al, 2016 suggested that brand image has a strong relationship with customer satisfaction in a study on Malaysian hotels. Another study by Vierdwiyani & Syafarudin,2020 has taken brand image and service quality as separate independent constructs and found their effect on purchase decision and customer satisfaction. Prabow et. al. 2020 have studied the effect of service quality and brand image on repurchase intention through word of mouth of budget hotels airy rooms in Semarang city of Java. Presence of a strong brand image makes it easier to differentiate

service brands. This further fosters repeat purchase, positive word of mouth and a buffer for service failures. A study on five star rated Shangri-La hotel Surabaya customers of Indonesia has revealed that service quality positively influences image, perceived value, customer satisfaction and emotion of consumption. To enhance the image the hotel has thrust upon the waiters and hotel employees and their educational backgrounds and customer dealing abilities (Setia, et, al, 2021). Ryu et. al, 2022 have found that there exist a correlation between service quality and hotel name and image.

Because of intangible nature of service it is suggested that branding and image creation is vital for long term success of services (Davis, 2007). Wu et. al. 2011 stated that service quality has a direct and positive effect on brand image of private level brands in case of retail store. Li et.al, 2012 have studied the effects of service quality on customer satisfaction, brand loyalty and brand image of hotels in China. The result indicated a positive effect of service quality on brand image. Other studies also showed a positive effect of service quality on brand image of hotels but through word of mouth (Nainggolan and Amidiola, 2021). Another study on Malaysian resort hotels reported a lucrative physical environment develops better positive image. Further developing a good service image has a potential impact on repeat purchase and profit making (Hu et. al, 2009; Ryu et.al, 2012). Another study on 5 and 8 star hotels of Pakistan researched upon the study of association of service quality on brand image, customer satisfaction and brand loyalty and found that service quality has a positive relationship with brand image of the hotels (Saleem & Raja, 2014). There is a finding that experience of customers in hotel industry can affect its brand image, brand loyalty, product attributes and customer satisfaction (Liu and Hu, 2021).

## Methodology

The research is exploratory as well as causal in nature. The present study included data mainly from primary sources although secondary data also facilitated the research. The population of the study included visitors who were habitats of Odisha and from other states of India as well and some from abroad too. Amongst these visitors and tourists who had stayed overnight or more in the three star hotels at selected tourist spots during the months of October 2019 to January 2020 were chosen as respondents for the study. The category of hotel chosen for the survey was 3-star or comfort hotels as there have been several studies on budget and luxury hotels. The sample size consisted of 448 respondents . The data was collected from 3 famous tourist places in Odisha namely Puri, Bhubaneswar and Gopalpur. From the above mention clusters, questionnaires were collected disproportionately through quota sampling. For the current research one questionnaire was developed having 4 different sections. Section 1 contains the demographic details of respondents; section 2 contains details of the hotels. Section 3 and section 4 are respectively dedicated for service quality and questions related to brand name and brand image.

The tool used for collection of data was a questionnaire which was developed using a seven-point (1 to 7) Likert scale. 22 variables based on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL model also known RATER scale was taken for the study. The questions were adopted from various studies and reframed in context to the present research (Parasuraman et.al., 1985, 1988, 1991; Onkivisit & Shaw, 1989; Kayaman & Arsli, 2007; Davis, 2007; Mishra, & Datta, 2011; Mishra & Chhatoi, 2017; Warsewicz & Kulykovets, 2020).

The five key dimensions of SERVQUAL model are Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy and Responsiveness. 22 attributes (Parasuraman et.al., 1985, 1988, 1991) of the SERVQUAL model were considered as variables of the study and distributed over five dimensions also known as the RATER scale. The details of the RATER scale are:

- Reliability is the ability of the service provider to deliver the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Assurance is the knowledge and courteousness of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
- Tangibility is the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials
- Empathy is the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers
- Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service

The dimensions of branding taken for the research are brand name, brand communication, brand awareness, brand personality, brand image, perceived brand quality and brand loyalty which is adopted from previous research of the researchers. Out of these 8 elements the first two which scored the highest rank and was also recommended by experts were chosen for the study. These are Brand Name and Brand Image. Structural equation modeling was performed using AMOS 20 to study the effect of the dimensions of service quality on brand name and brand image. SPSS 20 was used to judge the reliability and validity of the data.

To seek the above purpose the following hypotheses have been proposed basing on the literature reviewed which are further tested for validity.

- H1: Experienced reliability has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.
- H2: Experienced assurance has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.
- H3: Experienced tangibility has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.
- H4: Experienced empathy has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.
- H5: Experienced responsiveness has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.
- H6: Experienced reliability has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.
- H7: Experienced assurance has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.
- H8: Experienced tangibility has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.
- H9: Experienced empathy has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.
- H10: Experienced responsiveness has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.

### **Analysis and discussion**

After collecting data it was put to descriptive and inferential statistics by using SPSS 25 and AMOS 25. The results of the analysis are discussed in the following sections.

**Table 1: Demographic details of the respondents**

Demographic details	% of respondents
<b>Age in years</b>	
15-25	9.10
25-35	30.28
35-45	32.10
45-55	13.16
55 above	15.36
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	56.14
Female	43.86
<b>Marital status</b>	
Single	34.58
Married	65.42
<b>Education level</b>	
Matric	10.26
Under graduate	14.32
Graduate	23.93
Post graduate	34.61
Above post graduate	16.88
<b>Profession</b>	
Student	15.16
Employees	42.35
Entrepreneurs	25.10
Housewives	17.39
<b>Place of residency</b>	

Urban	51.46
Semi-urban	42.10
Rural	6.44
<b>State of residency</b>	
Odisha	47.31
Other states	52.69
<b>Tourist types</b>	
Business /official	46.51
Leisure	53.49

Demographic study is a must for any research as it reveals the details about the respondents and the subject of the research. It was found from survey that males dominated the responses with 56.14%. The maximum number of tourists belonged to the age of 35-45 with 32.10% where minimum was from the age group of 15-25 with only 9.10%. 65.42% of the respondents were married. 34.61% of the respondents were post graduates in different disciplines and 16.88% were above postgraduate level. Only 10.26% passed school most of whom were students. Majority of the respondents were corporate and government professionals with 42.35%. The major income level was from 5-10lakhs with 34.8%. 51.46% of respondents were inhabitants of urban areas and their place of residency was out of Odisha. 53.49% tourists were on leisure visit. This shows that majority of visitors who stayed in three star hotels are in the middle income category, married and professionals. As the places chosen for the survey were tourist spots therefore majority of the respondents were on leisure tour.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics and normality**

The data was put to analysis to find the descriptive statistics- mean and standard deviation and checked for normality by skewness and kurtosis in table 2.

Variable	Mean	Std.deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
R1: Providing service at the promised time	4.7411	1.46393	-.628	-.056
R2: Staff performing service right the first time	4.8214	1.41557	-.627	.025
R3: Well trained and knowledgeable staff	4.8839	1.39025	-.659	.135
R4: Accuracy of food orders	4.9129	1.41073	-.642	.083
R5: Timely housekeeping service	4.9576	1.37263	-.638	.123
A1: Friendliness of staff	5.1004	1.44588	-.738	.334
A2: Courteous employees	4.8795	1.55546	-.601	-.183
A3: Making customers feel safe	5.1250	1.42603	-.751	.451
A4: Ability of staff to instill confidence in visitors	4.8013	1.56537	-.557	-.251

T1:Sophistication of hotel rooms	5.0536	1.20283	-.196	-.371
T2:Model and comfortable furniture	5.1161	1.13315	-.081	-.537
T3:Well dressed employees	5.1250	1.29099	-.334	-.609
T4:Convenient hotel location	4.9464	1.17269	-.197	-.547
E1: Willingness to help visitors	5.1518	1.12096	-.225	-.257
E2:Giving special attention to visitors	5.2232	1.18688	-.213	-.739
E3:Understanding the visitors' requirements	5.0268	1.18499	-.376	.051
E4:Listening carefully to complaints	5.0625	1.30585	-.261	-.816
E5:Hotel to have visitors' best interests at heart	5.0089	1.30046	-.409	-.736
RS1: Willingness to provide prompt service	5.5536	1.02618	-.419	-.658
RS2: Staff availability to provide service	5.4286	.92409	-.541	-.427
RS3:Responding to requests	5.5446	.97291	-.331	-.441
RS4:Quick checkin and checkout	5.4375	.99016	-.298	-.667
BN1:Appealing name	5.3326	1.84975	-.917	-.220
BN2:Awareness	5.7701	1.68645	-1.392	.994
BN3:Associate with the name	5.3549	1.89935	-.968	-.170
BN4:Feel proud to promote	5.1853	1.85589	-.851	-.322
BN5:Recognise the brand name	5.6362	1.71824	-1.296	.814
BN6:Distinct	4.9174	1.95471	-.705	-.647
BN7:Meaningful	5.2924	1.91701	-.976	-.212
BI1: Visible exterior	5.3237	1.74689	-.946	-.014
BI2: Appealing interior décor	5.1518	1.69463	-.730	-.282
BI3:Architecture	5.0893	1.84671	-.789	-.372
BI4:Furniture	5.2679	1.80718	-.905	-.146
BI5: Services provided	5.5000	1.64255	-1.088	.360

The mean value of all the 34 variables were determined which ranged from minimum 4.7411 for R1 to maximum 5.7701 for BN2. The standard deviation was minimum for RS2 with the value .92409 and maximum for BN6 with the value 1.95471. The skewness and kurtosis are within the range from -2 to +2 with a slightly negative bent (George & Mallery, 2010; Hair et, al. 2010).

**Table 3: Reliability analysis**

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.894	34

**Item-Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
R1	170.9821	537.807	.386	.891
R2	170.9018	531.503	.501	.889
R3	170.8393	530.108	.533	.889
R4	170.8103	530.074	.525	.889
R5	170.7656	530.077	.542	.889
A1	170.6228	538.177	.386	.891
A2	170.8438	537.998	.357	.892
A3	170.5982	538.286	.391	.891
A4	170.9219	539.947	.327	.893
T1	170.6696	537.949	.480	.890
T2	170.6071	538.919	.494	.890
T3	170.5982	534.442	.504	.890
T4	170.7768	540.008	.455	.890
E1	170.5714	537.780	.522	.890
E2	170.5000	538.376	.479	.890
E3	170.6964	539.111	.467	.890
E4	170.6607	530.538	.564	.889
E5	170.7143	532.379	.535	.889
RS1	170.1696	538.978	.549	.890
RS2	170.2946	543.211	.514	.890
RS3	170.1786	542.398	.504	.890
RS4	170.2857	543.663	.467	.891
BN1	170.3906	525.254	.442	.891
BN2	169.9531	530.532	.422	.891
BN3	170.3683	528.448	.391	.892
BN4	170.5379	528.947	.396	.892
BN5	170.0871	540.102	.290	.894
BN6	170.8058	535.334	.299	.894
BN7	170.4308	532.384	.341	.893
BI1	170.3996	530.312	.408	.891
BI2	170.5714	532.125	.399	.891
BI3	170.6339	529.083	.397	.892
BI4	170.4554	532.105	.370	.892
BI5	170.2232	536.720	.352	.892

The data was checked for internal consistency reliability expressed in table 3. The reliability was represented by Cronbach's alpha which was 0.894 above 0.7. The scale variance if item deleted was above 0.8 which was above the acceptable value of  $> 0.7$  (George & Mallery, 2010; Hair et, al. 2010).

**Table 4: Sampling adequacy**

The data is then checked for its adequacy to conduct factor analysis by **KMO and Bartlett's Test**.

**KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Adequacy.	Measure of Sampling	.898
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square Df	13820.813
	Sig.	.000

The KMO measure is 0.898 which is  $> 0.5$  indicating that the sample is adequate. The Bartlett's test is significant at 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

**Validity analysis**

After conducting the reliability analysis the data is analysed for its validity

**Table 5: Convergent validity**

Factors	Average variance extracted (AVE)	Composite reliability
Reliability	0.818538	1.727354
Assurance	0.900701	1.968295
Tangibility	0.714538	3.905507
Empathy	0.762022	3.812492
Responsiveness	0.791855	3.079187
Brand name	0.716171	5.321614
Brand image	0.710351	4.316933

The  $AVE > 0.5$  and composite reliability  $> 0.7$  are within the acceptable standard (Hair et.al, 2014). The average variance extracted ranges from 0.710-0.900 and composite reliability 1.72-4.31. This shows that the factors are convergent.

**Table 6: Variance extracted****Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	9.973	29.331	29.331	9.973	29.331	29.331	4.632	13.622	13.622
2	5.629	16.557	45.888	5.629	16.557	45.888	4.185	12.307	25.930
3	3.263	9.597	55.485	3.263	9.597	55.485	4.026	11.841	37.771
4	2.406	7.076	62.560	2.406	7.076	62.560	3.479	10.232	48.003
5	1.444	4.247	66.807	1.444	4.247	66.807	3.238	9.524	57.527
6	1.239	3.643	70.451	1.239	3.643	70.451	2.844	8.365	65.893
7	1.112	3.270	73.720	1.112	3.270	73.720	2.661	7.828	73.720

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The above table shows the total variance extracted by the principal component analysis. Seven components were identified with eigen value greater than 1, explaining a combined total of 73.7% variance which is above the minimum acceptance value of 60%.

**Table 7: Factor analysis**

Variable	Reliability	Brand name	Empathy	Assurance	Responsiveness	Brand image	Tangibility
R1	.838						
R2	.921						
R3	.947						
R4	.930						
R5	.885						
BN1		.726					
BN2		.748					
BN3		.774					
BN4		.763					

BN5		.666					
BN6		.621					
BN7		.716					
E1			.723				
E2			.762				
E3			.797				
E4			.758				
E5			.771				
A1				.954			
A2				.871			
A3				.948			
A4				.830			
RS1					.784		
RS2					.833		
RS3					.753		
RS4					.798		
BI1						.734	
BI2						.752	
BI3						.786	
BI4						.778	
BI5						.501	
T1							.663
T2							.732
T3							.742
T4							.721

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

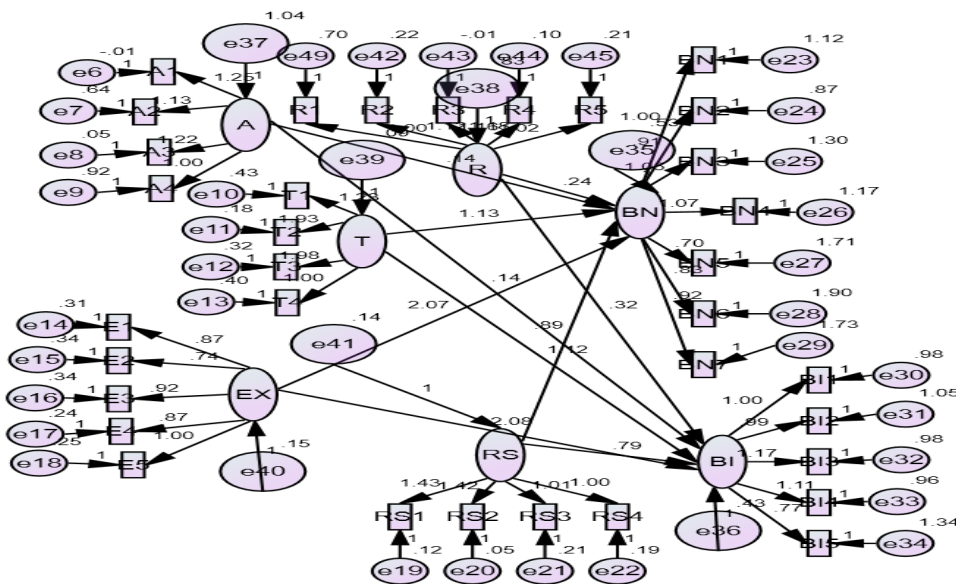
Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

The data was put to exploratory factor analysis to determine the factors. The extraction method adopted is Principal Component Analysis and rotation Method is Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. All the variables loaded  $>0.5$  on their respective factors (Hair et al, 2014.). The lowest loading was for BI5 = .501 and the highest for A1 = 0.954.

## Results of structural equation modeling

The data was analysed and a causal model shown in figure 1 was framed which was put to structural equation modeling using AMOS 25.

**Figure 1: Causal Model**



The model fit and the path estimates are discussed in the following tables.

**Table 8: Model fit summary**

Goodness of fit indices	Standard value	Obtained value
Chisquare $X^2$		1092.2
CMIN/df	< 3	2.1
Significance probability	<0.05	0.000
GFI	> 0.8	0.856
AGFI	> 0.8	0.835
RMSEA	< 0.05	0.05

The model fit summary shows the goodness of fitness indices, the standard value and the obtained values. It was found that chisquare was 1092.2, CMIN/df was 2.1, standard value <3, significance 0.000 which is <0.05. Goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.856, standard value >0.8. Adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) was 0.835, standard value >0.8 and root mean square error of approximation was 0.05, standard value <0.05 (Hair et.al, 2014). The results indicate that the data fits the model well and the model is acceptable.

**Table 9: Results of hypotheses testing**

Hypotheses	Standardized regression weights	C.R	P value	Result
H1: Experienced reliability has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.	0.177	2.831	.005	Supported
H2: Experienced assurance has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.	0.115	1.990	.047	Supported
H <sub>0</sub> 3: Experienced tangibility has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.	0.284	3.040	.002	Supported
H <sub>0</sub> 4: Experienced empathy has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.	0.666	4.943	***	Supported
H <sub>0</sub> 5: Experienced responsiveness has a significant effect on brand name of three star hotels.	0.271	3.402	***	Supported
H6: Experienced reliability has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.	0.242	3.901	***	Supported
H7: Experienced assurance has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.	0.123	2.173	.030	Supported
H8: Experienced tangibility has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.	0.287	3.131	.002	Supported

H9: Experienced empathy has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.	0.690	4.847	***	Supported
H10: Experienced responsiveness has a significant effect on brand image of three star hotels.	0.247	3.337	***	Supported

\*\*\* significant,  $P < 0.05$

The standardized regression weights for all the paths were positive in nature and significant. All the hypotheses were supported showing the causal effect of the exogenous constructs on the endogenous constructs. 10 alternative hypotheses were formulated from H1 to H10.

## Discussion

This research provides insight into new aspects of service quality and brand sustainability. The service quality was measured by SERVQUAL model using the RATER scale. The dimensions of service quality measures taken for the study are Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy and Responsiveness as taken by Davis, et. al, 2007; Prabow, et. al, 2020. Further brand name and brand image were chosen to study brand sustainability. To check the relationship hypotheses were formulated. All the hypotheses were supported. Model fit was good. All the factors of service quality had significant effect on brand name and brand image. Experienced empathy has the highest significant effect on brand name and brand image of three star hotels. Tangibility and responsiveness followed next in case of effect of service quality on brand name. For brand image reliability, tangibility and responsiveness followed empathy.

The hotel employees had willingness to help the guests and gave them special attention. Moreover they understood the visitors' requirement and listened carefully to their complaints if any. The hotels surveyed had the visitors' best interest at heart similar to the study of Manhas & Tukamushaba, 2015. These personal touch and caring attitude of the hoteliers made a positive impact on the customers. This empathetic approach of the hoteliers evoked a positive significant view of the brand name and brand image. Reliability was achieved by providing service at the promised time by the hoteliers. The guests found the staff performing their services rightly at the first instance. The hotels had well trained and knowledgeable staff which added to the customers' reliability on the services. The timely housekeeping service and food order was a cherry on the cake. It was found that the employees of the three star hotels were friendly, courteous and made the customers feel safe and secured in a new place. This instilled a confidence in the minds of the customers towards the hoteliers.

Since service quality is intangible in nature therefore the hoteliers tried their best to make the room ambience sophisticated with modern and comfortable furniture. The convenience of the hotel location and the well dressed employees added to the tangibility by their physical evidence. The services providers responded well to the customers by their willingness to provide service promptly. There were adequate staff to provide service as and when needed. The check in and check out which is the beginning and end of the stay of visitors was fast and accurate.

The service quality dimensions had a positive effect on brand name and brand image. The name of the hotels were appealing to the guests. They were aware of the name and could associate

themselves with the brand. The hotel name was distinct and meaningful and recognizable by the customers. They felt proud to promote the brand names to others. Brand image of the hotels reflected the customers mindsets (Hasby et.al, 2018). When asked about the exterior and interior décor, the reply was visible and appealing. The guests loved the architecture of the buildings and the furniture too. Finally the services provided by the hoteliers imprinted a positive image on the customers' minds also studied by Manhas & Tukamushaba, 2015.

## Conclusion

This study revealed a novel approach to service quality and brand sustainability. Service quality being an abstract and intangible element has a significant effect on brand name and brand image. This enhanced the sustainability of the service brand. The take away from this research is that service quality should be taken care of to build a sustainable brand in case of three star hotels. As a citizen of the society customer care and a comfortable stay should be the main focus of hoteliers. It has been found from the responses of the customers who held empathy of the hoteliers as a main focus. The hoteliers should have willingness to help hotel guests and keep their best interests at heart. Comfort, safety and feel at home are some aspects which should be taken care of. The image of hotels is influenced by the degree of loyalty of the customers. This would result in building customer value and competitive advantage along with profit maximization. For researchers this model can be used for further study in other categories of hotels and post covid. New variables can be added to the study and checked for validity and results. Finally for a service hospitality brand to be sustainable its brand name and brand image are important elements which can be enhanced by providing superior and valuable service quality.

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