

Assessment of Service Quality in Tourist Hotels of Cox's Bazaar in Terms of Demographic Characteristics of Tourists

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Tourism is adopted in many developing countries to ensure economic growth. It can reduce the gap between rich and poor nations by promoting the development of the country by using natural and cultural attractions. Service quality of tourist hotel is an important concern for such nations, i.e. Bangladesh, as the inflow of the tourists depends on the hospitality they get from a nation. Thus the study purports to assess the service quality in tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar, the world's longest sea beach. A sample of 50 local tourists is surveyed through structured questionnaire and the evaluation is made in terms of the differences in tourists' demographic characteristics. Everyday tourists from diversified background visit the hotels in Cox's Bazaar. The preferences for service may vary among the tourists based on the differences in gender, age, education, occupation, etc. The study employs the SERVQUAL model for identifying both the expected and actual service quality in the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar. A series of hypotheses tests are conducted to explore service gap and to know whether the perception of service quality varies among different groups of tourists. The result reveals a significant service gap in terms of all the components of service quality including Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, and Tangibility according to the SERVQUAL model. It is also prevalent that perception about service quality varies significantly among the tourists visited in the hotels of Cox's Bazaar based on the differences in their gender and education. The service quality of tourist hotels varies among tourists from different occupation in terms of Reliability, Responsiveness, and Empathy. The service quality also varies among tourists from different age group in terms of Reliability.

Field of Research: Marketing.

Keywords: Service quality, tourist hotels, SERVQUAL model, demographic characteristics of tourists.

1. Introduction

Tourism has become one of the major international trade categories as it is the world's largest, rapid growing and profitable industry (Tuhin & Majumder 2011). Travel & tourism continues to be a leading employer as it employs around 235 million people that accounts for more than 8% of global employment. Besides, travel & tourism contributes over 9% of global GDP (WTTC 2010). Thus tourism has become an important sector for economic growth in Bangladesh like other developing countries in the world (Islam 2009). Bangladesh, a South Asian country, has become the attraction of the tourists as the country is filled with natural wonders and variety of unique and magnificent creatures (Tuhin & Majumder 2011).

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Moreover, Bangladesh has archaeological, ecological, cultural and other tourism products to attract tourists (Tuhin & Majumder 2011). Apart from a country's beautiful natural environment, the warmth welcome of local population and tourist's memorable souvenirs are deeply influenced by the type of service they receive from the hotel where they lodge (Fowdar 2007). Therefore tourist hotels should strive for delivering quality services to ensure customer satisfaction, which by turn ensures survival and profitability of these hotels (Fowdar 2007). In recent years, customers have become increasingly more sensitive to service quality (Lee & Hing 1995). Thus satisfying these quality conscious customers can be possible by providing quality services. There has been evidence that when customers' perceptions of service quality are positive, the behavioral intentions are favorable; this strengthens their relationship with the organization (Zeithaml & Bitner 2003). On the other hand, when service quality assessments are negative, the customers' behavioral intentions are unfavorable (Kouthouris & Alexandris 2005). Thus quality is becoming critical in the service organizations as services are becoming more commodity-like (Chowdhury, Iqbal & Miah 2010). Through quality services, the organizations can differentiate in the market and satisfy the customer needs (Ozment & Morash 1994). Moreover, research has demonstrated the strategic benefits of quality in contributing to market share and ROI, as well as lowering manufacturing costs and improving productivity (Anderson & Zeithaml 1984; Garvin 1982). That's why delivering superior service quality is a prerequisite for success and survival in today's competitive business environment (Gilbert & Wong 2006).

The service managers and academic researchers are trying to understand how customers perceive the quality of service, as the service industry has become competitive. The tourist hotel is a typical service industry, offering individual services for tourists (Tsaur, Chang & Wu 2004). Like any other service industry, customer satisfaction and loyalty are secured through high quality services in this industry. Tourists usually judge their accommodation based on the evaluation of interactions, hotel environment and the value associated with staying at the place of accommodation (Haghkhah, Nosratpour, Ebrahimpour & Hamid 2011). This paper takes a first step towards exploring the service quality of tourist hotels in Cox's Bazaar. Even, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, the official authority of tourism industry did not take any interest in measuring the service quality. The reason behind such scenario may be the fact that Bangladesh has recently realized the contribution of service sector in economic development. Thus like other service industries, no research initiative is taken so far to explore the service quality of these tourist hotels in terms of customer expectation and actual service quality in Bangladesh. Besides lack of research interests, as the necessary supportive requirements for researches are not adequate in the country, very few service industries are explored in terms of service quality.

This research paper focuses on the link between tourist expectations and service quality, and demonstrates the measure of different tourists' expectations as a diagnostic tool in managing its service quality. It is found in previous researches that the customer expectations construct has been viewed as playing a key role in the evaluation of service quality (Groenroos 1994; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry 1985, 1988). Such approaches have been previously researched in different fields of business (Gilbert & Wong 2006; Gustafsson & Johnson 2004; Bebeko 2000). Besides demographic characteristics is one of the major determinants of consumer buying behavior and it plays a noteworthy role in shaping customer needs (Aksoy, Atilgan &

Akinci 2003). In fact differences in the demographic profile of the customers can lead to variances in the expectations regarding service quality (Bebko 2000). That's why in this study the attempt was made to extract the root causes affecting the service quality of the tourist hotels of Bangladesh and the expectations of different types of tourists based on their demographic differences towards the improvement of quality of hotel services that will offer them a competitive edge.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the service quality of the tourist hotels in Cox's Bazaar of Bangladesh based on the differences in demographic characteristics of the tourists. More specifically the objectives of the study are:

- To find out the expectations of tourists regarding service quality and perceptions about the actual service quality in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.
- To identify the gap between the expected and actual service quality in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.
- To find out whether the tourists' perceptions vary across gender or not.
- To find out whether the tourists' perceptions vary across their different levels of age or not.
- To find out whether the tourists' perceptions vary across the different types of occupations or not.
- To find out whether the tourists' perceptions vary across their different levels of education or not.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Tourism Industry and Tourist Hotels in Bangladesh

Now-a-days tourism is considered as the largest and rapid growing industry of modern business world. Today tourism is the most advantageous and up-to-date business all over the world (Tuhin & Majumder 2011). For many developing countries it is one of the main income sources. According to Bangladesh Bank (2011), the foreign exchange earnings from tourism and other travels is 5562.70 million Tk. in 2010. Tourism, mostly a service industry, is more labor oriented than other sectors of production. Thus, in view of the fact that Bangladesh has a labor-intensive economy the creation of more employment opportunities for the growing population is crucial. Therefore, tourism industry can create employment opportunities and a productive labor force to a greater degree than other sectors (Tuhin & Majumder 2011). For this purpose, Bangladesh tourism industry should arrange its marketing mix elements in a way that attain positive attitudes of the foreign tourists and ensure growth of the country (Hossain, Khan & Hasan 2005). Tourism industry in Bangladesh still has not got a solid footing to "taken off" despite all the efforts and measures from government and other private agencies (Ahmed 1986). This is because people have country specific attracting and repelling factors which affect tourists' choice and decision regarding their travel to a country (Tuhin & Majumder 2011). So, promotion of tourism of a country is greatly dependent on the magnitude of publicity. Therefore, it became imperative for the government to come forward by promote tourism in Bangladesh (Talukder 1984).

Soon after the independence of Bangladesh, the government of the newborn state realized the importance of tourism in its economic and social life. Therefore, the government decided to reorganize the tourism sector by combining both the tourism department and the private corporation into one organization, bringing it under government responsibility for better coordination, promotion, development and marketing (Hossain & Nazmin 2006). Consequently, the government established the National Tourism Organization (NTO) in the name of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation under Presidential Order No. 143, declared in November 27, 1972. BPC began in January 1973 with limited assets of the former "Pakistan Tourism Corporation" and TK.10 million (\$US147,059) sanctioned by the government. The Corporation was entrusted with the dual responsibility of developing tourism infrastructure and promoting Bangladesh as a tourist destination. Other responsibilities of the Corporation included regulation and operation of tourism activities in the country. Thus, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation came into being as the NTO in Bangladesh (MoCAT 2011). The major problems of tourism industry in Bangladesh are over population, natural disasters, unemployment, and economic underdevelopment (Hall & Page 2000). At present, there are a number of tourist facilities and tourist hotels in Bangladesh. But in some cases information of these facilities and hotels are not available to the tourists (Hasan 1992).

3.2 Service Quality and SERVQUAL Model

Quality refers to the ability of a product or service to consistently meet or exceed customer expectations (Stevenson 2002). Schoenberger (1990) found twelve dimensions that customers associate with quality products and services, although all the dimensions of quality are not relevant to all products and services. These dimensions are: *conformance to specification, performance, quick response, quick-change expertise, features, reliability, durability, serviceability, aesthetics, perceived quality, humanity, and value*. Quality is considered as the cornerstone of success for any business, as it is the key factor for the sustainable competitive advantages (Hampton 1993). For the success of any service organization, quality is a critical and of paramount importance to service providers (Bebko 2000), as services are the intangible outcomes of a tangible or intangible process. Over the past several years, there have been a variety of studies on different issues pertaining to service quality. Traditionally service quality has been defined as the difference between the customer expectations of the service to be received and perception of the service actually received (Gro'nroos 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry 1985, 1988). These researchers posited that measuring service quality as "disconfirmation" that is the difference between perceptions and expectations, is valid. Thus such a model allows service providers to identify certain defined gaps in the service provided (Wang, Lo & Hui 2003).

The instrument used to explore service quality in this study was adapted from SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985, 1988). SERVQUAL model is one of the first service quality models, measured service quality using the expectancy disconfirmation framework on the five dimensions of tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985, 1988). Parasuraman et al. (1988, 1991) found that the five-dimensional format of SERVQUAL allows researchers to assess the level of service quality along each dimension, as well as overall. The purpose of this model is to serve as a

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diagnostic method for uncovering broad areas of weaknesses and strengths in the quality of service an organization delivers.

The five dimensions of SERVQUAL model identified by Parasuraman et al. (1988) are:

1. Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
2. Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
3. Assurance: Employees' knowledge and courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
4. Empathy: Caring, individualized attention given to customer.
5. Tangibles: Appearance of physical facility, equipment, personnel and written materials.

Parasuraman et al. (1988) define five gaps from their research data:

Gap 1. The discrepancy between customers' expectations and management's perceptions of these expectations.

Gap 2. The discrepancy between management's perceptions of customers' expectations and service quality specifications.

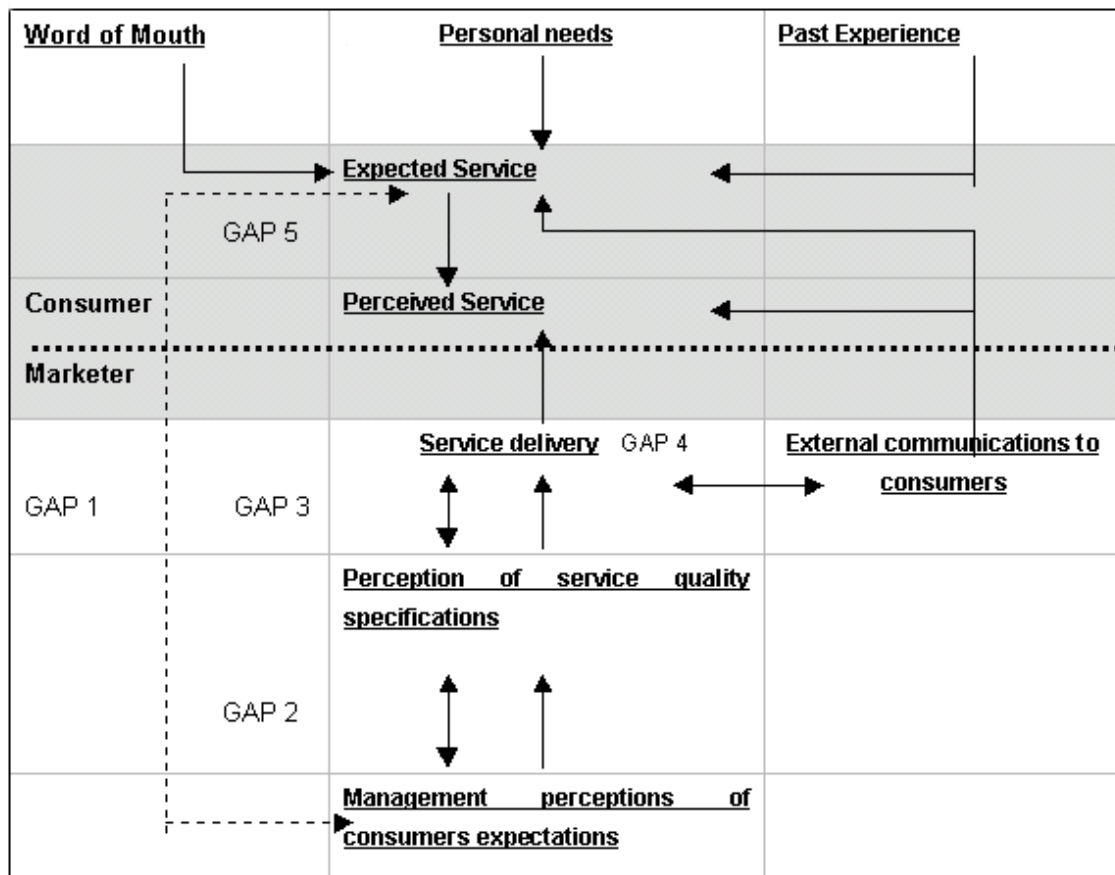
Gap 3. The discrepancy between service quality specifications and actual service delivery.

Gap 4. The discrepancy between actual service delivery and what is communicated to customers about it.

Gap 5. The discrepancy between customer's expected service and perceived service delivered.

The first four gaps contribute to Gap 5, that is, the gap between customer expectations and customer perceptions of service received- and it is this last gap which has been the main focus of this research. The figure of the gaps of SERVQUAL Model is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Model of service quality gaps (Parasuraman et al., 1985).



3.3 SERVQUAL Model in Research

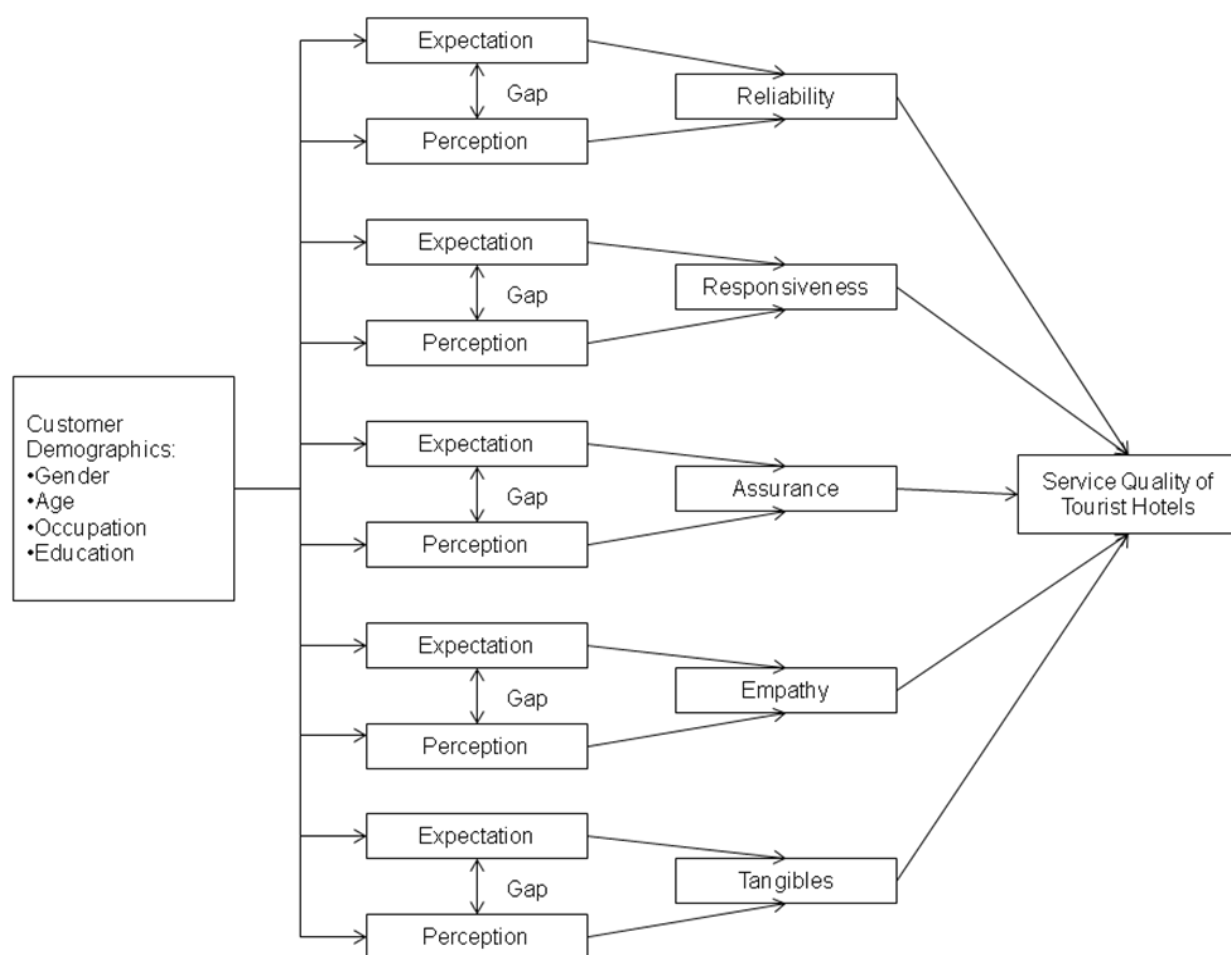
Even though the SERVQUAL model was used widely in researches, the model has come under extensive criticism by marketing researchers (see Babakus & Boller 1992; Carman 1990; Cronin & Taylor 1992; Brown et al. 1993; Cronin & Taylor 1992; Carman 1990). According to Markovic and Raspor (2010), “criticism was directed at the conceptual and operational base of the model, mostly its validity, reliability, operationalization of expectations, and dimensional structure”. Though the SERVQUAL model has such numerous limitations, the model’s framework has guided numerous studies in the service sector that focus on banks, repair and maintenance services, telephone companies, physicians, hospitals, hotels, academic institutions and retail stores (Parasuraman et al. 1988; Carman 1990; Boulding et al. 1993; Kouthouris & Alexandris 2005). Several researchers have used SERVQUAL model to measure service quality in tourism industry (Augustyn & Ho 1998; Fick & Ritchie 1991; Avci & Nadiri 2000; Antilgan, Akinci & Aksoy 2003). In Bangladesh the SERVQUAL model has been used to measure the service gap in different industries such as, private universities (Chowdhury, Iqbal and Miah 2010), retail stores (Khan & Jahan, 2011), advertisement agencies (Khan 2010), SME, retail banking (Siddiqi 2010), hospitals (Siddiqui & Khandaker 2007). No study was found on service quality measurement of tourist hotels in Bangladesh. Khan (2008) took the attempt to identify the service quality of the luxurious hotels of Khulna city in Bangladesh. He found the hotel guests’ perceptions of service facility provided by the hotel industry were lower than their expectations. Later on, Tabassum and Rahman (2011) tested the service gap in the luxurious hotels of Bangladesh and explored significant

differences in terms of expected and actual service quality. Thus it can be said that SERVQUAL model is still suitable as an assessment tool to measure the service quality perceptions (Siddiqi 2010).

4. Conceptual Framework

The present research focuses on service quality provided by the tourist hotels in terms of SERVQUAL model's five dimensions of service quality measurement. So here the variable service quality is dependent on the five dimensions of quality measurement in service sector; reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. Service quality in terms of these dimensions is determined with the measurement of service gap in each dimension. The service quality in each dimension is again dependent on the customer demographic characteristics; i.e. gender, age group, occupation, education, etc. These phenomena are illustrated through the following conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

Figure 2: Conceptual framework of the study based on SERVQUAL model



5. Hypotheses Development

Based on the above conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are developed.

H1₀: There is no gap between expected and actual perception of tourists regarding the service quality of the tourist hotels in Bangladesh.

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This hypothesis can be broken further according to the SERVQUAL model.

H1a₀: There is no gap between expected and actual perception of tourists regarding the reliability of service in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.

H1b₀: There is no gap between expected and actual perception of tourists regarding the responsiveness of service in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.

H1c₀: There is no gap between expected and actual perception of tourists regarding the assurance of service in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.

H1d₀: There is no gap between expected and actual perception of tourists regarding the empathy of service in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.

H1e₀: There is no gap between expected and actual perception of tourists regarding the tangibility of service in the tourist hotels of Bangladesh.

The later hypotheses are developed based on demographic characteristics of the tourists. The tourists' perceptions regarding service quality frequently vary based on sex, age group, occupation, etc. Thus the hypotheses are,

H2₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in gender of the tourists.

This hypothesis can be broken further according to the SERVQUAL model in terms of gender differences.

H2a₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in gender of the tourists in terms of reliability of service.

H2b₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in gender of the tourists in terms of responsiveness of service.

H2c₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in gender of the tourists in terms of assurance of service.

H2d₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in gender of the tourists in terms of empathy of service.

H2e₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in gender of the tourists in terms of tangibility of service.

H3₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in age of the tourists.

This hypothesis also can be broken further according to the SERVQUAL model in terms of difference age groups.

H3a₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in age of the tourists in terms of reliability of service.

H3b₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in age of the tourists in terms of responsiveness of service.

H3c₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in age of the tourists in terms of assurance of service.

H3d₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in age of the tourists in terms of empathy of service.

H3e₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in age of the tourists in terms of tangibility of service.

H4₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in occupation of the tourists.

This hypothesis also can be broken further according to the SERVQUAL model in terms of differences in occupation.

H4a₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in occupation of the tourists in terms of reliability of service.

H4b₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in occupation of the tourists in terms of responsiveness of service.

H4c₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in occupation of the tourists in terms of assurance of service.

H4d₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in occupation of the tourists in terms of empathy of service.

H4e₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in occupation of the tourists in terms of tangibility of service.

H5₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in education of the tourists.

This hypothesis also can be broken further according to the SERVQUAL model in terms of differences in education.

H5a₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in education of the tourists in terms of reliability of service.

H5b₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in education of the tourists in terms of responsiveness of service.

H5c₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in education of the tourists in terms of assurance of service.

H5d₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in education of the tourists in terms of empathy of service.

H5e₀: The service quality of tourist hotels in Bangladesh does not vary due to the differences in education of the tourists in terms of tangibility of service.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Sample Selection and Data Collection

According to Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC 2011), total 112,965 number of tourists arrived in the year 2010 in Bangladesh. This study includes 50 local tourists who visited the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar at the end of the year 2010. According to Nunnally (1978), the ideal sample size for any exploratory research is within 40 to 60. Thus the current study with 50 samples meets the criteria of the sample size. The hotels included in this study are selected based on convenience of the researchers. According to Parjatanbd.Com (2011), there are around 29 tourist hotels in Cox's Bazaar. Among these 5 hotels are considered and 10 tourists are included from each hotel for questionnaire survey purpose.

The research assistants administered the survey in the hotel premises, during one week period in December 2010. The first part of the questionnaire consists of the

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general information of the respondent. Service quality attributes are used in the second part, which are used to identify the service gap. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on each statement from '1' as 'strongly disagree' to '5' as 'strongly agree' for both the expected service quality and perceived service quality. These statements are constructed based on the five components of SERVQUAL model.

6.2 Operationalization of Variables

The service quality attributes consist of five components: Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, and Tangibility, which are adopted based on SERVQUAL model. This study uses multiple item scale items adapted from Marković and Raspor (2010), Gržinić (2007), and Avci and Nadiri (2000).

6.3 Validity and Reliability Issues

Validity is the degree which measures accurately represents what it is supposed to (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham 2007). Validity is concerned with how well the concept is defined by the measure(s). There are three types of validity: content validity, predictive validity, and construct validity (Siddiqi 2010), Duggirala, Rajendran and Anantharaman (2008) defined the content validity as the assessment of the correspondence between the individual items and concept. Malhotra (2010) defines the content validity as face validity. This study concentrates on content validity through the review of literature and adapts instruments which are used in previous research.

Reliability differs from validity in that it relates not to what should be measured, but instead to how it is measured. Reliability is the extent to which a variable or set of variables is consistent in what it is intended to measure (Hair *et al.* 2007). The current study applies internal consistency method because multiple items in all constructs are used here. The reliability is here measured with the help of Cronbach Alpha value and the data is found as reliable (see Table 1).

6.4 Statistical Tools of Data Analysis

The study is based on the data collected to measure the tourist expectation and observation of service quality to assess the service gap in tourist hotels. For this purpose 5-point 'Likert scale' is used that is a numerical and more specifically, interval-scaled data. The corresponding probability distribution of this numerical data point will be a continuous distribution but as the data is informing about the opinion of the tourists through ranking, it is very likely that the parent distribution will not follow a normal pattern. This pre-assumption has been further confirmed by illustration of the Probability-Probability plot (P-P plot) of items. The central view and the diversity among the views of the respondents have been observed in case of each item individually. The distribution pattern of all the components as a whole expressing all the basic features have been observed along with Box-plot diagram.

Lastly, Test of Hypothesis has been performed to draw a final conclusion about identifying the gap between the tourists' expectation and observation about the service quality of tourist hotels. In the present study, each of the respondents has been asked about his or her expectation and also observation. As the same person

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has been chosen for both measurements, the samples are related or dependent. Because of the subjective nature of the scores, it is assured that the data does not follow the normal distribution and in consequence the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test has been decided to use. Dissimilarity between the ratings of expectations and also the ratings of observation pattern across different gender, age, education and occupation of the customers has been focused through non-parametric Mann-Whitney Test (for independent two sample) and non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis Test (for independent many samples).

7. Data Analysis

7.1 Respondents' Profile

Among the 50 hotel customers, the percentages of male and female respondents are 80 and 20 respectively. In the whole sample, 22% of the respondents fall in the age range of 21-30 years, 38% fall in the 31-40 range, and 40% fall in the 41-50 range. In terms of occupation, 58% respondents are service holders, and 42% respondents are business. In terms of education, 14% respondents are below graduate, 32% are graduates, and 54% are post-graduates.

7.2 Inference on the Basic Features of Service Quality Components

Table 1: Inference on the basic features of all the components of service quality

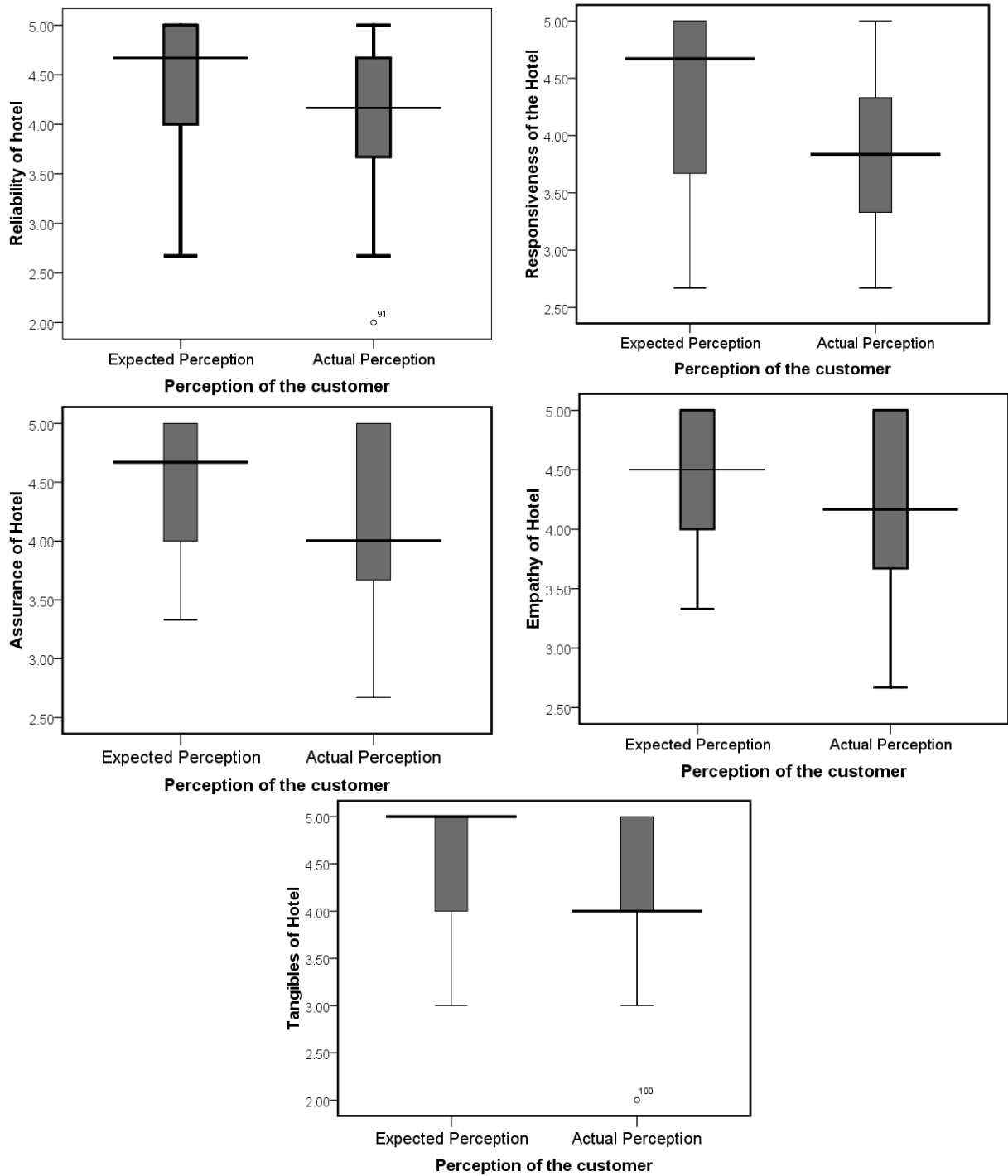
	Mean		Median		Mode		Standard Deviation		Reliability Analysis (Alpha value)	
	E*	O**	E*	O**	E*	O**	E*	O**	E*	O**
Reliability	4.49	4.04	4.67	4.17	5.00	4.33	0.63	0.75	0.8433	0.9033
Responsiveness	4.39	3.79	4.67	3.83	5.00	4.00	0.66	0.70	0.8908	0.9228
Assurance	4.54	4.12	4.67	4.00	5.00	4.50	0.52	0.76	0.8335	0.9079
Empathy	4.49	4.15	4.50	4.16	5.00	5.00	0.56	0.73	0.8529	0.9014
Tangibles	4.60	4.30	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	0.67	0.76	0.8749	0.9306

* E = Expected service

** O = Observed service

From Table 1, it is easily observable that the average level of expectation of the tourists regarding the service provided by the tourist hotels has always been greater than that of the actual phenomenon have been observed. Among all the component, Responsiveness has been received the least observed score. The middle-most ranking of expectation and observation have achieved at least 4, reflecting the positive view about the component except the earlier stated component. The modal response of expectation has shown its extreme feature as usual whereas those for most realistic facts could not reach that peak. The level of observation is more spread and diverse compare to the expectation of the tourists for all the components.

Figure 3: Box-plot diagram for expected and actual perception about all the components of service quality of the tourist hotels



The Box-plot diagram (Figure 3) also suggests this contrast of the distributions of the expectation and observation of tourists. In all cases, expected median are clearly shown above than that of the observed one. Most interestingly, for Tangibles, almost all expected frequency is clearly sited below the median whereas those of actual frequency are above the median.

Table 1 also represents the reliability analysis in terms of all the components of service quality. Reliability is measured for both the expected and observed perception with Cronbach Alpha value. The Cronbach Alpha with acceptable cut off

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point 0.70 demonstrates that all attributes are internally consistent (Fujun, Hutchinson, Li & Bai 2007). As the Cronbach Alpha values for all the components meet the criteria of this cut off point. Thus all the attributes of the study are reliable.

7.3 Hypotheses Testing

7.3.1 Test of Hypotheses regarding Service Gap

The following table (Table 2) shows that the p-values for the components of service quality are less than the significance level of the test that 0.01 or just 1%. Thus comparing with the level of significance, 0.01, it can be concluded that H1a₀, H1b₀, H1c₀, H1d₀, and H1e₀ are rejected, which indicates a significant gap between the tourists' expectations and observations regarding the service quality of the tourist hotels.

Table 2: Statistical Testing of Hypothesis regarding the Service Gap

	Ranks				Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Statistics	
		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	P-value (2-tailed)
Reliability	Negative Ranks	33 ^a	23.61	779.00	-4.539 ^d	0.000*
	Positive Ranks	8 ^b	10.25	82.00		
	Ties	9 ^c				
	Total	50				
Responsiveness	Negative Ranks	33 ^a	18.48	610.00	-4.857 ^d	0.001*
	Positive Ranks	2 ^b	10.00	20.00		
	Ties	15 ^c				
	Total	50				
Assurance	Negative Ranks	28 ^a	15.96	447.00	-4.435 ^d	0.000*
	Positive Ranks	2 ^b	9.00	18.00		
	Ties	20 ^c				
	Total	50				
Empathy	Negative Ranks	28 ^a	16.77	469.50	-3.865 ^a	0.000*
	Positive Ranks	4 ^b	14.63	58.50		
	Ties	18 ^c				
	Total	50				
Tangibles	Negative Ranks	18 ^a	11.61	209.00	-3.000 ^d	0.003*
	Positive Ranks	4 ^b	11.00	44.00		
	Ties	28 ^c				
	Total	50				

a. Actual Perception < Expected perception

b. Actual Perception > Expected perception

c. Actual Perception = Expected perception

d. Based on positive ranks. * Significant at 0.01 level

7.3.2 Test of Hypotheses regarding Service Quality in terms of Gender Differences

A Mann-Whitney U test is performed on the ratings of male tourists and female tourists about their evaluation of actual service quality in the tourist hotels. The results of this test are presented in Table 3. Considering the level of significance at 5%, it is clearly revealed that there is an obvious difference between the ranking (observed) of male and female tourists as the p-value is steadily less than the considered significance level for each and every component of service. Thus H2a₀, H2b₀, H2c₀, H2d₀, and H2e₀ are rejected. Based on this result H2₀ is also rejected as

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significant differences are found in terms of gender differences among the tourists perception about provided service quality of the tourist hotels in Cox's Bazaar.

Table 3: Testing the Difference in service quality in terms of gender

	Test Statistics	P-value (2-tailed)	Decisions
	Mann-Whitney U Statistic*		
Reliability	98.500	0.013**	H _{2a0} rejected
Responsiveness	94.500	0.010**	H _{2b0} rejected
Assurance	106.500	0.020**	H _{2c0} rejected
Empathy	77.500	0.005**	H _{2d0} rejected
Tangibles	107.500	0.014**	H _{2e0} rejected

* Mann-Whitney U Statistic has been used for independent two samples

**Median Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

7.3.3 Test of Hypotheses regarding Service Quality in terms of Age Differences

Kruskal-Wallis test is conducted to test the differences in the tourists' perception regarding the provided services by the tourist hotels. The result presented at Table 4 shows that only one hypothesis H_{3a0} is rejected as the p-value is less than the considered significance level that is 5%. Thus it indicates differences among tourists of different age groups regarding the Reliability component of service quality.

Table 4: Testing the Difference in service quality in terms of age group

	Test Statistics	P-value (2-tailed)	Decisions
	Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistic (χ^2)*		
Reliability	6.201	0.045**	H _{3a0} rejected
Responsiveness	3.353	0.187	H _{3b0} not rejected
Assurance	2.394	0.302	H _{3c0} not rejected
Empathy	0.417	0.812	H _{3d0} not rejected
Tangibles	0.650	0.723	H _{3e0} not rejected

* Kruskal-Wallis Test has been used for independent many samples

**Median Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As no significant difference was found in terms of the rest of the components, H_{3o} is not rejected.

7.3.4 Test of Hypotheses regarding Service Quality in terms of Occupation Differences

Again a Mann-Whitney U test is performed on the ratings of tourists from different occupational background about their evaluation of actual service quality in the tourist hotels. The results of this test are presented in Table 5. Considering the level of significance at 5%, no significant differences are found between the rankings

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(observed) of different types of tourists based on occupational differences as the p-value is greater than the considered significance level for all the components of service quality. Thus H_{4a_0} , H_{4b_0} , H_{4c_0} , H_{4d_0} , and H_{4e_0} cannot be rejected. Based on this result H_{4_0} cannot be rejected as significant differences are not found for each and every component of service quality in terms of occupation differences among the tourists.

Table 5: Testing the Difference in service quality in terms of occupation

	Test Statistics	P-value (2-tailed)	Decisions
	Mann-Whitney U Statistic*		
Reliability	253.000	0.305	H_{4a_0} not rejected
Responsiveness	259.500	0.370	H_{4b_0} not rejected
Assurance	273.000	0.525	H_{4c_0} not rejected
Empathy	295.000	0.849	H_{4d_0} not rejected
Tangibles	275.000	0.526	H_{4e_0} not rejected

* Mann-Whitney U Statistic has been used for independent two samples

7.3.5 Test of Hypotheses regarding Service Quality in terms of Education Differences

Table 6: Testing the Difference in service quality in terms of education

	Test Statistics	P-value (2-tailed)	Decisions
	Kruskal-Wallis Test Statistic (χ^2)*		
Reliability	6.605	0.037**	H_{5a_0} rejected
Responsiveness	6.670	0.036**	H_{5b_0} rejected
Assurance	2.349	0.309	H_{5c_0} not rejected
Empathy	5.577	0.062**	H_{5d_0} rejected
Tangibles	4.184	0.123	H_{5e_0} not rejected

* Kruskal-Wallis Test has been used for independent many samples

**Median Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Again a Kruskal-Wallis test is performed on the ratings of tourists from different educational background about their evaluation of actual service quality in the tourist hotels. The results of this test are presented in Table 6. Considering the level of significance at 5%, it is found that there is a significant difference between the rankings (observed) of different types of tourists based on education differences as the p-value is less than the considered significance level for the Reliability, Responsiveness, and Empathy component of service quality. Thus H_{5a_0} , H_{5b_0} , and H_{5d_0} are rejected. Based on this result H_{5_0} is rejected as significant differences are found for three components of service quality in terms of occupation differences among the tourists.

8. Discussion

The hypotheses tests confirm that there is a significant gap between the tourists' expectation and actual perception regarding all the dimensions of service quality of the tourist hotels according to the SERVQUAL model. According to the study, a significant gap exists in the Reliability dimension in the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar. Reliability is the extent to which the service is delivered to the standards expected and promised. In essence, it represents the customer getting what they feel they have paid for (Siddiqi 2010). Zaimrry, Bayyurt and Zaim (2010) pointed out that reliability is one of the important factors to guarantee customer satisfaction.

A significant gap also exists in the Responsiveness dimension of SERVQUAL model. Responsiveness refers to the willingness and ability of the service provider to meet and adapt to customers' needs. The study indicates that the employees of tourist hotels do not give prompt service and willing to help the customers. Responsiveness is similarly important as Reliability as Mengi (2009) indicated that tangibility has a positive relation with customer satisfaction.

A significant gap exists in Assurance dimension as well. Assurance is the degree of trust and confidence that the customer feels that the service provider is competent to supply the service. Mostly, this stems from the degree of confidence that the customer has in the service provider's staff. The customer will not be satisfied if he/she does not feel assured about the competence of the service provider (Siddiqi, 2010). The current study shows that the tourist hotels in Bangladesh could not instill confidence in the customers and the employees are not enough courteous according to their expectations. Kumar, Kee and Manshor (2009) pointed out that assurance is one of determining factors for customer satisfaction.

Service customers often have expectations with regard to the extent to which the service provider appears to understand and be concerned about their individual needs and wants. The more the service provider can see things from the customer's point of view, the better (Siddiqi 2010). Thus the core concept of Empathy is to understand the needs of customers and provide individual attention. Employee and customer interactions are reflected through the empathy dimensions. Data shows that the tourist hotels in Cox's Bazaar are not enough sincere to provide individual attention and customer needs. Ladhari (2009) found that empathy is the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction.

According to the current study, a significant gap also exists in the Tangibles dimension of service quality. This indicates that the tourist hotels do not have enough modern complementary equipment. Also the hotels lack in the visual aesthetics and in terms of employee appearance. Lai (2004) and Siddiqi (2010) found that tangibility is positively related with customer satisfaction and retention.

This current study explored that perception about service quality varies among the tourists in terms of gender differences. This result is consistent with some previous studies as Lacobucci and Ostrom (1993), Mattila, Grandey and Fisk (2003), and Snipes, Thomson and Oswald (2006) argued that there can be gender differences in customers' perception about customer service and service quality. The study also explored significant differences in perception about service quality based on the differences in educational background of the tourists. This result is found as

consistent with Siu and Mou (2005), and Lee and Chen (2009)'s studies. Tourists' perceptions do not vary based on the differences in age, which tally with Samez's (2011) study and tourists' perceptions also do not vary based on the differences occupation, which is similar with the findings of Lee and Chen (2009)'s study.

9. Managerial Implications

The study confirms significant gap in all the dimensions of service quality according to the SERVQUAL model in the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar. The study also suggests that SERVQUAL model is a suitable instrument for measuring the service quality in the tourism industry of Bangladesh. Therefore, the hotel management can use this instrument for measuring service quality in Bangladesh. Moreover, because significant service gap exists in all the dimensions of service quality, Bangladeshi tourist hotel managers should emphasize all the service quality dimensions including Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, and Tangibility in maintaining and improving the service quality that they provide. Results regarding the relationship of demographic profile of tourists and service quality also can be a valuable source of information for generating the strategies recognizing differences in consumer groups.

10. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although there are notable contributions from this study especially for customer retention strategies, the results of this study need to be viewed and acknowledged in lights of its limitations. First, the sample size was considerably low. Moreover, the study considers only the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar. Therefore, future research should be conducted on a larger scale by considering a large sample size from all over Bangladesh to authenticate the differences between the customer expectation and perception about tourist hotel services. In future, other variables i.e. customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer retention should be included and related with service quality to validate the importance of service quality in the hotel industry of Bangladesh.

11. Conclusion

The study assessed the service quality in terms of demographic differences of the tourists and also explored the service gap in the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar by using SERVQUAL model. The study revealed considerable difference between the service expectation and service perception of the customers in the tourist hotels in terms of reliability, assurance, empathy, tangibility, and responsiveness dimensions of service quality. So the hotel management should try to improve these aspects of service quality to eliminate the gap that is evident in the tourist hotels of Cox's Bazaar. Besides, it is also apparent that the tourists' evaluation about service quality varies based on the differences in gender and education of the tourists. So the hotels should formulate their strategies in such a way so that each and every group of tourists becomes satisfied about the service quality. Many organizations in the world have focused on the differences among the customer groups and became successful by meeting the needs and requirements of different customer groups. As the businesses are getting more globalize, these advances are particularly significant because a high level of service quality is associated with several key organizational outcomes, including high market share (Buzzell & Gale 1987), improved profitability

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relative to competitors (Kearns & David 1992), enhanced customer loyalty, the realization of a competitive price premium, and an increased probability of purchase (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1996). With this the tourist hotels will be able to attract more tourists of different demographic profiles in every season throughout the year and the tourism sector of Bangladesh will be blessed with growth and development.

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