



Article

## Service Quality in the Tourism Industry

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**Abstract:** Tourism is an economic and social significant and one of the fastest-growing sectors, but everywhere the service quality is the barrier to the competitiveness, especially in developing contexts like Uzbekistan. Although the international literature focus on tools such as SERVQUAL, certifying systems in France, VR / AR applications in the USA, and Kazumi Shimizu's concept of "Omotenashi" cultural tours in Japan; the tourism sector of Uzbekistan has not yet fully adapted to these approaches. A number of current articles being published in Uzbekistan provide merely general assessments about tourism expansion, but do not put forward what might be termed a multidimensional approach to service quality that relates international best practice, sustainability, and technological innovation. It was the aim of this study to critically analyse the theoretical and methodological basis of service quality in the tourism industry, review global practices, and make conclusions and recommendations for further development of tourism in Uzbekistan. Results indicate that quality services make tourists 25% more likely to stay and international cases show the certification, technological innovation and service culture directly strengthens competitiveness and sustainability. Such integrative practices can develop Uzbekistan tourism infrastructure and strengthen its global positioning. It offers a consistent construct of tourism service quality that integrates ecological, financial, and social sustainability along with technological modernization, which is an advance from customer expectation gaps. Thus, the conducted research suggests Uzbekistan tourism sector to focus on the above areas of certification practices to be in line with the international standards and sustainability development goals. Future work needs to explore more on customer perception and test the practicality of launching VR/AR and certification programs in the local settings.

**Keywords:** quality of tourism services, tangible and intangible tourism services, competitiveness, certification, innovation, VR/AR technologies, "Omotenashi" culture.

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### 1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most dynamically developing economic sectors of the 21st century, playing an important role in economic growth, job creation, and the strengthening of intercultural relations. Although Uzbekistan's tourism industry has achieved significant growth in recent years, low service quality and misaligned value continue to limit competitiveness. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), countries that provide high-quality services succeed in retaining 25% more tourists. Therefore, improving the quality of tourism services is a pressing issue for our country [1].

This study is devoted to developing a deeper understanding of the concept of service quality in the tourism industry and exploring ways to improve it. The main objective of the research is to assess the quality of services in the tourism sector and identify strategies to enhance it.

The object of the study is tourism industry services (hotels, restaurants, excursions, and other tourism infrastructure).

The subject of the study is the mechanisms for improving service quality, their effectiveness, and the level of customer acceptance. The purpose of the study is to improve the quality of tourism services and thereby contribute to the development of regional and national economies [2].

Research tasks:

1. Identify existing problems and shortcomings.
2. Develop criteria for assessing service quality.
3. Explore the opportunities for using digital technologies and innovative solutions.
4. Propose practical recommendations and strategic solutions.

First of all, it is necessary to gain a broader understanding of the concept of tourist services, their main elements, and the notion of service quality. Tourist services are a set of purposeful actions in the service sector aimed at satisfying and meeting the needs of tourists and excursionists. They must correspond to the goals and nature of tourism, the orientation of the service provided, and must not contradict universal human principles. According to the state standard, tourist services are defined as the outcome of the activities of tourism organizations engaged in meeting the needs of tourists [3].

Both international and Uzbek scholars have provided their own definitions of the concept of tourism service quality. The definitions given by scholars regarding the quality of tourism services are as follows:

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study outlines its methodology in a way that most other studies of service quality do not, in an effort to promote a systematic response to the concept of service quality in tourism. The research draws on analysis of literature framed as qualitative design and outcomes, comparative analysis, and critiques from other countries. The assessment of national practices was framed by primary sources, which were legal documents of Uzbekistan, as the Law "On Tourism" and presidential decrees. Secondary data were from journal articles, textbooks, and international samples, such as the SERVQUAL model, a French program "Qualité Tourisme," an American use of VR/AR technologies, and the concept of "Omotenashi" in Japan [4]. These sources allowed the study to combine elements of theory and practice. The data collection used were in the form of document analysis which focuses on definitions, criteria, and measurement mechanisms from scholars and organizations related to tourism service quality. We performed a comparative analysis and identified the differences and similarities between the tourism service practices of Uzbekistan and the developed countries, particularly, in terms of culture, technology and sustainability. Using conceptual modeling, the study also synthesized the findings into an integrative definition of service quality, to include customer expectation and as well as the sustainable development goals [5]. Validity was established by source triangulation, while consistency across contexts enabled reliability, whereby the same evaluative criteria were applied. The methodical design inherent in the study fed forward recommendations to Uzbekistan's tourism industry in terms of adopting international certification systems, a framework of digital innovations, and service culture in a resource context which guarantees both contextual relevance and a global perspective of the findings [6].

## 3. Results and Discussion

**Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry:** In measuring the quality of tourism services, the main focus is on the gap between customers' expectations and the actual service delivered. They identified five dimensions of service quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. According to our scientific perspective, the concept of tourism service quality has a much broader and deeper meaning compared to the definition

proposed by Parasuraman and his co-authors. In that definition, service quality is mainly interpreted based on the gap between customers' expectations and the actual services delivered to them. However, in our view, the essence of service quality goes far beyond merely satisfying consumer expectations; it should also reflect the directions of sustainable development in the tourism sector [7].

In this regard, when analyzing the quality of tourism services, it is necessary to take into account their multifaceted characteristics. In particular, the functional convenience of services, their external attractiveness, and the overall sense of satisfaction generated in customers should be considered as key criteria. This approach allows service quality to be evaluated not only within the framework of the "expected and received" outcomes but also by taking into account the overall tourist experience, their individual needs, and sensitivity levels [8].

Furthermore, in determining the level of service quality, attention should also be paid to ensuring the ecological, economic, and social sustainability of the tourism sector, as well as compliance with international standards and competitiveness. In particular, ensuring that service processes conform to internationally recognized standards not only raises the quality level of the national tourism industry but also creates opportunities to successfully promote it in the global competitive arena [9].

Taking the above factors systematically into account, it can be said that the approach to tourism service quality should not be limited to satisfying customer expectations alone. Rather, it should be carried out through an integrated approach aimed at ensuring overall tourist satisfaction and the long-term sustainable development of the entire sector. This, in turn, creates a foundation for enhancing the strategic potential of the tourism sector and achieving a high level of service quality [10].

**Ali, Al-Refaie, & Ramli:** In measuring service quality, the gap between customers' expectations being fulfilled and how the service provider meets these needs is of critical importance. This definition provided by the scholars creates an effective basis for evaluating the quality of tourist services and reflects the extent to which the activities of service-providing organizations meet customer demands. Through this approach, it is possible to carry out an initial diagnostic assessment of service quality [11].

However, it should be particularly emphasized that this approach does not fully cover the quality indicators of tourist services. The reason is that it relies only on the gap between customers' expected outcomes and the actual service delivery process. Yet, in order to express service quality more deeply and comprehensively, additional factors should also be considered.

In particular, the consistent improvement of consumer experience during the service process, ensuring compliance with international standards, and increasing the level of global competitiveness are regarded today as integral components of service quality strategy. It is precisely through such factors that the quality of tourist services can evolve into a modern, comprehensive system that meets contemporary requirements.

**Asiljon Yulchiyev:** Developing economic mechanisms for improving and managing the quality of tourism services is of great importance for the renewing Uzbekistan today. In enhancing service quality, it is essential to focus on both core and supplementary services and to provide the services expected by consumers (tourists) in a timely manner, as this plays a key role in improving the existing consumer base and attracting a new flow of customers. In our opinion, the given definition of the concept of tourism service quality is well-formulated in terms of content and reflects the general order. However, it conveys the idea that generality and the timely provision of services are sufficient for improving the quality of tourism services. In fact, the most important factors for enhancing tourism service quality are reliability, safety, convenience, aesthetic appeal, and the ability to generate customer satisfaction [12].

**Ural Mirzayev:** The characteristics of tourism services in the field of tourism service delivery are expressed through the '4 S'. These characteristics play an important role in

shaping the package of services in the tourism sector. In the given definition, attention is focused on the most well-known characteristics of tourism services expressed through the "4S," and this is indeed one of the most important factors for improving tourism service quality. However, in our opinion, the 4S concept variability of quality, perishability, inseparability of service and consumer, and intangibility is not sufficient to fully reflect the quality of tourism services. These concepts partly reveal the specific features of tourism services, but they fail to take into account some important aspects. Below, I explain these aspects in more detail:

1. Variability of quality: The variability of tourism service quality means that the quality of services may change depending on time and circumstances, the experience of service providers, and certain elements of the service process, which can differ significantly. This situation may cause inconvenience to tourists and lower the overall level of satisfaction. However, it should be emphasized that service quality must not only consider variability but also ensure stability and consistent maintenance at a high level. In this regard, the definition of sustainability often refers only to ecological and economic sustainability, but it is also necessary to highlight the sustainability of service quality itself [13].
2. Perishability: The perishability of service quality, i.e., the decline or deterioration of quality in the process of service delivery, is one of the key challenges in ensuring the sustainability of tourism services. Since tourism services are generally high-value, labor-intensive, and consist of various components, the perishability of quality often arises in the process of repeating the service. This aspect requires additional measures to ensure the long-term prospects, excellence, and sustainable development of tourism services.
3. Inseparability of service and consumer: The inseparability of tourism services, namely, the proper organization and efficiency of the relationship between tourists and service providers, is one of the crucial aspects of service quality. If there is no effective communication, mutual respect, and high-quality performance between tourists and service providers, the effectiveness of service quality will significantly decrease. Although this aspect is partially reflected in the 4S model, in fact, the compatibility and trustworthy relationships between consumers and providers play a central role in improving tourism service quality. In this process, mutual evaluation, knowledge-sharing, and communication are of great importance.
4. Intangibility: The intangibility of tourism services, meaning that services are immaterial and their quality is difficult to evaluate until after delivery, creates certain challenges in tourism. As a result, tourists may struggle to assess the quality of services in advance, which can lower satisfaction levels. In our view, intangibility remains one of the major issues in evaluating tourism services, since such services must often be judged intuitively. Therefore, reducing intangibility requires making service quality more tangible through visible elements, style, modernity, and other explicit features offered to tourists.

Based on the above considerations, it must be acknowledged that relying solely on the 4S principle is not sufficient for a comprehensive assessment of tourism service quality. While this model certainly sets out the general directions of quality approaches, a broader perspective is required for an in-depth analysis of services.

In particular, aspects such as service reliability, functional convenience, safety, aesthetic appeal, as well as other features that evoke positive emotions and satisfaction among tourists, must be given thorough attention. These indicators determine not only the outcome of the service but also the overall experience of the service delivery process.

At the same time, in the process of consistently improving service quality, special emphasis should be placed on ecological and social sustainability. Indeed, it is precisely these factors that ensure the tourism sector moves toward long-term success, increases its competitiveness, and develops in accordance with global standards.

**Umidaxon Turdiyeva:** The Crouch and Ritchie model is considered a theoretical basis for improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism services. This model takes into account comparative and competitive advantages in analyzing the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Although the Crouch and Ritchie model is regarded as one of the key conceptual foundations for improving the quality and competitiveness of tourism services, this model does not fully cover certain pressing aspects. Therefore, in our view, it is advisable to develop and propose additional approaches that enrich this model. Below are some important factors that are not sufficiently reflected within the framework of the Crouch and Ritchie model:

Consumer experience and satisfaction level. The Crouch and Ritchie model is mainly focused on analyzing the resource potential and infrastructure of tourist destinations. However, this approach does not adequately consider subjective and intangible aspects such as tourists' individual needs, expectations, and overall satisfaction with the service experience. In our opinion, when evaluating the quality of tourism services, priority should be given to the guest's behavior, the extent to which expectations are met, and the effectiveness of service delivery from the perspective of personal experience [14].

International standards and global competitiveness. In the model, the comparison of resources and tourism potential at the national or regional level is one of the main directions. However, the model does not sufficiently address compliance of services with international benchmarks, ISO certification, comparison with global service quality indicators, and elements of quality competition in the international market. We believe that the conformity of services to global standards, their practical implementation, and comparison with international experience are critical for ensuring the sustainable growth of the tourism sector and strengthening its position in the global market.

The factor of sustainable development. Although economic and social factors are considered separately in the model, the aspects of sustainable development related to ecology, social responsibility, and environmental protection are not sufficiently covered. Yet, in today's global tourism trends, sustainability criteria such as ecological safety, reduction of carbon footprint, and positive impact on local communities play a decisive role. Therefore, service quality should not only be linked to the utilization of existing resources but also to strategic approaches aimed at preserving them in a healthy state.

Based on the above considerations, it should be emphasized that while the Crouch and Ritchie model serves as an important foundation for assessing service quality, it does not fully encompass the modern needs and complex realities of the tourism sector. Hence, by forming a comprehensive approach focused on service quality, in-depth analysis of customer needs, compliance with international standards, and sustainable development, it is possible to create a more complete strategic model. This would not only improve quality indicators but also serve as a vital factor in enhancing the long-term competitiveness of the tourism industry.

From the above definitions and conclusions, the concept of tourism service quality can be defined as follows: **"Tourism service quality** is the degree to which the service delivery process, carried out in accordance with standards, meets the explicit and implicit needs of tourists, encompassing reliability, safety, convenience, aesthetic aspects, timeliness, empathy, and the condition of material resources. This quality serves to shape both the tourist's satisfaction during the current trip and their trust in tourism for the future".

This concept implies a comprehensive approach aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of the tourism sector by continuously improving consumer experience, aligning services with international standards, and enhancing competitiveness.

"In analyzing the process of improving the quality of tourism services, it is very important to take into account the regional characteristics of international tourism. The World Tourism Organization divides the world's tourism macro-regions into the following six main regions":

1. Europe – all European countries, the former Soviet Union countries, as well as Turkey,



Cyprus, and Israel.

2. Americas—all countries of North and South America.
3. Asia-Pacific – the Asia-Pacific region, East and Southeast Asian countries, Australia, and Oceania.
4. Middle East – the countries of Southwest Asia, as well as Egypt and Libya.
5. Africa—all African countries except Egypt and Libya.
6. South Asia – the countries of South Asia.

Among the European countries, France is considered one of the leading nations in the field of tourism, ensuring quality and improving services. The “**Qualité Tourisme**” program was introduced in France with the aim of ensuring the provision of quality services to tourists [15]. The main elements of this program include:

1. Certification of tourist facilities – A special certification system has been established to evaluate and confirm the quality of services provided to tourists. The purpose of this system is to ensure that tourism facilities comply with established international and national standards. Certified facilities guarantee the delivery of high-quality services to tourists.
2. Improving staff qualifications – Through this program, France ensures the professional development of employees working in the tourism sector, preparing them to provide services at a high level. This, in turn, increases customer satisfaction and enhances the overall quality of service.
3. Studying tourist satisfaction – In France, the level of tourist satisfaction is regularly monitored through surveys and reviews. This makes it possible to identify problems arising in the service delivery process and to eliminate them quickly.

The implementation of this program in France serves as a guarantee for providing high-quality services to tourists, and its effectiveness is based on studied and proven methods. This program is widely regarded as good practice in improving the quality of services in tourism.

In the United States, the role of innovations and technologies in improving the quality of tourism services is indeed of great significance. Technologies such as **VR** (virtual reality) and **AR** (augmented reality) help make tourism more interactive and personalized, creating opportunities for tourists to further enrich their travel experiences. Let us now elaborate on these technologies and provide examples of their application in the United States

**Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR):** In the United States, VR and AR technologies are widely used to enhance the level of interactivity in tourism. For example, *The Virtual Reality Travel Experience* company allows tourists to explore travel destinations through virtual reality before embarking on an actual trip. With this technology, tourists can immerse themselves in famous tourist sites within a virtual environment, experiencing the feeling of travel before it begins. Such experiences increase tourists’ interest and strengthen their desire to travel.

For instance, AR applications developed by *National Geographic* provide tourists with the opportunity to interactively explore archaeological sites or historical monuments. These technologies offer tourists a deeper experience than reality itself, as they allow learning not only through visuals but also through sound and interactive imagery.

Uzbekistan also has the potential to develop its tourism sector through technological means. In particular, the introduction of VR and AR technologies would make tourism more competitive and create engaging experiences for tourists.

**Experience of Asian countries in improving the quality of tourism services:** Japan is one of the world’s leading countries in combining service culture with innovative technologies. In particular, the service culture known as “**Omotenashi**” refers to sincere and wholehearted hospitality toward tourists. This concept in Japanese tourism ensures special attention and the provision of high-quality services to visitors. In Japan, it is widely practiced, with service staff always anticipating the needs of tourists and striving to create

maximum comfort for them. At the same time, Japan actively employs innovative technologies including robots to enhance the quality of tourism services.

“*Omotenashi*” – this is not only the traditional culture of hospitality, but also an approach that embodies sincerity and genuine care. In Japan, service staff strive to anticipate the needs of tourists in advance and aim to satisfy them through attentive service. For example, in Japanese restaurants, paying special attention to each customer, providing individualized services, and responding quickly to their preferences are part of the *Omotenashi* culture. This is not only a high level of service but also creates a comfortable and relaxed environment for tourists, which in turn leads to an improvement in the quality of tourism services.

**Robots and Automated Services:** Another important innovation in Japan is the use of robots and automated service systems. In Japanese hotels, services are provided with the help of robots, offering tourists more modern and convenient service experiences. For example, at “Henn-na Hotel” (Japan’s automated hotel), robots are used to welcome guests, clean rooms, and perform other services. With this technology, guests can adjust their rooms according to their preferences and receive the necessary services at any time without having to contact service staff.

Japan’s experience demonstrates that the use of robots in hotels or other tourist facilities not only increases efficiency but also provides convenient and user-friendly services, while relieving human employees from difficult or repetitive tasks.

**Integration of technologies:** Japan’s success in integrating technologies into tourism services is clearly reflected through the use of robots, artificial intelligence, and other innovative technologies in service delivery. Through “**micro-tourism and smart mobile applications,**” tourists can manage their journeys in a more personalized way. Such systems provide tourists with interactive information and services, making travel easier. In our opinion, there are opportunities for Uzbekistan to apply Japan’s experience. These approaches not only improve the quality of services but also provide tourists with more convenient and engaging experiences.

The results of the research show that improving the quality of tourism services strengthens a country’s competitiveness in the tourism sector. International experience (France, the USA, Japan) has demonstrated that offering services in innovative forms increases tourist satisfaction. For Uzbekistan, the most important tasks include developing a service quality certification system, introducing digital technologies, and enhancing service culture.

The use of modern technological solutions in further developing tourism in Uzbekistan particularly the introduction of VR and AR technologies will significantly improve the quality of tourism services and help bring innovations to tourists. Moreover, thanks to the country’s rich cultural heritage, natural monuments, and modern infrastructure supported by the government, Uzbekistan can secure a strong position in the global tourism market. Operating on the basis of the most advanced innovations in global tourism and international best practices is of great importance for raising Uzbekistan’s tourism sector to a competitive level and contributing to the sustainable development of the national economy. To achieve this, it is necessary to introduce modern technologies, improve service culture, prioritize ecological and cultural aspects, and create a unified system that develops all elements of the tourism sector in an integrated manner.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of this study showed that in the tourism sector service quality enhancement is a key aspect for increasing customer satisfaction and the main determinant of national competitiveness and sustainable development. Drawing global insights for more effective tourist experiences through practices such as France’s certification system, the adoption of VR/AR technologies in the United States, and Japan’s “*Omotenashi*” culture of hospitality,

the research demonstrates how a healthy mix of foreign norm, innovation, and culture yields optimal tourist loyalty and economic sustainability. For Uzbekistan, this means that a holistic approach, combining certification, service culture and modern digital solutions, will mean stronger competitive positions for the country on the global tourism market, and compliance with targets for socio-ecological sustainability. Future research should explore empirical evaluations of tourist perception in Uzbekistan, and pilot applications of practical uses of the VR/AR technologies and the service certification frameworks, hence generating context-specific evidence to inform policy and practice.

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