The mediating role of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and tourist re-visit intention: With reference to the SME hotels in Mirissa tourist destination, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Tourism industry can be recognized as one of the most prevalent as well as the upcoming industries ever. Globally, there is a huge competition to attract more tourists towards their countries as it directly affects for the improvement of foreign income and also contributes for the Gross Domestic Production. Quality of the services provided by a tourist hotel is playing a vital role in determining the tourist's second visitation to the same hotel. Having repeat tourists will enhance the image of the hotel in a significant level. A higher level of service quality determines the higher level of tourist satisfaction. Especially, as a service organization, tourist hotel should be focused enough on the service quality to make their customers to re-visit them again and again with superior level of satisfaction. To have more from tourism, it is important to provide high quality services for the tourist. Though, there are large number of tourist hotels established in Sri Lanka, maintain the service quality and ensure the satisfaction of tourist is debatable. Thus, this study has been focused to identify the service quality, tourist's satisfaction and their re-visit intention. All these three variables are highly important in determining the success of the tourism industry. The population of this study comprised with tourists who have been stayed in 05 selected SME hotels in Mirissa, Sri Lanka during 01st September 2018 to 30th September 2018. Mirissa is one of the most vibrant tourist destinations in down south of Sri Lanka, for which millions of rupees have been invested to develop tourism sector. Based on the convenience sampling technique, a sample of 100 respondents was selected. A self-administered questionnaire was used to gather the primary data while using some secondary sources as well. Bi-variate and multi-variate analysis were adopted to analyse the data with the help of SPSS. The study reveals that there is a positive relationship between service quality and re-visit intention.

Tangibility significantly affects in determining the tourists re-visit intention and the study emphasizes that there is no mediation from tourist's satisfaction on the association between service quality and the re-visit intention. Finally, the study sheds light on how hoteliers and practitioners can improve the service quality dimensions of their services in order to provide tourists with a quality service and make the tourists repeat guests in their property.

Keywords: *Re-visit intention, service quality, tourists' satisfaction.*

1. Introduction

Tourism industry is considered as one of the most important, most diverse and richest global industries in the twenty-first century and by the end of the next decade it would lay at the top of the table of the world's high income industries (Haghkhah & Teknologi, 2016).Therefore, concerning more about service quality is essential for the enhancement of tourism industry. Hotels provide guests with array of services that affect customer satisfaction not only food and accommodation hotel is often referred as a "Home away from home" (Matthias, 2004). According to Sheela (2007), the author of the book "Economics of Hotel Management", the hotel is the place where the tourist stops being the traveler and become a guest. So, repeatedly it highlights most of the research articles that the service quality of hotels is essential for the tourism industry as a whole. Due to that, when concerning on re-visit intention, it is more important to identify the relationship of service quality and re-visits intention.

Recently, a number of conceptual and empirical studies have examined the differences between first-time and repeat visitors and the effect of previous visitation experience on future destination choice (Pereda, 2002). Having a sound knowledge on re-visit intention of tourists are essential for the managers of tourism-based hotels in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to focus on their limited resources for the purpose of enhancing service attributes that affect tourists' re-visit intentions the most (Saini & Matta, 2014). If hoteliers could understand their level of service quality, it will be facilitated to come up with further improvements in order to achieve tourist satisfaction and creating a re-visit intention in their minds of their guests (Kim & Lough, 2007). Understanding the customer satisfaction becomes more and more important these days as it allows the company to know how customer defines the service and products quality; facilitates the development of customer satisfaction questionnaires (Hayes, 1997). On the other hand, it impacts on the purchase repetition and word of mouth recommendations (Berkman and Gilson, 1986).

Most of the researches were trying to identify the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction for variety of reasons. As well as, existing literature has shown the effects of service quality on re-visit intentions; however, few of them have studied the impact of service quality on re-visit intention. Therefore, studying the relationship of service quality and re-visit intention allows management of tourism-based businesses to identify their strengths and weaknesses while facilitating to pay

more attention towards their limited resources. Managers in tourism make every effort to improve both quality of their services and level of their customer satisfaction as they believe that this effort will create loyal visitors (Haghkhah & Teknologi, 2016), because loyal visitors will return to the destination and recommend it to others (Tian-Cole & Cromption, 2003). Most of the researchers considered only the large-scale or five-star hotels for the purpose of identifying the relationship of service quality and tourist's satisfaction for re-visit intention in Sri Lankan context. However, literature has not sufficiently focused on SME sector in tourism. Under this, it has been identified the necessity of conducting a study on SME hotels on the same matter. SME hotels are one of the main pillars in regional development in the regions like Mirissa, Sri Lanka.

In this background, the overall objective of this study is to identify the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and re-visit intention of tourists. In this connection, the following specific objectives will be focused: 1) to examine the relationship between service quality of tourist hotels in Mirissa and tourist re-visit intention, 2) to investigate the relationship between service quality of tourist hotels and tourist's satisfaction, and 3) to examine the relationship between tourist's satisfaction and tourist's re-visit intention.

2. Literature review
2.1 Service quality and customer satisfaction

Within past few periods there were greater emphasis has been paid on service quality and customer satisfaction in business and academic world (Osman & Sentosa, 2013). Akbar and Parvez (2009) mentioned in their study on 304 customers of a major private telecommunication company operating in Bangladesh that service quality has strong influence and significantly and positively related to customer satisfaction. Service quality is a strong antecedent and significantly related to customer satisfaction (Hossain and Leo, 2008). Munusamy, Chelliah and Mun (2010) found that four elements of service quality, including assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness have positive relationship with customer satisfaction. According to Erto and Vanacore (2002) the customer is actively participating in service process, and furthermore, a consumer of a service as well as an evaluator of service received. Also, Chen and Lee (2008) proved non-vessel owners and shippers in Taiwan that service quality has a positive influence with customer satisfaction.

Minazzi (2008) described that customer satisfaction is the result of comparison between customers' "expectations" and customers' " perceptions". In other words, customer satisfaction is seen as difference between expected quality of service and customers experience or perceptions after receiving the service (Makeeva, 2010). In the study done by Makeeva, (2010), clearly indicated that the most important goal of hotel industry is to analyzed future customers' requirements and attitudes and after identifying them it is needed to translate them into hotel service elements. According to Hoffman (2002) customer satisfaction depends on dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness,

assurance, empathy and tangibility and an additional elements like price, personal and situational factors that may occur during the service supply. It is now widely acknowledged that service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 2006). Also, loyal customers or the people who enjoy positive experiences with the service are more likely to become a stable base of satisfied customers (Kim & Lough, 2007; Tsitskariet, Tsiotras & Tsiotras, 2006) because they tend to have better social interactions with service providers. Moreover, it has been specified the primary objective within tourism providers for investing effort in evaluating and improving quality of performance and seeking to enhance level of tourist satisfaction (Canny, 2013).

2.2 Service quality and re-visit intention

Since businesses realized the importance of service quality and customer satisfaction, most of the businesses focused on improving themselves in terms of quality and satisfaction (Han & Hyung, 2015). Some of the studies (Bowen and Chen, 2001; Han and Ryu, 2006) indicate that quality and satisfaction factors affect customers' opinions and intentions positively. Even though, re-visit intention mostly relies on customers' perceptions created by the services provided by businesses, it is known that other factors also affect re-visit intention (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

Literature review shows that a number of concepts are assessed in order to explain re-visit and recommend intentions in several studies. Most of these studies mainly focused on what businesses should do and facts related to re-visit intention and intention to recommend concepts with service quality and satisfaction (Timur, 2018). A very few studies examined destination image, service quality and re-visit intention (Canoglu, 2008; Cabuk et al., 2013) and they have covered hotels falling between two-star and five-star. While many holiday destinations rely heavily on repeat visitations, limited research (e.g. Anwar and Sohail, 2004; Fallon and Schofield, 2004; Hughes and Morrison-Saunders, 2002; Shanka and Taylor, 2004) has been conducted on re-visit intentions and its antecedents for several reasons. The findings of this study provide an important insight to understand whether there is a relationship between service quality and re-visit intention.

2.3 Tourist satisfaction and re-visit intention

Salazar, Costa and Rite (2004) found that satisfaction strongly influenced intention to return to the same destination, and a study by Kozak and Rimmington (2000) also mentioned that overall satisfaction among tourists will lead to tourist intentions to visit the same destination in the future. While there is no guarantee that a satisfied customer will be a repeat customer, it is most likely that a dissatisfied customer will not return (Soriano, 2002). Geng-Qing and Hailin (2008) further found that tourist satisfaction impacted their intention for revisiting. The enrichment of service production and delivery can create customer satisfaction which in turn leads to customer re-visit intention (Al-Alak, 2010). In the tourism literature it has generally accepted that when

the tourists feeling satisfied on services, products, and other resources, which provided by tourism destinations it could lead repeat, visits same as positive word of mouth effects to such as relatives and/or colleague (Canny, 2013). So, many researchers and practitioners recognized that the relationship of tourist satisfaction on future behavioral intentions as an important research topic as customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction considered become the driving force that shapes the customers' attitudes and future behavior (Canny, 2013).

Studies have also shown that when customers perceive poor service quality and when dissatisfaction is felt, the customers are likely to complain about the service and engage in negative word-of-mouth (Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012). Therefore, customer satisfaction is often used to predict the likelihood of customers returning to a service organization (Ramseook-Munhurrun, 2012).

In Sri Lanka, there is a lack of information on the tourist satisfaction towards re-visit intention in literature. As well as, it has not been specifically discussed about the SME hotel sector. Therefore, this study will provide knowledge on study variables in Sri Lankan context.

3. Methodology
3.1 Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual framework (Figure 1) of the study is formulated based on well established literature to examine the mediating effect of tourist satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and re-visit intention of tourists.
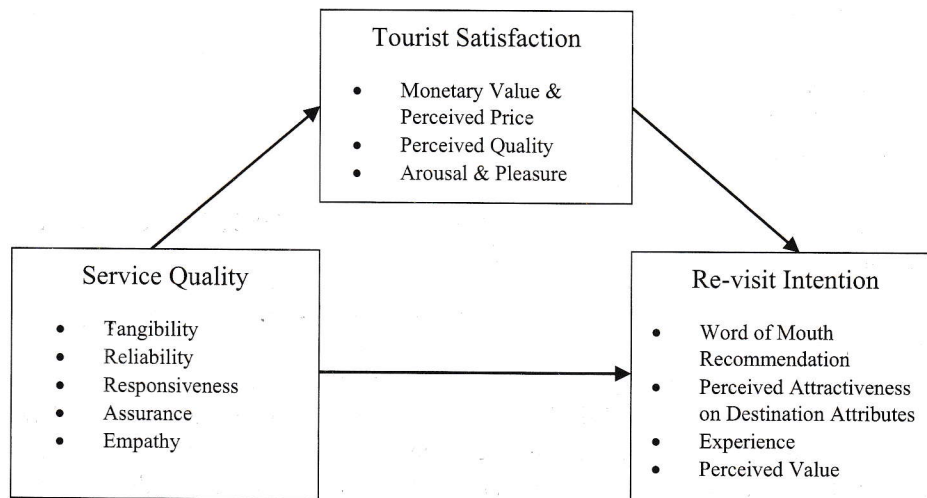

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

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3.2 Population and sample

The study was carried out at Mirissa tourism zone in Southern coastal region, Sri Lanka. Tourism in Mirissa region is considered as an appropriate tool for economic development, since the Mirissa tourism region provides attractive sandy beaches, natural beauty, Whale watching, Dolphin watching, diving, sea bathing, sun bathing, stilt fishing etc. Recently, Mirissa has been identified as one of the most vibrant tourist destinations in the down south of Sri Lanka. Large number of tourists who visit Sri Lanka do not forget to include Mirissa in their tourism plan. Also, there are millions of investments done by small and medium scale investors in the tourism sector. These increasing investments should be based on the quality service to retain repeat customers for long period of time. Thus, the Mirissa has been selected for the purpose of this study to check whether the tourists are satisfied with the services provided by all these SME sector hoteliers. Population of this study was both domestic and inbound tourists who visit five selected hotels in Mirissa during the 01st September 2018 to 30th September 2018. There are number of local and foreign tourists visiting this area during all over the periods of the year. 100 domestic and inbound tourists were selected using convenience sampling technique.

3.3 Validity and reliability

An on-site questionnaire survey was conducted to gather primary data for the study. The questionnaire was consisted with four main parts: demographic details of tourist, service quality measurements, tourist's satisfaction measurements and tourist's re-visit intention measurements using five-point likert scaled questions where 1 was strongly disagree to 5 was strongly agree. The SERVQUAL model (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) was used for measuring the service quality (Parasuaraman et al., 1985; Parasuman & Zeithmal, 1988; Shaikh et al., 2011; Min et al., 1996; Chen, 2008). Tourists satisfaction was measured using three dimensions; monetary value & perceived price, perceived quality, and arousal & pleasure (Heung & Cheng, 2000; Yu & Goulden, 2006; Seng et al., 2011; Hasegawa, 2010; Hui, Van, Ho, 2007; Yam, 2013). Re-visit intention of tourists was measured using four dimensions; word of mouth recommendation, perceived attractiveness on destination attributes, experience, and perceived value (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Cole & Chancellor, 2009; Savinovic & Kim, 2012; Saini & Matta, 2014; Rho & Oh, 2008).

The validity and reliability test were conducted to ensure the error free and valid instruments for the study. A factor analysis was used to validate the study variables. Before the analysis, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were tested. The KMO should be greater than 0.5 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity should be significant. Table 02 given below shows that the KMO is 0.606 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which is significant at $p < 0.000$. Hence, the data used for the study were adequate for further analysis.

Table 1
Validity of the study variables

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.606
	Approx. Chi-Square	179.532
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	3
	Sig.	.000

In order to confirm the internal consistency of the variables used for the study, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted. Accordingly, the Cronbach's alpha values exceed the 0.70 level, showing that high consistency level among the dimensions and the constructs.

Table 2
Validity of the study variables

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Service quality	0.897
Tourists Satisfaction	0.797
Re-visit Intention	0.853

4 Results

4.1 Relationship among study variables

Table 03 given below shows the relationship among main study variables. Survey data emphasis that there is a strong positive relationship between service quality of tourist hotels and tourist's re-visit intention. Tourist's satisfaction is having a strong positive relationship with service quality and re-visits intention.

Table 3
Correlations among study variables

Variables	Re-visit intention	Tourist satisfaction
Service quality	.697**	.877**
Tourists satisfaction	.868**	-

$**p < .01, *p < .05$

4.2 Relationship between service quality dimensions of tourist's hotels and tourists re-visit intention

Table 04 shows the relationship between the dimension of service quality of tourist's hotels and tourist re-visits intention. According to the study results, there is a strong positive relationship between service quality and re-visit intention and tangibility, reliability, assurance and empathy are strongly correlated with the tourist re-visit intention while responsiveness is moderately correlated.

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Table 4

Relationship between service quality dimensions of tourist's hotels and tourist's re-visit intention

Dimension	Tangibility	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy
Re-visit Intention	.675**	.697**	.554**	.762**	.641**

**$p < .01$, *$p < .05$

4.3 Impact of service quality to determine the tourist's re-visit intention

The R^2 value in the model summery table explains extent to which the dependent variable can be predicted by the independent variable. As per the table 05, the tourists re-visit intention is explained by tangibility, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and empathy in 50.1% where ($P < 0.05$).

Table 5

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics Sig. F Change
1	.633a	.501	.569	.447	.000

Predictors: (Constant), Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy

Table 06 indicates the strength of individual components in the service quality construct with the re-visit intention of tourists. As per the results shows in the table 06, highest number in the beta is 0.305 for tangibility which is significant at the $p = 0.005$. Assurance can be ranked as the second with beta 0.296 at the significant at the $P = 0.039$ followed by responsiveness with beta 0.159 at the significant $p = 0.035$ and reliability with beta 0.120 and significant at the $p = 0.043$. Empathy becomes the lowest with the beta of 0.069 where significant at the $P = 0.011$.

Table 6

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard: Coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	B		
(Constant)	1.022	.418		2.447	.016
Service quality	.700	.095	.597	7.361	.000
Tangibility	.305	.107	.321	2.860	.005
Reliability	.120	.167	.103	.721	.043
Responsiveness	.159	.140	-.062	-.420	.035
Assurance	.296	.142	.284	2.089	.039
Empathy	.069	.105	.077	.659	.011

Dependent Variable: Re-visit Intention

4.4 Mediation

With regard to the mediating effect of customer satisfaction on the relationship between service quality of tourist's hotels and the tourists re-visit intention, Baron and Kenney's (1986) criteria for mediation was used.

As the first step, it was measured through the regression analysis and report an $R^2 = 0.796$, $p < 0.000$. The first requirement, assessed the significant relationship between the independent variable (Service quality) and the dependent variable (Re-visit intention) ($r = 0.697$, $P < 0.000$). Second requirement assessed the relationship between service quality and the tourist's satisfaction ($r = 0.877$, $P < 0.000$) and indicated a significant relationship. Third criterion for the mediation, correlation between tourist satisfaction and the re-visit intention was assessed ($r = 0.868$, $P < 0.000$). The final criteria were regressing independent variable and mediating variable against dependent variable. Accordingly, service quality and tourist's satisfaction regressed together and considered against with the re-visit intention ($B = 0.672$, $P < 0.000$).
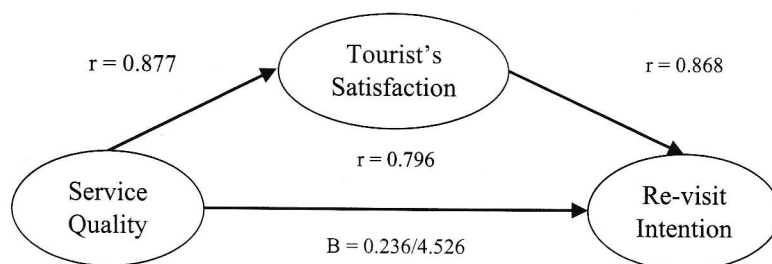

Figure 02 Mediation of tourist's satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and tourist's re-visit intention

5 Discussion

The findings of this study are consistent with that of the previous studies that established a significant and positive relationship among study variables. The study found out that there is a positive relationship ($r = 0.697$) between service quality of tourist's hotels and tourist's re-visit intention (Kole & Illum, 2006). Tourist's re-visit intention mostly relies on customers' perceptions created by the services provided by businesses. Service quality has been positively correlated ($r = 0.877$) with the tourist's satisfaction (Latiff & Ng, 2015; Baker and Crompton, 2000). The study has been proved that tourist's satisfaction and tourist's re-visit intention are positively associated ($r = 0.868$) (Chi & Que, 2008; Kim, 2012). Considering the service quality of tourist's hotels based on the SERVQUAL model (also used by Al-ababneh, 2013 in tourism studies), it has been confirmed that there is a positive relationship between each sub-dimension of SERVQUAL model with the re-visit intention of tourists (Fick and Ritchie, 1991; Yuan et al., 2005; Shaikh and Khan, 2011). Accordingly, assurance recorded the highest positive relationship while responsiveness is having a moderate relationship with the re-

visit intention. Further, the study suggested a significant impact of service quality on tourist's re-visit intention (Lee & Lee, 2015). Tangibility has recorded a significant impact on the tourist's re-visit intention. Assurance, responsiveness, reliability and empathy are also recorded a positive impact on tourist re-visit intention. Regarding the mediating effect of tourist's satisfaction on the relationship between service quality and tourist's re-visit intention, this indicated a partial mediation between tourist's satisfactions, service quality and tourist's re-visit intention.

6   Conclusion

The study concluded that there is a strong positive relationship between service quality of tourist's hotels and tourists re-visit intention. Also, it has been revealed that customer satisfaction and service quality are also positively related and customer satisfaction is positively associated with the re-visit intention. The study suggested that there is no mediating effect among study variables found, since there are having a positive association.

7   Implications

There are very few of studies have been done in Sri Lanka pertain to the SME hotel sector. As the theoretical contribution, the study will support to fulfill the literature gap in service quality, tourist satisfaction and re-visit intention of tourists in Sri Lanka. The findings of this study will create a very good platform to discuss more on the level of service quality and re-visitation of tourists in small and medium scale tourism enterprises extensively.

Service quality is a direct antecedent to the re-visit intention in the tourist hotels. This study will be guided hoteliers in strategic development process to identify the places where they need to pay more attention with regard to superior customer service. Tourist hotel owners, especially SME hotel owners should be focused on the improvements of the levels in service quality dimension in their hotels. They need to understand the key areas where they can enhance the quality of service while providing a superior service for tourists. As per the study, hoteliers need to be more focused on tangible which is having more impact on determining the service quality and the tourist satisfaction, thereafter. Thus, they must concern more on tangibles such as; swimming pools, accommodation and facilities, transport, vicinity, reception, building structure, fragrance, furniture, cutleries and utensils, websites, displays, interior and exterior decorations etc. Employee curtsey, politeness, friendliness and warm welcome are also important factors to determine the higher level of service quality. Tourists make their travel repeat to the same location in their next visit, if only, all these factors are playing in a positive way. As managerial implications, managers in SME hotels should be developed effective managerial strategies and provide relevant trainings for employees to enhance the service quality of hotels. As well as, the study result emphasis that there is a continuous need for resource allocation and time investments in upgrading the

service quality in tourist's hotels to seek higher level of tourist's satisfaction and re-visitation. This will support industry practitioners, especially the government and other policy making bodies to identify the areas where should be developed and facilitated in order to improve the level of existing demand for the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

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