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### A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF TECHNICAL QUALITY, FUNCTIONAL QUALITY, CORPORATE IMAGE OF THE TOUR OPERATORS WITH THEIR SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THEIR OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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#### ABSTRACT

This study finds out the relationships between the service quality components such as technical quality, functional quality and corporate image of the tour operators with their service quality perception and operational excellence from the view of managers in their respective organizations. The data is collected from the 100 tour operating managers from different organizations in the Chennai region. Correlation among the variables were tested out to assess their relationships. There exist is positive correlation between all the set of variables in the study. This study established that the technical quality, functional quality and corporate image will influence the operational excellence of the tour operators in Chennai. Furthermore, this will also tell the dynamics of the organisations and their way of approaching this model. The dynamics of the organisations with respect to size would be the Large, Medium, Micro Organisation and also with respect to affiliation of business would be Local, Chain, International. The results show the micro and independent organizations doing a tremendous work than the others in the market. The managers in the micro and independent are extremely more aware of their service quality components. Surprisingly the chain organizations have the great operational excellence in the market than the others. There exists strong bi variate correlation between the functional quality and service quality perception rather than the technical quality. This will help the managers to focus more on the functional quality. Corporate image also shows strong correlation with the service quality perception. The corporate image is the only variable that all the organisations are having a great score which shows that organizations in Chennai maintaining a good corporate image in the market. This study proves that the service quality components will influence the operation excellence of tour operators in Chennai. This study will be useful for all the tour operating managers to get a clear view of their organization's service quality system and what they really needed to focus and to improve on it.

#### Keywords:

Technical Quality, Functional Quality, Corporate Image, Service Quality Perception and Operational Excellence.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Service sector organizations are more dominant in the employment of today's world. The employment in the service sectors are greater than the manufacturing sectors. In service sector there is no such thing as goods or products like in manufacturing sectors due to the characteristics of intangibility (Aharon Kellerman,1985). The Nature of the service sector requires physical presence of the customer, as customer is the part of the process. Services are activities that provide some combination of time, location, form, or psychological Value (Stevenson, 2011). A service is normally perceived in a subjective manner. Because of its high degree of intangibility, it is frequently difficult for the customer to evaluate service (Gronroos, 1988). Due to the characteristics of non-perishability in the service operations, the service providers needed to get right at the very first service encounter (R.P. Mohanty & R.R. Lakhe,2001). Studying the service sector is important because services have played a significant part in growth of developing economies, absorbing unemployment, and promoting the diffusion of service constituents in manufacturing goods (Voss et al., 1997). In today's competitive world, success is often determined by the appropriateness with which firms choose their competitive strategies. With so much riding on choosing the best competitive strategy, it is particularly important to gather and categorize market data to understand customer needs. (Prajogo and McDermott, 2011).

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### Service Quality

In most of service operations, a high degree of customer contact is involved, which influences the consumers' perception of the service quality. Service quality is the most important element due to the fact that it is less tangible and difficult to measure rather than in manufacturing sectors. There is no generally accepted concept called 'service quality'. There is a harmony among several researches that the consumers evaluate the quality of services by comparing the expectations with the perception of service quality to what they experienced from their service (Gronroos, 1988). Parasuraman (1985) states that service quality cannot be determined, measured before the actual service delivery. Evaluation of service quality is difficult and also very critical to measure how well the customers perceived the service that offered. Service quality perception is the difference between actual service delivery with the consumer expectations. Service quality is a measure of how well the service level delivered matches consumer expectations (Parasuraman, 1988). Since service quality is usually evaluated by the process in which it is delivered as well as the quality of any solid product involved, it is more complex to determine the quality of service delivery than that of manufactured goods (Gronroos, 1988). In manufacturing, errors in product quality can easily be traced and rectified before reaching the customers unlike in-service operations where the customer is part of the process (Stevenson, 2011). In order to understand the service quality perceptions of the customer, one should have to clearly study about what the customers are looking forward in the market.

### Service quality in tourism industry

The quality in tourism has been speaking since from 1960's. Various researchers are studying about the quality of services in all the developing countries as they know that will be a necessary and winning strategy impacting larger in their GDP. Tourism managers know that the quality of services delivering is the most important thing and it reflect in the valuable loyal visitors. Every loyal visitor will like to revisit a particular destination when they really satisfied. Sometimes the cultural background of the tourist may affect the perception of tourist in their services. The diversified cultural groups will have diversified levels of expectations and perceptions in the service quality dimension. In tourism, customers use service dimension or types to evaluate the quality of services. However, each service dimension or type does not have equal significance in terms of how they affect tourist satisfaction. For instance, one consumer may choose a reliable service, while another consumer prefers the responsiveness and individualized attention given by the service provider. Tourism industry serves consumers from all cultural backgrounds worldwide and each consumer has personal preferences on how they want their services delivered. The company cannot satisfy all the individual needs of the customer, that would not possible at all. Managers has to take a generalized decision so that it satisfy the majority of the customer's need. Managers have to take a different approach like changing the service elements often, so that customer does not feel the same repeated experiences. Feedback of the customers is the crucial thing in the tourism industry, as it helps the managers to take strategic decisions.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Tourism industry is the crucial service sector among the others that mainly focuses on the service quality. The services provided by most of the tour operators will be the same. Every tour operator will have unique strategy to with stand in a market to satisfy its customers. Managers are the face of the business that they will have the empowerment to decide which is good or bad for the customers. Quality improvement is the most crucial factor that every public and private organization in tourism industry focuses on. Mainly the lack of quality in the tourism industry due to the fact that lack of awareness or else the wrong use of the system in the service (Wille, 1992). The primary motive of the study is to find out how the managers in the tour operating organizations have the awareness of the service quality and what they think about their company service quality components and how it affects their operational excellence in the market. Based on the suggested model by Gronroos (1984), an organization can perform well in operational excellence by improving the service quality components such as technical quality, functional quality and corporate image. To improve the operational excellence, the managers must be aware of the service quality components and how it will affect the perceived service quality of the customers. And also, managers should know which of the service quality components will have a great impact on the operational excellence of the organization. There are few studies that formulated to achieve operational excellence by using technical quality, functional quality, corporate image as by Gronroos model. This study follows the method and to investigate service quality components and operational excellence of tour

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operators in the Chennai. This study will determine two research questions.

- 1) Whether the tour operators in the Chennai should improve all the service quality components to maximize operational excellence?
- 2) Which of the service quality components having maximum effects of operational excellence of the company?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Conceptual model of service quality

Parasuraman 1985 states that the service quality is dependent on two variables expected service and perceived service. In service encounter customers always look for certain things to notice and evaluate. So, the customer's experience in that service will be able to influence his post-consumption evaluation of that service which is a perceived service quality of a customer. (Crompton and Love, 1995) tells that service quality is measured in terms of the tourist's overall experiences and the opportunities that are available to them in the destinations. It is obvious to say that the perceived quality of service will be the outcome of an evaluation process, where the consumer compares his expectations with the service he has received i.e., he puts the perceived service quality against the expected service. (Parasuraman, 1985). The result of this process will be perceived quality of service. He also stated that Perceived service quality can be divided into two things. The first one would be the instrumental performance of a service i.e., technical dimension of that service. The second one would be the expressive performance of a service i.e., psychological or functional dimension of the service.

#### Technical Quality, Functional Quality and Corporate Image

Technical quality of the service is the most important thing before the actual service delivered but the technical quality only is not enough. If the functional quality of a service is not considered satisfactory, the customer will still feel and be satisfied irrespective of the level of satisfaction caused by the technical quality (Parasuraman, 1985).

Gronroos (1988) proposed that customers measure the quality of services by using technical quality and functional quality components. He tells that technical quality is what customers receive during the moment of interaction with the company, which describes the features as employees' technical skills, technical solutions of their products, knowledge and ability, company reputation and credibility. Functional quality would be how well the customer receives the service, which constitutes employee attitudes and behavior, service mindedness, accessibility and flexibility, service recovery, reliability and trustworthiness. Also, tourist perceived service quality is measured by multidimensional factors such as technical, functional, emotional and overall service value is more significant than the single concept of Perceived service quality. (Lee and Chen, 2006). Show the value of service quality may not be considered same for all the tourists.

Parasuraman (1985) created the model composed of with the technical quality and functional quality. Technical quality is the result of service encounter with the organization and it is important to evaluate the quality of services. Functional quality is the process of service delivery (how technical quality delivered functionally). He also states that another dimension of service quality which is image of the organization. The expectations of the customers are influenced by the view of the company i.e., corporate image. Simply corporate image is the result of how consumers perceive the organization. In that scenario Oliver (1997) states that image of the company plays a crucial role in the expectations of the customer. This will also tell that service quality perception and their desires are able to be satisfied by the company with the influence of the company's image in the market. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) tells that the company's image has the ability to influence the customer's perception of service quality positively or negatively and that leads to their satisfaction. In their study they analyzed how the company's image and satisfaction influence the customer's loyalty. They established that the customer's perception of the product and services is impacted by the corporate image of that organization. This clearly shows that corporate image is one of the major factors that influence the minds of customers with products and services.

#### Operational Excellence

Operational excellence is an industrial culture concept and it is new to the service industries. The continuous

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improvement of employee’s empowerment will lead to achieve operational excellence in the service sectors (Vittorio Cesarotti and Caterina Spada,2009). So, using the employees’ contribution we empowering them will lead to the success of the business in the service sectors. Operational excellence in short how the desires of consumers are effectively satisfied by the organizations. Parasuraman (1991) also tell that the organization can gain operational excellence by satisfying minimum level of customer expectations. When the organization needed to be operationally excellence, it should create a value creation strategy not used by competitors (Barney J,1997). Thus, the value creation strategy can be a part of employee’s empowerment and knowledge. In the tourism sector operational excellence can be measured by knowing the occupancy rate of the hotels, total revenue and break-even point etc., Operational excellence of an organization is measured by financial methods such as return on sales investment and equity (Barney J,1997).

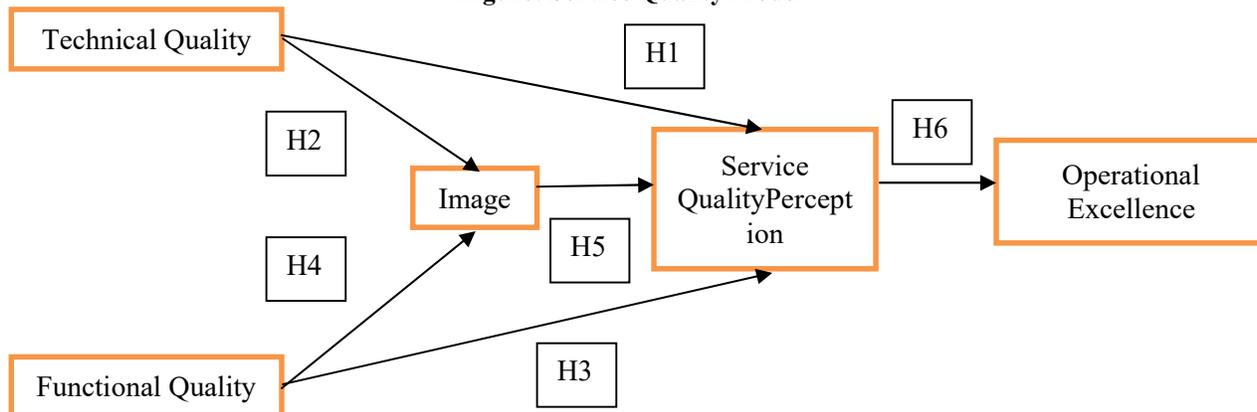
### Service Quality and Operational Excellence

Everyone widely accepted the fact that service quality is the important factor that determines the operational excellence of the companies. After all the numerous steps taken to improve the quality there exists an increase in the dissatisfaction of tourist and many tourism organizations mainly the tour operators are dealing on regular basis (Augustyn,1998). Brogowicz, et al., (1990) tells a model that quality of services can be improved by managerial activities of the company. They studied the earliest service quality model of Gronroos by analytical methods. Their study reveals that the managers can achieve operational excellence by establishing what their customers expect (Technical quality) and how they expect to receive that service (Functional quality). The most important thing would be the organization has to meet the customer service expectations. For that managers must plan, implement and control the technical and functional quality elements in the service. (Brogowicz, et al. 1990). This study is supported by Sedlacek, et al., (2011) who stated that service quality is the key factor in the operational excellence of the companies in tourism industry. Their study was developed in the companies of Czech Republic where they examined the perception of quality and emphasis on quality management. The Study by Inyo Nanyama Doreen (2019) tells that there is relative significance between the service quality components and operational excellence of organizations in tourism industry. The study tells that both technical quality and functional quality needed to be improved with functional quality demanding higher priority among the tour operators in Kenya.

### Conceptual framework

From all the above studies, it clearly known that tourism organization can achieve operational excellence by determining the technical quality (what their customers expect) and functional (quality how they expect to receive). And also, corporate image plays a crucial role in influencing the customer’s perception of service quality when the services are difficult to evaluate. Finally, when the services satisfy the customer, their attitude towards the organization will improve will lead to attain the organizational competitiveness in the market. The study investigated technical quality, functional quality, corporate image and service quality perception and how these affects operational excellence of the tour operators.

Figure: Service Quality Model



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Based on the model in figure, the hypotheses going to be evaluated are:

- H1: There is a positive correlation between technical quality and service quality perception
- H2: There is a positive correlation between technical quality and image
- H3: There is a positive correlation between functional quality and service quality perception
- H4: There is a positive correlation between functional quality and image
- H5: There is a positive correlation between image and service quality perception
- H6: There is a positive correlation between service quality perception and operational excellence

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research design

The main aim of the study to find out the relationships between the service quality components, service quality perception and operational excellence of the tour operators. This study follows the descriptive research design. A descriptive research is adapted to understand a clear picture of the situation as it exists at current moment (Cooper and Schindler, 2006). Descriptive study was chosen since it helps to give the complete and accurate data on the existing aspects of service quality which helps tour operators to achieve operational excellence.

#### Population and sampling

The study focuses on the tour operating managers in the Chennai region. Chennai is the capital of south Indian state Tamilnadu. Tamilnadu has the largest footprint of visitors among the other states in India for almost more than 4 years. Most of the organizations established their offices in Chennai (both domestic and international). The study encompasses the data of 100 tour operating managers of different organization. The data collected from almost 12 different tour operators in Chennai. Convenience sample method was used to collect the data from the organization. The details of managers with respect to the organization has shown in the below table.

**Figure: Profile of the Respondents**

Name of organization	No of Respondents	Name of organization	No of Respondents
Thomas Cook India	33	Mathura Travels	5
Balmer and Lawrie	14	Cubix Holidays	5
Make My Trip	9	SOTC Holidays	6
Club 7 Holidays	5	GOED Travels	5
Delmos World	2	Akbar Travels	10
Parveen Travels	1	Elite Voyages	5

#### Data collection

The primary data was collected through structured questionnaire which has two sections. The section A composed of general information about the respondents and the section B comprised of Company’s perception of service and their efforts in achieving service quality. The respondent comprised of operational managers in the tour operators. Likert rating scale was used to measure the variables in the study. Likert scale is used in the study as it is more reliable and gives a greater volume of data and assures that each item meets an empirical test to allow for discrimination ability between favorable and unfavorable attitudes among the respondents. The tour operator’s efforts to improve the service quality is assessed on a scale ranging from ‘always’ (1) to ‘never’ (4). Operational excellence is measured on a scale ranging from ‘to a great extent’ (1) up to ‘not at all’ (4). Perceptions of technical quality is measured on a scale ranging from ‘very satisfied’ (1) to ‘very dissatisfied (4) and functional quality dimensions is measured on a scale ranging from ‘true’ (1) ‘somewhat true’ (2) and ‘not true’ (3) while corporate image was measured on a scale ranging from ‘absolutely characterizes’ (1) ‘somewhat characterizes’ (2) and ‘does not characterize at all’ (3).

#### Data analysis

By using SPSS software data collected is coded. The data presented in pie charts and tables. By using analytical

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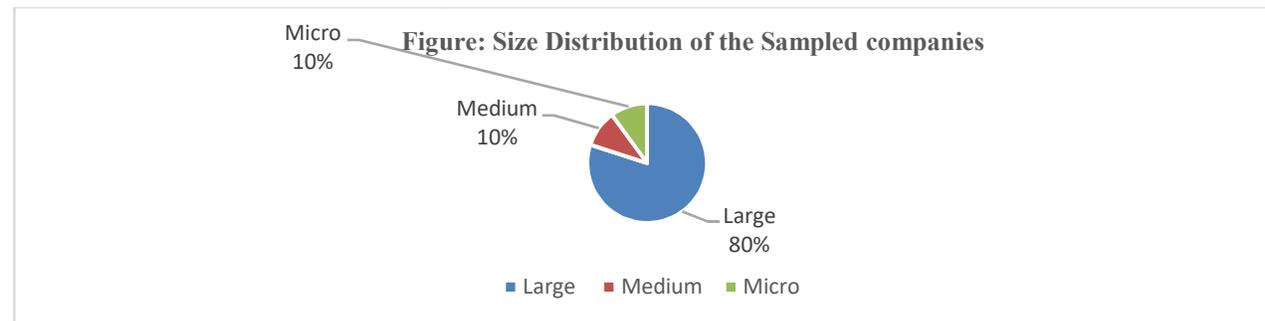
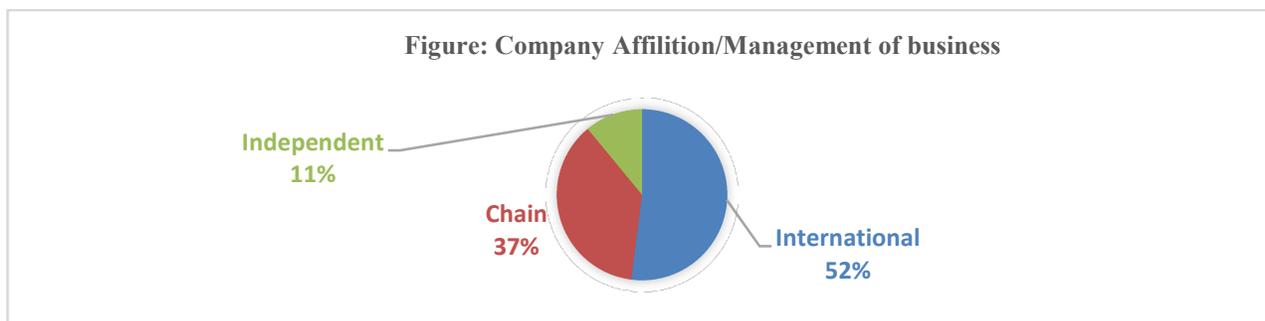
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techniques, the relationship among the variables such as mean score, standard deviation and correlation were assessed. Correlation analysis helps to determine any relationship between the variable pairs.

### ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Organization Characteristics

The organization characteristics was measured by two variables. The one would be the level of establishment of the company and the other is the affiliation / management of business. This was determined to find out how well the organization size and its affiliation has an influence on how service quality is perceived and overall operational excellence of the organization in India. From the data 80% of the companies are Large enterprises, 10% of them are Medium enterprises and 10% of them are Micro enterprises. And also 52% of the organizations are Internationally affiliated, 37% of the organizations are Chain and 1% of them are independent.



#### Technical quality scores

Table: Technical Quality Scores		Mean	Standard Deviation
Size of the Organization	Large	1.4325	0.40931
	Medium	1.5600	0.46952
	Micro	1.4400	0.33731
Affiliation / Management of Business	International	1.4692	0.44437
	Chain	1.4270	0.37465
	Independent	1.4000	0.34641

From the above scores it clearly shows that the micro organizations managed to get good values in both mean and standard deviation which shows that they are performing well in in this component. Likewise, independent organizations have done the similar work as like as micro organizations. This means that the company with least resources can achieve good technical quality scores rather than giants in the market. There is no such difference

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between the micro and large organization in the mean score of technical quality. The large organizations are also having well established way of approaching technical quality component too.

### Functional quality scores

Table: Functional Quality Scores		Mean	Standard Deviation
Size of the Organization	Large	1.2200	0.36919
	Medium	1.3000	0.40277
	Micro	1.1600	0.32387
Affiliation / Management of Business	International	1.2923	0.42373
	Chain	1.1459	0.26936
	Independent	1.1455	0.31101

Functional quality is all about how the employees are performing well in the service encounter. In this scenario, micro organizations done well as like in the technical quantity. Both the mean and standard deviation is very less compared to other organizations. Surprisingly chain organizations performed well in the second category, as their way of doing business is not similar to the other organizations. While in the mean score both chain and independent organizations have similar scores and vary in the standard deviation.

### Corporate image scores

Table: Corporate Image Scores		Mean	Standard Deviation
Size of the Organization	Large	1.2525	0.25605
	Medium	1.3200	0.39101
	Micro	1.0800	0.13984
Affiliation / Management of Business	International	1.2692	0.27691
	Chain	1.2541	0.26936
	Independent	1.0727	0.13484

The image of the micro organize actions are successfully managed by their managers asset as it as reflected in their scores. The microorganisms are far more above than other organizations in mean and standard deviation. This shows how the managers in micro organizations working tremendously in the market. In the second category also, the independent organizations have done the similar kind of work as micro organizations did.

### Service quality perception scores

Table: Service Quality Perception Scores		Mean	Standard Deviation
Size of the Organization	Large	1.4175	0.43071
	Medium	1.5400	0.46236
	Micro	1.3800	0.62858
Affiliation / Management of Business	International	1.4192	0.49031
	Chain	1.4378	0.34589
	Independent	1.4182	0.60962

As by the score the micro organizations have done a great job but the large organizations are the one which have both mean and standard deviation less than the others. So, it shows that large organization works well in this component needed for the customers. In the second category also, international organizations performed very well than the others. But also, three of them are having similar schools that they vary only in the standard deviation.

### Operational excellence scores

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Table: Operational excellence Scores		Mean	Standard Deviation
Size of the Organization	Large	1.4563	0.43956
	Medium	1.3667	0.42889
	Micro	1.5000	0.48432
Affiliation / Management of Business	International	1.4744	0.50959
	Chain	1.3964	0.31020
	Independent	1.4182	0.60962

This is where the real face of the organizations will show up. Surprisingly medium organizations performed very well in this category. They manage to get good place in the market as it reflects in their operational excellence. In second category also chain organizations have done similar appreciable work than the others. chain organizations have really better scope than the others in the market.

### Mean Scores Summary

The Mean scores for each variable in the study are given in a summarized form as shown in appendix. The total Mean score of the respondents for technical and functional qualities are given as 1.446 and 1.222 respectively. Corporate image scored a total Mean of 1.242, while service quality perception scored and operational excellence scored 1.426 and 1.452 correspondingly. Technical quality, service quality perception, and operational excellence scores ranged between 1 and 4, while both functional quality and corporate image scores ranged between 1 and 3.

### Correlation Analysis

The main aim of this study was to investigate service quality components and operational excellence among four operations in Chennai. The specific objectives included; to establish the relationships between the three service quality components as proposed by Gronroos Model which are technical quality, functional quality, and image; and operational excellence of firms in tourism industry. The hypotheses tested for this study were six and they stated as follows: there is a positive relationship between technical quality and image (H1), there is a positive correlation between technical quality and image (H2), there is a positive correlation between functional quality and service quality perception (H3), there is a positive correlation between functional quality and image (H4), there is a positive correlation between image and service quality perception (H5), and there is a positive correlation between service quality perception and operational excellence. Correlation analysis was carried out to examine the nature and strength of associations that exist among the variables in the study. The independent variables in this case were technical quality and functional quality, while the dependent variables were corporate image, service quality perception, and operational excellence. Preliminary steps were involved in calculating scores for each variable. The scores for each variable were calculated by adding up the ratings of each aspect that used to measure that variable. Table 4.6 illustrate the correlation coefficients matrix. All the five variables correlate significantly. However, the strength of relationship differs between different pairs of variables. Some pairs of variables have very strong relationships while others have weak correlations.

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**Table: Correlation Coefficient matrix**

		Technical Quality	Functional Quality	Corporate Image	Service Quality Perception	Operational excellence
Technical Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.612**	.551**	.322**	.446**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.001	0.000
Functional Quality	Pearson Correlation	.612**	1	.523**	.387**	.546**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.000
Corporate Image	Pearson Correlation	.551**	.523**	1	.505**	.496**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.000
Service Quality Perception	Pearson Correlation	.322**	.387**	.505**	1	.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.000		0.000
Operational excellence	Pearson Correlation	.446**	.546**	.496**	.533**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Technical quality and corporate image have the strongest bivariate correlation while the technical quality and service quality perception is moderate. The strong positive correlation existing between in the following pairs of variables technical quality and functional quality, functional quality and operational excellences, corporate image and functional quality, corporate image and service quality perception. Therefore, the bivariate correlation coefficients confirm that all the variables of the study correlate significantly. This means that all the six hypotheses were statistical relevant and acceptable.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study clearly depicts that service quality components is positively correlated with the operational excellence of the tour operators. The study clearly shows that corporate image of the organizations in Chennai scores greater than the other variables. This clearly shows that organizations in Chennai maintaining a good corporate image in the market. From the findings majority of the respondents had high scores on service quality perception. These findings confirm that managers are extensively aware the importance of service quality and they are committed towards bringing quality force in improving the service quality offered by the organizations. Service quality perception is highly correlated with operational excellence. Functional quality is highly correlated with service quality perception rather than technical quality. This tells that managers as to focus more on functional quality rather than technical quality. Corporate image plays a crucial role in the service quality perception of the customers. So, the managers should focus more on corporate image and functional quality. This study will help the budding tourism managers to focuses more on single area that where their company lacks on it will be easily assessed. This will also be self-realization study among the tour operators as they evaluating their managers to think about their service components. This study will not only for tour operators and may extend up to any service sector organizations as suggested by the studies. This study focusses only on the tour operators of Chennai region. So, generalizations would be needed in the other regions in India and also in the other Countries. The Study didn't analyses the customer point view of this model and it required to find out their views of approaching too as further research. This study only deals with service quality components it may also study with respect to SERVQUAL Dimensions as a further research.

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