

GAP ANALYSIS OF SERVICE QUALITY USING SERVQUAL MODEL: A STUDY OF CONSUMERS SATISFACTION IN PAKISTAN APPAREL BRAND

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ABSTRACT

Service quality and its connection to customer satisfaction and loyalty are crucial for all businesses in today's competitive environment. The apparel industry which is expanding globally, operates in a very dynamic environment, where constant updating and renewal of the product line is essential to retain customers to meet their high and varied demands. It becomes critical for apparel brands to track consumer satisfaction with service quality over time, pinpoint the variables that influence it, and then search for areas for development. Therefore, this research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of women's clothing brand service quality on its clients' satisfaction by finding the gap between perceived and expected quality of service using the SERVQUAL model. Through a questionnaire survey, data was collected from 150 customers of a particular Pakistani clothing brand from different outlets in the city of Karachi. The results revealed that the customers were satisfied with the brand in all five dimensions of SERVQUAL i.e. tangibles, reliability, empathy, assurance and responsiveness and has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. However, empathy and responsiveness were the two aspects that needed to be focused on to outperform in service quality.

Keywords: Service Quality, SERVQUAL, GAP model, Customer Expectations, Customer Perceptions

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

In today's rapidly expanding world and period of globalization, textile retailing is at its pinnacle. Service is one of the most significant views in the textile sector. Regarded as a critical component of consumer pleasure, it is highlighted as a top priority before any other purpose in retail. The given services can serve as a basis for measuring the level of client satisfaction.

Because customers have gotten more educated, aware, and absorbed, the textile industry's business environment is becoming very competitive from the get-go, making it difficult to provide the proper level of services that customers expect. Effective services and meeting client expectations directly contribute to customer happiness, which in turn contributes to the customer retention that any business needs.

Keeping this in view, this research intends to assess a textile brand's service quality by employing the service quality gap model, otherwise known as SERVQUAL, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry during the 1980s. The model is adapted to determine service characteristics and improvement areas by exploring the difference between customer expectations and perceptions of the service.

Customer Satisfaction

Customers are satisfied when they have a favorable impression of a product, service, or company. It's what sets one apart from the rest of the pack. Managing customer satisfaction well is crucial, since repeat business from happy customers is a powerful kind of free advertising. The level of client satisfaction is another important indicator of a product's success. In the fiercely competitive Pakistani market, where every company is fighting for the same pool of satisfied customers, this is often seen as the deciding factor in whether or not a business succeeds.

Consider the textile business which places a premium on service excellence, to compete successfully with opponents from around the globe, it is vital to deliver services of the highest quality and to provide complete customer satisfaction. High Customer satisfaction benefits organizations in numerous ways such as increasing the trust of existing customers and brand loyalty, increasing awareness of people towards the firm, gaining new customers due to favorable word-of-mouth advertising and diverting customers from the competitor, all of which increase sales (Almossawi, 2012). Customer satisfaction in the textile industry is influenced by several aspects such as helpful and courteous staff, prompt and accurate billing, fair costs, high-quality services, and a strong overall value proposition. Satisfied customers differ from those who are not very pleased and can have a significant impact on the success of a business. According to Heskett et al. (1994), the relation between scores and loyalty depends on whether or not customers are "very satisfied" or just "satisfied" with the good or service. The likelihood of repeat purchases is five times higher for "very satisfied" customers. Therefore, ingenious organizations always try to adopt strategies not only to satisfy their customers but also to delight them.

The American Customer Satisfaction Index states that customer satisfaction is a strategic company asset that needs to be maximized. Companies that can satisfy customers' expectations while delivering quality, value, and complaint handling are successful. Long-term success depends on building a loyal customer base, which can only be achieved by offering exceptional service. Loyal customers not only reduce costs (through repeat business and increased purchases), but also increase profitability by reducing promotional efforts (Li et al., 2011). The degree to which a service fulfills the client's expectations is a good indicator of its quality.

To maintain a strong foothold in the market, businesses need to learn what their clients expect from them and then work to exceed those expectations through the development of service standards.

Mendzela and Craig (1999) identified four steps to successful service planning. Customers should be valued first, and their needs and wants should be met in every way possible. The second is equipping workers by inspiring them to perform above and beyond in terms of client satisfaction. The next stage is to disseminate information to clients that clarify the steps necessary to get their desired outcome.

Last but not least, achieving victory at all stages of the customer service chain through strengthening ties between the business and its clientele.

Several publications of past study investigations have proposed high service quality as a strategically differentiated strategy in today's retail business (Asubonteng et al. 1996; Weiss et al. 2005; Rhee and Rha 2009). The garment industry is one such dynamic, fiercely competitive business environment that demands a focus on providing high-quality services to win over customers' happiness and loyalty. Due to the rising number of products that consumers need and the introduction of new supply to suit these high and diversified needs, this is a massive and rapidly growing global market.

The Pakistani clothing industry is well known for its broad product line, competitive price, and excellent quality products that are sold to other countries. With US\$6.05 billion in apparel market revenue in 2023, it is among the top five exporters of fashion clothing to the US and European markets. The market's largest segment, women's apparel, is expected to be worth US\$2.53 billion in 2023. The apparel industry, however, faces a number of difficulties, including a lack of fuel and rising fuel costs, labor disputes, political unrest, and factory closures and relocations brought on by an unstable economy and heightened competition (Uddin and Jahed 2007). (Crinis, 2012). Because frontline personnel who have direct contact with customers have a substantial impact on customer satisfaction, Hui and Yee (2015) believe that the company's services will suffer in the absence of a professional and knowledgeable team, leading to unhappiness among customers.

Although numerous previous studies on service quality and customer satisfaction have been conducted in various industries using SERVQUAL, such as education (Enayati et al., 2013; Amelia, Hidayanto, & Hapsari, 2011), restaurant and hotel (Tessera et al., 2016; Sharma, 2014), retail (Badlani and Singhal, 2017; Hisam et al., 2016), telecommunication (Kang and James, 2004; Rajeswari et al., 2017; Huang, Lee, and Chen, 2017), banking (Ahmed et al., 2017; Kakuoris & Finos, 2016) and some on textile industry have also been found (Selvabaskar and Shanmuga, 2015; Jaskulska, 2013). However, those findings required more examination in a Pakistani context because several countries have varied social economic statuses and client segmentation.

Also, service quality from the customer's perspective in the apparel sector has not been widely researched. Therefore, this research tries to fill this gap to some extent by conducting research on the Pakistani apparel industry which is first of its type to the best of my knowledge. The study adopted the SERVQUAL model to explore the factors predicting clothing brand customer satisfaction and loyalty. The apparel firm examined for this study was a leading women's clothing brand located in the city of Karachi.

SERVQUAL Model

The rules and extent of the five gaps delineated by Parasuraman et al. (1988) were utilized in the creation of SERVQUAL, or the service quality gap model. The underlying premise of this concept is that service quality is determined by the discrepancy between client expectations and perceptions of the service.

The first gap is the knowledge gap, which is the discrepancy between what customers anticipate from the quality of services provided and what management believes they should expect.

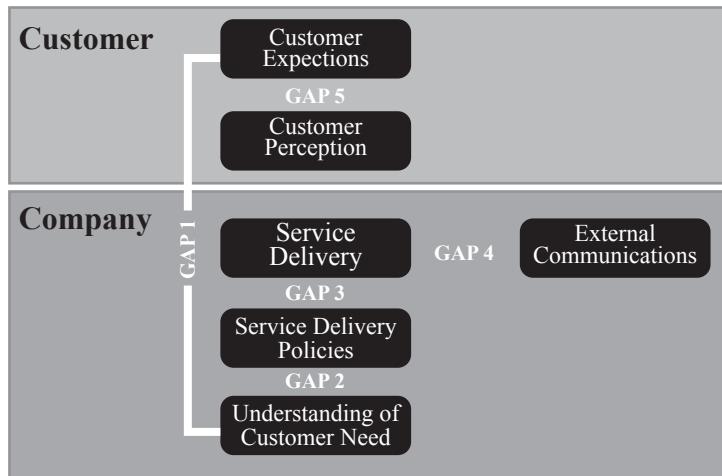
The second gap is the policy gap, which is the difference in how management interprets customer expectations and how that knowledge is incorporated into staff standards and service delivery regulations.

The third gap is the delivery gap, which is the difference in the actual services provided and the service quality requirements.

Communication gap number four: the discrepancy between the services rendered and those promised or conveyed to the customer.

The fifth gap is the customer gap, which is the difference between the level of service that consumers perceive and what they expect.

Therefore, Gap 5 represents a lack of service quality as perceived by clients, while gaps 1-4 reflect inadequacies inside the service organization. Conceptual gap model of service quality.



Dimensions in SERVQUAL Model

The American researchers A. Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml, & L.L Berry compiled a list of 97 elements that can have significant effects on service quality concerning the customers' expectations and what they are perceiving against. The model was designed in 1985 and formerly the items were divided into 10 major dimensions: tangibles, responsiveness, reliability, security, communication, credibility, competence, courtesy, and understanding the customer. By the end of 1988, the model was modified with complied 22 items (for expectations and perceptions) used along with the 7-point scale from "Strongly Agree" (7) to "Strongly Disagree" (1).

Additionally, the 10 dimensions had been condensed into 5 essential dimensions, which were referred to by the acronym RATER, which included the 22 items from the improved model. Although all the dimensions are important to customers few are considered highly valuable. While conducting research, participants were asked to give each of the five aspects a score out of 100, with higher scores indicating more relevance.

Dimensions of SERVQUAL

- Reliability is defined as the capacity to continuously deliver the promised service with precision and dependability.
- Assurance is described as the knowledge, courtesy, and capacity of personnel to inspire confidence, trust, credibility, and safety.
- Tangible is the look of an organization's physical facilities, equipment, staff, and communication materials.
- Empathy is the offering of care and customized attention to the consumer.
- Responsiveness is described as the eagerness to assist clients and offer prompt service.

The SERVQUAL MODEL is a "Multi-Item Scale" that is well-versed in reliability and validity. Its declarations of assumptions and perceptions across five dimensions established its status as a defined model. Scores based on averages along each dimension item can be used to compare the businesses' reliability and productivity (Parasuraman et al., 1985). One of SERVQUAL's benefits is that it can be used to identify and analyze the specific aspects of service delivery that contribute to high-quality service and pinpoint places where improvements may be made.

Research Objectives

- To identify the expected and perceived level of customer satisfaction for a leading women's clothing brand.
- To conduct a gap analysis to investigate service gaps.
- To find out service quality features of a clothing brand that can improve customer gratification.
- To recommend service-related areas where enhancements can be made.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When the Servqual Model was implemented at Islamic Azad University, Mahmoodi, Salarzadeh, and Paslari (2015) and Enayati, Modanloo, Behnamfar, and Rezaei (2013) discovered that students' expectations exceeded their perceptions in all five categories of service quality. Furthermore, Amelia, Hidayanto, and Hapsari (2011) evaluated the expectations and perceptions of diverse university students using the Servqual Model and found certain gaps in the assurance and dependability

components of service quality. The service quality in universities in Iran and Dhaka was examined by Ahmadi and Ghelichli (2006) and Ahmad and Hossain (2009), respectively. It was discovered through SERVQUAL Model data analysis that student expectations were higher than student perceptions.

Kundi et al. (2014) sought to investigate the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality at a Pakistani higher education institution. The SERVQUAL model was employed in the investigation, and the results indicated a strong and positive relationship between customer satisfaction and each of the attributes (tangibility, assurance, reliability, empathy, and responsiveness). Furthermore, two factors that have been highlighted as catalysts for enhancing the higher education system's service quality are assurance and tangibility.

Blešić et al. (2011) investigated the quality of service in the hotel industry by employing the SERVQUAL gap methodology. The study's results discovered that clients are generally dissatisfied with hotel services in all variables except "empathy", as their expectations were higher than their perceptions of quality services.

Ahmad, Papastathopoulous (2019); Tessera, Ahmad, and Hussain (2016) examined customer satisfaction and service quality in the hotel industry using the SERVQUAL model. The findings showed that customer satisfaction was significantly influenced by two (2) SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles and responsiveness.

Sharma (2014) made an effort to use the SERVQUAL model to gauge the level of customer satisfaction in Indian hotels. The results showed that there are some discrepancies between what customers believe and expect. Additionally, Saleh and Ryan (2006) found differences in how guests and management saw the hotel's characteristics as well as differences in how guests and management perceived the services offered. There is a reason for discontent with the services provided when these gaps appear.

Hisam et al. (2016) used the SERVQUAL and GAP models to find out how consumer satisfaction can be impacted by the quality of service satisfaction in retail outlets in three Indian cities (Varanasi, Kolkata, and Ranchi). The outcomes of the investigation revealed that the aspects of reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness all were incorporated into the selected three retail organizations. Moreover, tangible has a larger gap when compared to other attributes.

Jaskulska (2013) suggested looking into how the ZARA clothing business in Ireland projects consumer happiness using factors related to the quality of its products and services. The SERVQUAL model for service quality served as the basis for the tool's construction in the research. The study indicates that consumers seem satisfied with ZARA staff and concur that qualities like responsiveness, dependability, and integrity are what meet their needs. Additionally, the results showed that comprehension and serviceability are factors that affect customer satisfaction.

Chan and Goh (2019) looked into how client satisfaction and service quality are related and found that three dimensions of SERVQUAL (empathy, tangibles and responsiveness) have a favorable and noteworthy association with consumers. However, client satisfaction was negatively impacted by reliability and assurance.

Badlani and Singhal (2017) employed the SERVQUAL approach to assess the difference between quality of service and perceived service quality in the Indian Retailing scenario. The gap analysis identified areas where the organization can improve and offered guidance for making adjustments to increase service quality. The tangibles dimension showed the greatest disparity, while the responsiveness factor showed the smallest.

Lim and Tang (2000) examined the Servqual Model by adding two more service quality features to it which are “accessibility and affordability”. They performed their research with this enhanced version in Singapore hospitals and identified that the two dimensions “Assurance and Responsiveness” are the most important and valued aspects of service quality in the health sector.

Kang and James (2004) applied the Servqual Model in the telecommunication industry in South Korea. They took a survey of two cellular companies in South Korea and concluded that technical qualities are as important as functional qualities proposed by Parasuraman et al (1988) for the customers to get satisfaction from service quality.

Rajeswari, Thiagarajan and Srinivasulu (2017) conducted research to uncover the link between client satisfaction, service quality, and loyal clientele in wireline telecommunications enterprises. The mechanism was based on the E-S-Qual and SERVQUAL models, and structured questionnaires were distributed. According to their findings, consumer satisfaction acts as an intermediary between client loyalty and service quality.

Huang, Chen, and Lee's (2017) study examined the relationship between service quality and client satisfaction and loyalty in the business-to-business technology service sector. The study follows the PZB model as a guide. The findings demonstrated that the quality of service (tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance) has a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, consumer satisfaction increases brand awareness and customer loyalty, and acts as a moderator, further enhancing the positive correlation between those factors.

Kakuoris & Finos (2016) examined consumers' perceptions of service quality at the leading bank in Serbia; whereas, Arasli et al. (2005) analyzed service quality in the commercial banking sector in Cyprus. The SERVQUAL measurement tool was utilized to perform the survey. The findings found discrepancies between consumer expectations and perceptions, implying that service quality inadequacies must be

addressed. In the case of Cyprus, the responsiveness-empathy component showed the greatest disparity, while in Serbia the highest negative gap was found for the reliability dimension. The assurance component had the greatest influence on customer happiness in both studies.

Ahmed et al. (2017) examined how perceived value and customer trust, as well as the impact of technology, affect the quality of banking services and the happiness of customers in a Pakistani environment. They did this by using a modified SERVQUAL model with four dimensions: empathy, reliability, competence, and online service. The investigation's findings showed that each of the four factors significantly affects total consumer satisfaction. It is also found that the banking industry's usage of technology serves as a moderating factor.

Panchariya (2014) made an effort to investigate the discrepancy between consumer perceptions and expectations of banking services in the Indian city, of Wardha, using SERVQUAL. The findings show that in all five dimensions of SERVQUAL banking clients' expectations exceeded their perceptions with the largest disparity in the dimensions of tangibility, responsiveness, and empathy, whilst the dimensions of reliability and assurance have the lowest gap scores.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the current era of modernization and innovation, it is found that the people of Pakistan tend to be more brand-conscious and seek the latest fashion trends in clothing. The study was carried out under the umbrella of the apparel industry of Pakistan and focused on the efficacy of service quality on consumer satisfaction targeting one of the leading women's clothing brands in Pakistan.

Research Design

To investigate how customers evaluate service quality, this study used a SERVQUAL model to explore the factors predicting customer satisfaction and loyalty for the brand selected. This research employed the deductive approach as we are not providing a new theory but rather, utilizing existing concepts to justify our results. Also, a quantitative (survey) approach is utilized, in which a self-administered structured questionnaire was provided to the consumers who have experience in purchasing the specific apparel brand in Pakistan.

Population and Sampling

A total of 150 completed questionnaires were gathered from the customers who had experience buying the particular clothing brand of our research. The respondents were selected randomly by convenience sampling approach from outlets at various sites in Karachi City, which was the sole study location.

Data Collection Technique

For data collection, self-administered structured questionnaires were distributed to the customers of a particular women's clothing brand in Karachi, Pakistan. The questionnaire used is divided into three significant sections. The first section encompasses the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The next section,

which is a crucial one includes twelve questions covering all five quality dimensions (4 questions for tangibles, 2 for reliability, 2 for responsiveness, 2 for assurance, and finally 2 for empathy) and explains the details of the major part of the study i.e. the gap between expectations and perceptions. This section has been modified from actual SERVQUAL in a way that includes only relevant questions, reworded where required, merging the repetitive ones and omitting which were not relevant. For each of the questions in the second section, the respondents are required to specify their expectation (importance) and perception (experience) intensity using 5 point Likert scale from highest to lowest. The final section covers the honored opinion of the customers for the brand determining their satisfaction level and loyalty.

DATA ANALYSIS

The descriptive analysis is carried out using Microsoft Excel software, with the help of frequency tables, and the application of mean and unweighted and weighted averages to simplify, summarize and produce accurate results from the gathered data.

Data obtained from the survey have been analyzed separately for each variable to ascertain the expected service quality, perceived service quality, and unweighted and weighted service quality gaps. Each dimension's gap scores—empathy, assurance, responsiveness, consistency, and tangibility—were weighted according to their average scores. The 12 SERVQUAL items from the expectation and perception statements were grouped based on the five SERVQUAL basic dimensions in order to determine the average SERVQUAL score. The combined weighted and unweighted service quality gap, as well as the final outcomes for each SERVQUAL dimension separately, are shown in a separate table below.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Respondents Demographic Profile:

A total of 150 respondents provided the gender, age, and profession data that was gathered. According to the data, 9% of respondents were men and 91% of respondents were women. According to the age criteria, 24% of respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35, 40% of respondents were between the ages of 21 and 25, and 27% of respondents were between the ages of 17 and 20. of the respondents, 9% were over 35. Furthermore, reported are the following statistics: 5% of respondents identified as businessmen; 26% were employed; 14% were housewives; 10% were unemployed and seeking for work; and 44% were students.

SERVQUAL Findings:

S.No	Question	Expectatio	Perception	Gap Score (P - E)
Tangibles Dimension				
1.	The brand outlet has dirt free service area.	1.76	2	0.24
2.	The brand outlet has appealing décor. (Mannequins, racks, shelves, etc.)	2.05	2.21	0.16
3.	Employees are neat, clean, and well dressed up.	1.66	1.68	0.02
4.	The equipment used at the brand outlet for billing and other technical purposes is modern and updated.	1.79	1.9	0.11

Total (Tangibles Dimension)	7.26	7.79	0.53
Average Gap Score (Tangibles Dimension)	0.133		
Reliability Dimension			
5. Employees take immediate action upon complaints	1.71	1.96	0.25
6. Employees perform services by a certain time as promised.	1.97	2.07	0.1
Total (Reliability Dimension)	3.68	4.03	0.35
Average Gap Score (Reliability Dimension)	0.175		
Responsiveness Dimension			
7. Employees show sincere interest to solve customers' problems.	1.69	1.76	0.07
8. Employees are polite and never too busy to respond to customers' requests.	1.79	1.8	0.01
Total (Responsiveness Dimension)	3.48	3.56	0.08
Average Gap Score (Responsiveness Dimension)	0.04		
Assurance Dimension			
9. Employees are knowledgeable about the type of product (fabric, size, fashion trends, etc. and recommends the best of it.	1.79	2.09	0.3
10. The behavior of employees at the brand instills and boosts customers' confidence.	1.88	2.12	0.24
Total (Assurance Dimension)	3.67	4.21	0.54
Average Gap Score (Assurance Dimension)	0.27		
Empathy Dimension			
11. Employees give individualized attention to customers.	1.99	2.1	0.11
12. Employees understand the specific needs of their customers.	1.94	2.06	0.12
Total (Assurance Dimension)	3.93	4.16	0.23
Average Gap Score (Assurance Dimension)	0.115		

Table 4.1: Average Gap Score for Each Dimension (Un-weighted)

S.No	Categories	Gap Scores
1.	Average Scores for Tangibles	0.133
2.	Average Scores for Reliability	0.175
3.	Average Scores for Responsiveness	0.040
4.	Average Scores for Assurance	0.270
5.	Average Scores for Empathy	0.115
Total		0.733
Average Un-weighted Score ($\div 5$)		0.147

Table 4.2: Average Gap Score for All Dimensions in Total (Un-weighted)

The above table shows that in all five dimensions i.e. tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, empathy and assurance, the perceptions of the clothing brand clients exceeded their expectations showing that customers are satisfied with the overall service quality of the brand. The results also show that in the perceived v/s expected level of quality of service, the assurance dimension has the largest gap score followed by reliability whereas the dimension of responsiveness has the lowest gap.

S.No	Dimensions	Unweighted		Weights		Weighted
1.	Tangibles	0.133	x	0.28	=	0.037
2.	Reliability	0.175	x	0.22	=	0.039
3.	Responsiveness	0.04	x	0.29	=	0.012
4.	Assurance	0.27	x	0.19	=	0.051
5.	Empathy	0.115	x	0.11	=	0.013
Total						0.151
Average Weighted Score ($\div 5$)		0.030				

Table 4.3: Average Gap Score for All Dimensions in Total (Weighted)

Summary of overall gap analysis

S.No	Dimensions	Expectations	Perceptions	Total Gap Score	Average Weights Gap Score	Weighted Score
1.	Tangibles	7.26	7.79	0.53	0.133	0.28
2.	Reliability	3.68	4.03	0.35	0.175	0.22
3.	Responsiveness	3.48	3.56	0.08	0.040	0.29
4.	Assurance	3.67	4.21	0.54	0.270	0.19
5.	Empathy	3.93	4.16	0.23	0.115	0.11
Total						0.151

Table 4.4: Summary of Gap Analysis

As per respondents' evaluation for the significance of each category, responsiveness and tangibles were the factors that had the highest importance. while, assurance and empathy were less important with a ratio of 0.19 and 0.11, respectively.

According to the results, customers appeared satisfied with the service quality of the brand in all five dimensions and agreed that assurance, reliability, and tangibles were the factors that satisfied their expectations the most. Furthermore, the aspect with the lowest score in terms of satisfaction was Responsiveness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study analyzed the service quality of a clothing brand of Pakistan, through the lens of the gap model using SERVQUAL to ascertain whether or not the brand was living up to its customers' expectations and perceptions, as well as to identify any impediments to service delivery. The findings of the research revealed that the Customers' perceptions were higher than their expectations, and the brand's influence over the quality of the services provided was found to be substantial. The positive feedback from consumers demonstrates a high level of satisfaction, identified for all

five dimensions of service quality. However, to gain a competitive edge and to excel more in service quality, a company should work on the aspects of responsiveness and empathy by providing human psychology training to their staff and hiring more employees to cater to a greater number of customers and matching their needs in a better-sophisticated manner.

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