TO STUDY RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF SERVQUAL FOR MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY OF FAST FOOD JOINTS IN INDIA

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Abstract:

Service sector is a dominant and very significant part of Indian economy.. In last three decades, since 1980 researchers have studies service quality concept and shown high interest in the field. Shemwell et al (1998) clearly explains in his research study that delivering high service quality is a key to achieve higher customer satisfaction and creating sustainable advantage for organization.

SERVQUAL scale is most popular scale for measuring service quality in last few decades. However Many researchers at many instances have criticized SERVQUAL scale and have put remarks on its dimesion , factor structure, reliability and validity. (Peiro´ et al., 2005; Price et al., 1995; Sa´nchez-Herna´ndez et al., 2009). Cronin and Taylor (1992) questioned SERVQUAL model saying the expectation minus perception model is not a right measure for service quality. Thorough literature review of topic suggests that SERVQU is most popular scale but cannot be used as it is without testing its applicability in context of study.

This study aims at checking SERVQUAL applicability for measuring service Quality of Fast food restaurants in India. The Result suggests that the SERVQUAL scale is reliable for measuring service quality in India for fast food restaurant service but it cannot be accepted as valid as results are not giving five factor models but falling in 7 factors.

Introduction:

SERVQUAL is a most popular measure of service quality measurement developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, 1988). The instrument was subsequently refined (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1994a, 1994b) by them. It consists of 22-item in scale, for measuring the gap between the consumers' expectation and their perception regarding service quality. The initial study (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) identified 10 dimensions for assessing the quality of service given by the service providers. These dimensions were as follows: 1. Reliability: Consistency of performance, doing it right the first time. 2. Responsiveness: Willingness or readiness of employees to provide the service. 3. Competence: Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the task . 5. Courtesy: Politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact personnel. 6. Communication: Keeping customers informed in a language they can understand. 7. Credibility: Trustworthiness, believability, honesty, and maintaining the customers' best interests at heart. 8. Security: Freedom from risk, danger or doubt. 9. Understanding/knowing the customer: Making an effort to know the customers' needs. 10. Tangibles: Physical evidence of service, such as the appearance of the personnel.

This scale was refined as some of the dimensions were found to be overlapping. The refined scale (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988) featured five dimensions to assess the quality of service, which are as below: 1. Tangibles: The physical surroundings (for example, facilities, equipment and appearance of employees). 2. Reliability: The service provider's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. 3. Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. 4. Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of the organization's employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. 5. Empathy: The service organization's caring, individualized attention to its customers. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) and Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991), consumer expectations on the afore-mentioned five dimensions are the comparison standards for the measurement of service quality. Customers judge the quality of service by comparing their expected level of service performance with the perceived performance of service providers. The SERVQUAL scale, however, is not free from criticism. Some researchers (Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992, 1994; Teas, 1994; Brady, Cronin and Brand, 2002) have criticized the SERVQUAL scale for using expectations as a comparison standard for analyzing the quality of service. According to them, expectations are dynamic and can change over time with a change in the environment and situation. Hence, they proposed service performance as the only criteria for assessing service quality instead of the difference between expectations and perception. Zeithmal, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) responded to the initial criticism by proposing that customer expectations can be viewed from two approaches, namely, narrow and broad. In the narrow approach, expectation is a belief that assumes future performance of a service. According to the broad approach, expectations are multi-dimensional and can be associated with different levels of performance. Subsequently, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994b) modified SERVQUAL by proposing two levels of expectation—desired and adequate. Desired service is defined as the level of service representing a blend of what customers believe can be and should be provided. Adequate service is the minimum level of service customers are willing to accept. The region between these two is known as the Zone of Tolerance, which shows a range of performance given by the service provider that can be considered satisfactory by customers.

Purpose of the Study: In view of the criticism of SERVQUAL scale from some quarters, it is necessary to test its validity for measuring the service quality of any service provider. This paper attempts to test the reliability and validity of the SERVQUAL model in the context of the fast food restaurants in Bangalore. **Research Method**: Five fast food restaurants in different part of the Bangalore city are identified. The reason for the choice of the city is its proximity to the author. The five restaurants are comparable on factors such as seating capacity, ambiance, location and customer base. Moreover, the five restaurants also permitted the author to conduct the study on their premises. Their management supported the study by designating staff to distribute the questionnaire (scale), request the guests to take out some time and fill it up, and lastly collect the filled-up questionnaires. For purposes of confidentiality, the names of the restaurants have not been mentioned in the study. The data collection was spread over 3 days at each restaurant. The respondents were selected by the systematic random sampling technique. The first respondent was selected at random, i.e., a customer who ordered first on the counter on a specific day was requested to fill up the questionnaire. Thereafter, every fifth customer who ordered food was requested to fill up the questionnaire. A total of 76 questionnaires were filled up. The sample included customer who visited restaurant alone and also some

who visited with friends and family. Customers who visited alone were mostly come for lunch time, while those who visited with family and friends were for dinner and outing. . In the case of customers who came to restaurant with families, the person who placed order was requested to fill up the questionnaire. The age group of the respondents was 24–55 years. SPSS 13.0 version was used to analyze the data collected. Cronbach's alpha value was used as the test of reliability. A scale that has Cronbach's alpha value above 0.7 is said to be reliable (Nunnally, 1978). Cronbach's alpha value was determined for the overall scale, and also for each of the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL scale for desired, adequate and perceived service quality. Factor Analysis is done for analyzing validity of SERVQUAL in given context.

Results and Discussion Reliability indicates "the stability and consistency with which the instrument measures the concepts and helps to assess the goodness of a measure (Sekaran, 2003)." Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale for the desired service level was 0.852; for the adequate service level, it was 0.743; and for the perceived service level, the value was 0.729. Cronbach's alpha for the tangibles dimension was 0.746, 0.771 and 0.72 for the desired, adequate and perceived service quality, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the reliability dimension was 0.753, 0.826 and 0.816 for the desired, adequate and perceived service quality, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the responsiveness dimension was 0.72, 0.72 and 0.846 for the desired, adequate and perceived service quality, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the assurance dimension was 0.7, 0.819 and 0.72 for the desired, adequate and perceived service quality, respectively. Cronbach's alpha for the empathy dimension was 0.816, 0.812 and 0.753 for the desired, adequate and perceived service quality, respectively. Thus, the findings signify that both the overall scale as well as each of the five dimensions of SERVQUAL are reliable for measuring service quality of fast food restaurants in Bangalore city but the factor structure do not match to the five factor structure of SERVQUAL and so these scales cannot be used in its present form, for the measurement of Service Quality of fast food restaurants in Bangalore. The results in table 1 do indicate that there is no reliability problems in using the instrument to measure service quality but the 22 items do not match the five-factor structure of SERVQUAL, In fact, As shown in table 3 the analysis obtained gives a seven-factor structure for Gap Score, Eight for expectation score and six factor for perceived score. Also, the factors do not load according to the factor structure e.g. sixth and tenth statement of reliability does not load on the same factor as the other three statement. Items in different dimensions have become mixed and many items have a high loading for a number of factors.

Table 1: Reliability check for SERVQUAL Instrument

	Expected	**Perceived**	**Gap**
Cronbach Alpha	.852	.743	.729

Table 2: Sample Adequacy Test of SERVQUAL

	Expected	**Perceived**	**Gap**
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.704	.828	.736

Table 4.3: SERVQUAL Factor Loading

	Expected	**Perceived**	**Gap**
No of factors extracted	8	6	7

Conclusion and Future Scope The possible reason why the SERVQUAL scale failed the validity test is that it fails to take in to account the local context (Cook and Thomson, 2000; Carman, 1990) of the sector to which it is applied (Akan, 1995; Finn and Lamb, 1991), pointing to the inappropriateness of using a discrete 7-point scale (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990; Brown, Churchill and Peter, 1993). In any case, a separate exercise to develop and validate a suitable scale for measuring service quality in the context of fast-food restaurants in India should be explored. The current study included only customers of five restaurants in Bangalore city. Subsequent studies may include various cities within the country with a larger sample size. Once the scale is developed, it may be used to compare the quality of service of different hotels.

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