



*Review Article*

## **Service Quality Assurance and Customer Satisfaction**

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### ***Abstract***

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*The perception of the concept quality has evolved over the years. The service researchers emphasize the importance of studying customer perceived quality since the customers are the only ones entitled to decide what quality is. Service quality is evaluated by means of a comparison of what the customers expect with the service that is delivered.*

***Keywords:*** Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Redressal, Retailing.

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### **Introduction**

#### **Service Quality Concept**

The requirement for a concept which could explain in detail as to how consumers perceived the quality of a service, with special reference to the service industry gave birth to the concept of service quality. It was considered that once the service provider was aware of the fact as to how the customers evaluated the quality of its service, he can better his delivery of services. In other words he would be in a better position to influence the customers' perceptions. The service provider can affect them the way he wants to, to be more specific. Also he can connect the service to customer benefits(1).

Service quality has evolved as a concept over the years. Service is an activity which helps to satisfy some one's need in the market. Service is an experience, a feeling which can be experienced but cannot be touched or seen. Services offered by service providers cannot be seen & touched,

as they are intangible activities. The major difference between a service & a product can be understood from the fact that services are intangible but products are tangible and are required to follow some standardized procedures. Service user can specify about that particular service satisfaction only after availing it for some period of time. Some of the common area are Retailing, Transportation, Cell phones, Education, Health & hospitality Services, BPO and many more(1).

The service quality, besides from being influenced by the various other factors of the customer expectations is also affected to great extent by the company's service offerings. The service quality that customers experience can be classified into two different dimensions; the technical dimension and the functional dimension. The technical dimension refers to the quality of the outcome in the service process; what the customer is left with when the service process and the buyer-seller interactions are over. The functional dimension refers to the quality of the process; the service process before the outcome has been reached or in other

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words how they experience the simultaneous production and consumption process. The two dimensions are therefore what the customer receives and how the customer receives it, so the customers evaluate the technical quality and the functional quality in order to evaluate the total quality of the company(2).

To achieve the best service quality a company should be well aware of their promises to the customer. The business house then should act accordingly and ensure that there is sufficient support so that the given promises can be kept. These promises can be analyzed on five different dimensions known as the service quality determinants: assurance, tangibles, responsiveness, reliability and empathy. An analysis could provide the company with insight regarding which areas that could be improved.

According to authors services are intangible because they are performances rather than objects but many mobile operators may find it difficult to understand how their customer perceives services and service quality. The focus of the study will be on Service Quality Analysis and the Complaint Redressed System in Telecom Quality of service needs to be improved by the service providers in telecommunications since the customers demand more competence and service on behalf of the company(3).

In the service sector organizations, especially such services where the production, delivery and consumption of the service occurs at the same time, the concept of quality refers to matching customers' expectations and perceptions about a particular service. Customers judge the service quality to be satisfactory by comparing what they expect from their service provider and what they actually get(4).

### Service Characteristics

Having described the development of service marketing and management, it is now important for the overall understanding of services, to

examine what actually characterizes services. Although service industries are themselves quite heterogeneous, there are some service characteristics upon which it is useful to generalize. Services are deemed intangible in the sense that they cannot be seen, felt, tasted, or touched. Four unique characteristics describe the difference between a service and a product(1, 2).

These four characteristics include

- a) Intangibility
- b) Heterogeneity
- c) Inseparability
- d) Perish ability

### Intangibility

Intangibility is the primary characteristic that differentiates a service from a product. Service is not tangible. A good is an object, a device, a thing; whereas a service is a deed, a performance, an effort. When we buy a service, there is generally nothing tangible about it. He says that services are consumed but not possessed. The services offered in general are a combination of tangible and intangible elements. It is whether the essence of what is being bought is tangible, or intangible, that determines its classification as a physical good or a service(5).

Authors quote three dimensions of intangibility:

- a) Physical intangibility
- b) Mental intangibility
- c) Generality

Physical intangibility signifies that which is cannot be touched. Mental intangibility points to the degree to which a service can be visualized and can provide an image before the product is actually bought(6).

### Inseparability

Inseparability refers to the notion that a service is both simultaneously produced and consumed at the same time. Some of the researcher's points out those goods are normally produced first and then consumed.

Whereas, a service is generally sold and then produced are consumed simultaneously at the same time. Some authors suggest that a group of separable services exist that do not involve the customer directly such as transporting freight and laundering clothes. Participation of customers in the production process, or delivery process, the interaction between the service provider, the service environment and the customer, are also some of the characteristic of services(7).

### **Heterogeneity**

In comparison to goods service are generally less standardized and uniform. Services are not homogeneous. Service industries have human component involved in performing some services than others. They can be specified as people or equipment based. Equipment-based services vary depending on whether they are automated or monitored by skilled or unskilled operators. People-based services also may differ depending on whether they are provided by unskilled or professional workers(8).

### **Perishability**

Services cannot be stored, hence services are highly perishable, and e.g. empty tables in a restaurant can be seen as a revenue opportunity lost forever. Time cannot be held over for future sale, thus, services cannot be inventoried. The Perishability of services is not a problem when demand is steady, because it is easy to staff the services in advance, when demand fluctuates, service companies have difficult problems(9).

Marketers are to understand the severity of the situation and redress the customer complaints well in time to avoid any future losses. Service marketers need therefore to manage not only the demand, but also the supply so that a profitable equilibrium is consistently obtained. All of these mentioned service characteristics are associated with several marketing problems(10).

The major results of this study were the identification of ten dimensions of service

process quality. The dimensions have been listed as follows(11, 12):

- a) **Reliability**  
This will involves consistency of performance and dependability.
- b) **Responsiveness**  
It concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service.
- c) **Competence**  
This means possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service.
- d) **Access**  
This quality involves approachability and ease of contact.
- e) **Courtesy**  
Here it involves politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of contact personnel (including receptionists, telephone operators, etc.).
- f) **Communication**  
It means keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them. It may mean that the company has to adjust its language for different consumers—increasing the level of sophistication with a well educated customer and speaking simply and plainly with a novice.
- g) **Credibility** Will involves trustworthiness, believability, honesty. It involves having he customer's best interests at heart.
- h) **Security**  
This is the freedom from danger, risk, or doubt.
- i) **Understanding/Knowing The Customer**  
This involves making the effort to understand the customer's needs.
- j) **Tangibles**  
This includes the physical evidence of the service.

Three dimensions covering the Access, communication, and understanding the customer, on the other hand, were placed under a common dimension called empathy.

Thus the dimensions are now known as follows:

**I. Assurance:**

This is the Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.

**II. Empathy:**

This is the Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

**III. Reliability:**

This is the Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

**IV. Responsiveness:**

This is the Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

**V. Tangibles:**

This is the Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and Communication materials.

But if perceived performance falls short of his/her expectations (disconfirmation), then the customer is dissatisfied". Customer satisfaction is defined as "a complete evaluation of accumulated purchase and consumption experience, which reflects a comparison between the sacrifice experienced and the perceived rewards" by another model of Satisfaction. The sacrifice mentioned here consists of the financial implications of purchasing the service as well as the intangible costs involved such as the time and energy spent to visit the service provider. Thus, the premium that the customer has to pay at a fine dining restaurant is traded off against the perceived rewards he obtains. Thus, the level of satisfaction increases if the rewards are greater compared with the sacrifice(15).

**Customer Satisfaction**

Satisfaction has not been defined clearly. Though who most definitions would involve "an evaluative, affective or emotional response." The distinction between perceived service quality and satisfaction is important because the managers providing services need to understand whether their objective is to provide the maximum level of perceived service quality or to have satisfied customers. The level of comparison in forming satisfaction is a future prediction of the expectations, or what the consumer believes will happen. Perceived service quality is the result of a comparison of performance and what the consumer feels a firm should provide(13).

The importance of customer satisfaction has been appreciated by the service providers and researchers alike. They have recognized it as contributor to the market share and return on investment for the service provider companies. Various models and definitions of customer satisfaction have been proposed by various research thinkers. The focus of much of the research is on the "disconfirmation of expectations" theory which explains that "the customer is satisfied when he or she feels that the product's performance is equal to or more than what was expected (confirmation)(14).

**Customer Loyalty**

Authors have defined customer loyalty as the mindset of the customers who hold favorable attitudes toward a company. They commit to repurchase the company's product/service, and also recommend the product/service to others. Customer loyalty is defined as a consumer's intention to stay with an organization. It represents a commitment by the customer to purchase more and varied products from the same organization and to help it, where possible to be successful (e.g., through word of mouth testimonials)(16).

Considering the behavioral intentions perspective of loyalty rather than a behavioral or repeat purchase perspective avoids confusing spurious loyal those who have a low relative attitude toward the organization but are constrained to repeat purchase with genuinely loyal customers(17).

Customer loyalty is the phenomenon that makes a customer either to return to re-purchase a certain product, service or brand company, or to shop or outlet to purchase there again. Customer loyalty is the sum total of feelings or attitudes that would incline a customer to consider the repurchase of a particular product,

service or brand or re-visit a particular company or shop. It affects the success and profitability of companies. Customer loyalty can help the companies achieve competitive advantage and it is the best way to win the best kind of customers and also repeat purchases by the same customers(18).

### Complaints & Their Redressed

Customer satisfaction is not an absolute scenario, but very much depends on interactions, feedback, praise, and complaints. Complaints have to be looked at in a constructive, positive and professional perspective. In majority of the industries, almost fifty per cent of the customers do not bother complaining. The absence of complaints is, therefore, not a true indication of effective management. Progressive organizations need to encourage their customers to complain and to provide them with the necessary means to do so. The customer delight can be created out of a deficient situation is through listening empathizing- innovating-caring.

A complaint has been explained by many authors as a “conflict between the customer and the organization in which the fairness of the resolution procedures, the interpersonal communications and behaviors, and the outcome are the key evaluative criteria of the customer.” this definition implies that there are three dimensions that are inherent to complaints and should be assessed from the customer’s point of view. Complaint handling has been discussed by the same authors, as as “the strategies firms use to resolve and learn from service failures in order to reestablish the organization’s reliability in the eyes of the customer.”

A product is generally bought by the consumer purchase thinking that the product would satisfy his needs, wants and desires. At times just after purchasing the product, some defect or some problem in its working has an impact over the satisfaction. Consumers can take different actions to resolve this dissatisfaction. They may

adopt some form of public action or private action. The first step involves taking a decision whether to take action or not.

### Conclusion

It is generally seen that a lot of customers choose to do nothing about their dissatisfaction with a certain product or service. Whether customers choose to take action or not may be the low cost of the product or service, minor importance of the problem, and the ease of switching brands. In other words, customers often believe that it is not worth the time and effort to make complaints.

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