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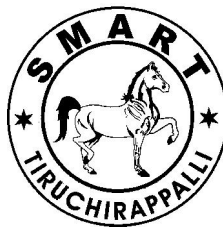
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SERVICE QUALITY IN LIBRARY FROM CUSTOMERS' POINT OF VIEW

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Abstract

Library Quality was traditionally evaluated, by the collection of books, journals and magazines, both in terms of their quality and quantity. However, customer demands and expectations necessitated changes in this approach. A quality library offers its users updated material, in the right method and with reasonable ease. With budgetary constraint, librarians of today, feel more pressure to fully exploit the available resources. In response, many academic libraries have voluntarily adopted service quality. Customers are satisfied when the library is able to rise up to his or her expectations or meet the actual needs. This study identifies the important factors of service quality in library, the relative significance of these factors from customers' point of view and assessment of these factors for statistical significance. The study will provide an indepth understanding of quality service factors that can help the library to improve their services.

Keywords: *Customer Services Quality, Academic Library, SERVQUAL, Service Quality Factors*

JEL Code: *I20, M10*

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1. Introduction

In the present era of real time global information, libraries have become intricate operating systems. From libraries, as storehouses of books and journals, they should be converted into powerhouses of knowledge and information. The advent of information and communication technology is responsible for this revolution. Library services are intangible. The library service is predominantly related to issue of books and other periodicals as well as other online resources for the users (**Gupta and Ashok, 2002**).

Providing quality service is a key for success. Professionals agree that the current trend, influencing business strategy, is service quality (**Abdullah, 2005; Nejati, 2007**). Services have become the source of competitive advantage in today's global economy. Services currently are the front edge of the industry (**Ante & Sanger, 2002**). However, not all companies are progressing well. Employees, like customers, also tell companies about quality because they dislike working in disordered environments (**Guaspari, 1985; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001**).

Government and other regulatory bodies have started assessing performance of education institutes, with the objective of improving overall effectiveness (**Belcher, 1997**). Providing outstanding customer service requires service provider's effort to fulfil the demands of the customer. Many academic libraries provide continuous (24x7) access of the physical facilities, to enable students to meet challenging deadlines. Service quality can be defined as the difference between user expectation and their perceptions of excellence in service (**Oldman and Wills, 1977**).

2. Review of Literature

Parasuraman et al., (1988c) developed SERVQUAL survey instrument, with ten dimensions (reliability, responsiveness,

competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowing the customer and tangibles). The PZB Scale, using confirmatory factor analysis, comprised of five dimensions which were industry-generalizable: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. **Edwards and Browne (1995)** submitted that SERVQUAL's five dimensions may not hold for information services in a university library and he suggested dimension, pertaining to technological features of service.

Nitecki (1996) examined three dimensions of library service (i.e. interlibrary loan, reference and reserve services). The only original dimension was tangibles. The items of reliability and responsiveness were found combined with items of assurance and empathy. **Cook and Heath (2001)** examined six dimensions: effect of service, ease of access, self-reliance, reliability, comprehensive collections and library as place. **Satoh et al., (2005)** suggested four dimensions: effect of service, library as reading place, collections and access, effect of service.

The ARL consortium **Cook and Heath (2001)**, through Texas A & M University, developed a theoretical model (LibQUAL+) to capture the dimensions of library service quality from the user perspective and it uses four dimensions or constructs – empathy, information access, physical aspects and responsiveness – two of which differ from the original SERVQUAL dimensions. These four constructs are referred to as the measurement model. Each of the four constructs has four or five expectations measures.

3. Statement of the Problem

Majority of college libraries are struggling to provide quality services. It is essential to identify the Service Quality factor in a library. Since there are limited resources, it is important for the study to identify the order of importance amongst the service factors and also the interrelation amongst the service quality factors.

4. Need for the Study

Throughout history, libraries were mainly concerned with collection and processing of books, magazines/research journals. The ever growing expectations of students have compelled libraries to improve their service quality. With budgetary constraint, librarians of today, feel more pressure to fully exploit the available resources. In response, many academic libraries have voluntarily adopted service quality. Customers are satisfied when the library is able to rise up to his or her expectations or meet the actual needs. The need for the present study is to provide an indepth understanding of quality service factors that can help the library to improve their services.

5. Objectives of the Study

- (a) To identify the dimensions of service quality in library from customers' point of view
- (b) To identify the relative importance of these dimensions
- (c) To evaluate the dimensions of library service quality, which are statistically significant
- (d) To study the correlation amongst the library service quality factors

6. Hypotheses of the Study

Library Service Quality Management defines the following eight factors (**Figure-1**):

- (a) **Tangibles** (facilities) refer to appearance of contemporary resources, physical amenities which are visually appealing, employees, with professional look, physical layout of books, journals and other magazines, proper housekeeping.
- (b) **Reliability** refers to providing services like issue of objects as promised, trustworthiness in handling customers' service problems, providing services at the guaranteed time, maintaining error-free records of collections.
- (c) **Responsiveness** refers to keeping customers educated about when exactly services will be performed, speedy service to customers, readiness to help customers,

empathetic to the customer needs, staff knowledge and accuracy, timeliness of service.

- (d) **Assurance** refers to employees who inculcate confidence in customers, making customers feel safe in their dealings, employees who are regularly courteous, employees who have the knowledge to answer customer queries, ability for actions whenever a serious incident takes place and the extent to which the organization succeeds in bringing the condition back to normalcy to the satisfaction of the customer.

- (e) **Empathy** refers to respect for variety, putting customers' best benefits at heart, library as the core of the community, polite and responsive staff, and suitable business hours for all customers.

- (f) **Information access** refers to variety and choice in the collections, access to library collections, programs, event and lessons, communications with customers.

- (g) **Physical aspects** refer to a space for silent study, overall safety, a comfortable and hospitable place, building layout and plan, furnishings and equipment.

- (h) **Service creation** denotes the content of service, the intensity and depth of service, the diversity and range of services, service innovation, convenient and flexible operating/ service availability hours.

The assumption of this study is that each of the eight factors, individually and jointly, influenced service quality in a library.

NH₀₁: Factor tangibles does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₂: Factor reliability does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₃: Factor responsiveness does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₄: Factor assurance does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₅: Factor empathy does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₆: Factor information access does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₇: Factor physical aspects does not significantly influence service quality in library

NH₀₈: Factor service creation does not significantly influence service quality in library

7. Research Methodology

7.1 Sample Selection

The two hundred respondents, to the Questionnaire, were students of Full time MBA, Part time MBA and Executive MBA programme of the School of Business Management of NMIMS University–Mumbai, selected randomly on the basis of their roll numbers. The respondents were regular users (students) of library (Prof Y. K. Bhushan Information & Knowledge Resource Centre).

7.2 Data Collection

The questionnaire, for assessing library quality service factors, was distributed to the students, using the library resource centre. Expert opinion was taken from functional managers for validating the statements. Responses were obtained, on a five-point Likert scale, with anchors 1 - “Not essential” to 5 - “Absolutely essential” (**Refer Annexure-I**).

7.3 Period of the Study

The responses were collected, during the period July 2015 to December 2015.

7.4 Tools Used

The Researchers used mean, standard deviation, Karl Pearson correlation coefficient and standard t-tests.

8. Analysis and Discussion

The relative importance of each of the hypothesized eight factors (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, information access, physical aspects & service creation) was obtained, by scoring each factor such that the sum of the scores for the eight factors equals 100. **Table-1** shows the relative importance of the eight service factors. Service creation was

rated as the most important while empathy was rated as the least important. Each of the hypothesized eight factors (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, information access, physical aspects & service creation) was analyzed for descriptive statistics and testing of hypothesis. **Table-2** shows that the mean values, for all the eight factors, were high ((3.81-4.78) on a scale of 1-5). This is a clear indication that the hypothesized eight factors of service quality are important. Service creation is emerging as the most important factor for SQM-library. The t-statistics, for all the eight factors, were high, which means that each of the eight factors was statistically significant. The service quality factors are inter-related and interdependent. **Table-3** shows that there is a moderate to high degree of positive correlation between the eight factors (Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient values between 0.52 and 0.79).

9. Findings and Suggestion

The factors of service creation and information access, represent the deliverables or the hardware side of service quality like content of service, the intensity and depth of service, the diversity and range of services, service innovation, convenient and flexible operating/service availability hours, variety and choice in the collections, access to library collections, programs, event and lessons, and communications with customers. The factor responsiveness, on the other hand, represents the soft touch of service quality like keeping customers educated about when exactly services will be performed, speedy service to customers, readiness to help customers, empathetic to the customer needs, staff knowledge and accuracy and timeliness of service. For each of the eight factors, the t value was statistically significant (**Table-2**). Therefore, the study concludes that each of the eight factors is individually significant, in influencing the Service Quality in a library. Hence reject the null hypotheses, **H₀₁** to **H₀₈**.

10. Conclusion

Essential quality factors: The attributes of proper housekeeping, providing services like issue of objects as promised, keeping customers educated about when exactly services will be performed, speedy service to customers, employees who have the knowledge to answer customer queries, polite and responsive staff, variety and choice in the collections, a space for silent study and service innovation are service characteristics that fulfil basic expectations and therefore, their absence was tremendously disappointing.

Desirable quality factors: The attributes of appearance of contemporary resources, physical amenities which are visually appealing, providing services at the guaranteed time, maintaining error-free records of collections, readiness to help customers, staff knowledge and accuracy, employees who inculcate confidence in customers, ability for actions whenever a serious incident takes place and the amount to which the organization succeeds in bringing the condition back to normalcy to the satisfaction of the customer, respect for variety, putting customers' best benefits at heart, communications with customers, a comfortable and hospitable place, furnishings and equipment, the content of service, the intensity and depth of service are service characteristics that are necessary and appreciated by the customers. The service quality elements, which are related to the personal interaction between employees and customers, satisfy in proportion to their level of presence. Customers feel free and protected in their transaction with library, on account of these factors.

Non Critical Quality Factors: The attributes like employees having professional look, physical layout of books, journals and other magazines, trustworthiness in handling customers' service problems, empathetic to the customer needs, timeliness of service, making customers feel safe in their dealings, employees who are regularly courteous, library as the core of the community, suitable business hours for all

customers, access to library collections, programs, events and lessons, overall safety, building layout and plan, the diversity and range of services, convenient and flexible operating/service availability hours, are service characteristics, which would satisfy the customers. The absence of these service quality elements would cause customer discontent.

11. Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to only one Library (Prof Y. K. Bhushan Information & Knowledge Resource Centre) due to time constraints and practical difficulties. The respondents for the study, were sampled as per ease of availability (In house Full Time and Part Time MBA students from School of Business Management, NMIMS University). Therefore, the sample drawn was not a truly random sample.

12. Scope for Future Research

The research can be extended, by selecting respondents from different courses and different divisions, to attempt a more comprehensive study.

Acknowledgment

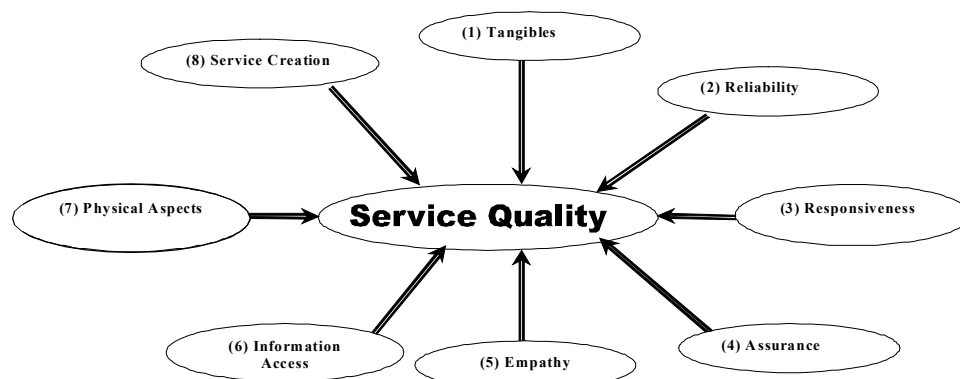
The study acknowledges the contributions of the following senior librarians, for validating the factors, for Library Service Quality Model (Shivanand Sadlapur – SBM Librarian, Varsha More – SBM Reference Librarian, Madhavi Tipnis – SBM Assistant Librarian, Hemant Shete – PGCL Librarian & Ramesh Satar - D J Sanghavi Librarian).

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Figure-1: Library Service Quality Management (From Customer's Point of View)



Source: Tohid Kachwala (2006). Empirical Model based on Ph.D Thesis “*A Study of Impact of Quality Management Practices in Select Indian Service Companies*”, Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University.

Table-1: Relative importance of the Eight Service Quality Factors for Library

Service Quality Factors	Tangible	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Information Access	Physical Aspects	Service Creation
Average (Sum 100)	10	15	19	7	3	20	5	21
Rank	5	4	3	6	8	2	7	1

Source: Primary Data - Output using Excel

Table-2: Descriptive Statistics for Eight Service Quality Factors for Library

Service Quality Factors	Tangible	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Information Access	Physical Aspects	Service Creation
Mean	4.25	4.51	4.62	3.92	3.84	4.61	3.81	4.78
Std Deviation	0.92	0.70	0.78	0.76	0.78	0.72	0.89	0.70
Std Error	0.07	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05
t statistics	19.19	30.53	29.32	17.14	15.19	31.63	12.86	35.91

Source: Primary Data - Output using Excel

Table-3: Correlation between Eight Service Quality Factors for Library

Service Quality Factors	Tangible	Reliability	Responsiveness	Assurance	Empathy	Information Access	Physical Aspects	Service Creation
Tangible	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reliability	0.59	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-
Responsiveness	0.71	0.76	1.00	-	-	-	-	-
Assurance	0.58	0.79	0.78	1.00	-	-	-	-
Empathy	0.59	0.61	0.57	0.75	1.00	-	-	-
Information Access	0.57	0.77	0.64	0.66	0.56	1.00	-	-
Physical Aspects	0.54	0.66	0.52	0.62	0.54	0.56	1.00	-
Service Creation	0.65	0.77	0.68	0.77	0.69	0.79	0.74	1.00

Source: Primary Data - Output using Excel

Annexure-1: An Instrument (Questionnaire) for Measuring Service Quality in Library

Based on your experiences of visits to library for study purposes or borrowing books or reading journals/magazines etc., think about the kind of library that would deliver excellent quality of service. Demonstrate the extent to which you think such a library would possess the features described below. If the feature is

not at all essential for excellent library, circle the number 1, absolutely essential for excellent library, circle the number 5. If your feelings are less strong, circle one of the numbers in the middle. Ensure that the points you allocate to the eight factors add up to 100.

Annexure-1 (Contd...)

(1) Tangibles (facilities):

a) Appearance of contemporary resources.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Physical amenities are visually appealing.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Employees have professional look.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Physical layout of books, journals& magazines.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Proper housekeeping.	1	2	3	4	5

(2) Reliability:

a) Providing services like issue of objects as promised.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Trustworthiness in handling customers' service problems.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Providing services at the guaranteed time.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Maintaining error-free records of collections.	1	2	3	4	5

(3) Responsiveness:

a) Keeping customers about when services will perform	1	2	3	4	5
b) Speedy service to customers.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Readiness to help customers.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Empathetic to the customer needs.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Staff knowledge and accuracy.	1	2	3	4	5
f) Timeliness of service.	1	2	3	4	5

(4) Assurance:

a) Employees who inculcate confidence in customers.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Making customers feel safe in their dealings.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Employees who are regularly courteous.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Employees who have the knowledge to answer queries.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Ability for actions when a serious incident takes place	1	2	3	4	5

(5) Empathy:

a) Respect for variety.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Putting customers' best benefits at heart.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Library as core of the community.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Polite and responsive staff.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Suitable business hours for all customers.	1	2	3	4	5

(6) Information Access:

a) Variety and choice in the collections.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Access to library collections.	1	2	3	4	5
c) Programs, event and lessons.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Communications with customers.	1	2	3	4	5

(7) Physical Aspects:

a) A space for silent study.	1	2	3	4	5
b) Overall safety.	1	2	3	4	5
c) A comfortable and hospitable place.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Building layout and plan.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Furnishings and equipment.	1	2	3	4	5

(8) Service Creation:

a) The content of service.	1	2	3	4	5
b) The intensity & depth of service.	1	2	3	4	5
c) The diversity & range of services.	1	2	3	4	5
d) Service innovation.	1	2	3	4	5
e) Convenient & flexible service availability hours.	1	2	3	4	5