SERVQUAL: A Multiple – Item Scale for Measuring Customer Perceptions of Restaurants’ Service Quality

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a 40 – items instrument called SERVQUAL for assessing customer perceptions of restaurant service quality at hotels. After a discussion of the conceptualization and operationalization of the restaurant’s service quality construct the procedures used in constructing and refining a multiple-item scale to measure the construct are described.

INTRODUCTION

Intensifying competition and rapid deregulation have led many service and retail businesses to seek profitable ways to differentiate themselves. One strategy that has been related to success in these businesses is the delivery of high service quality [1]; [2]. Delivering superior service quality appears to be a prerequisite for success, if not survival, of such businesses in the 1980s and beyond. Unlike goods quality, this can be measured objectively by such indicators as durability and number of defects. Service quality is an abstract elusive construct because of three features unique to services: intangibility, heterogeneity, and the inseparability of production and consumption [3]. In the absence of objective measures, an appropriate approach for assessing the quality of a firm’s service is to measure customers’ perceptions of quality.

The purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to describe the development of a multiple-item scale of measuring service quality (called SERVQUAL) and (2) to discuss the scale’s properties and potential applications. The basic steps employed in constructing the scale closely parallel procedures recommended in Churchill’s [4] paradigm for developing measures of marketing constructs. Figures 1 provide an overview of the steps. The article is divided into five sections. The first section delimits the scale items (Steps 1, 2 and 3 in Figure 1).

Domain of the Service Quality Construct:

In deploring the inadequacy of measurement procedures used in the marketing discipline Jacoby [5] wrote: many of our measures are developed at the whim of a researcher with nary a thought given to whether or not it is meaningfully related to an explicit conceptual statement of the phenomena or variable in question. In most instances, our concepts have no identity apart from the instrument or procedures used to measure them (p.92). The need for scale development to be preceded by, and rooted in, a sound conceptual specification of the construct being scaled has been emphasized by other intellectual as well.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(i) Summary of Steps Employed in Developing the Restaurants Service Quality Scale:

Figure 1 shows the conceptual foundation for the SERVQUAL scale was derived from the works of a handful of researchers who have examined the meaning of service quality and from a comprehensive qualitative
research study that defined service quality and illuminated the dimensions along with consumers perceive and evaluate service quality [3].

Quality versus Perceptions and Satisfaction:
Oliver [6] Summarizes current thinking on satisfaction in the following definition “satisfaction is a summary, psychological state resulting when the emotion surrounding disconfirmed expectations is coupled with the customer’s prior feelings about the consumption experience” (p. 27). These and other definitions (e.g., [7]; [8]) and most all measures of satisfaction relate to a specific transaction. [6] Summarizes the transaction specific nature of satisfaction, and differentiates it from the attitude, as follows: Attitude is the consumer’s relatively enduring affective orientation for a product, store, or process (e.g., customer service) while satisfaction is the emotional reaction following a disconfirmation experience which acts on the base attitude level and is consumption specific.

Fig. 1: Steps Employed in Developing the Restaurants Service Quality Scale: Adopted by [3].

Attitude is therefore measured in terms most general to the product or store and less situationally oriented (p. 42). Consistent with the distinction between attitude and satisfaction, is a distinction between service quality and satisfaction: perceived service quality is a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service, whereas satisfaction relates to a specific transaction. Indeed, in the twelve focus group interviews included in the exploratory research conducted by [3], respondents gave several illustrations of instances when they were satisfied with a specific service but did not feel the service firm was of high quality. In this way, the two constructs are related, in the incidents of satisfaction over time result in perceptions of service quality. In [6] words, “satisfaction soon decays into one’s overall attitude toward purchasing product”.

Dimensions of Service Quality:
Exploratory research of [3] revealed that the criteria used by consumers in assessing service quality fit 10 potentially overlapping dimensions. Theses dimensions were tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, knowing the customer and access (a description of the dimensions can be found in [3], p. 47). These 5 dimensions and their descriptions served as the basic structure of the service quality domain from which items were derived from the SERVQUAL scale.

Service Quality Dimensions:
[3; 9], suggested the following tables and concise definitions for the diminutions:

- **Tangibility:**
  This presents the tangible aspects related to services such as the equipment’s needed to present service like buildings, materials of communications, furniture’s, appearance of (Personnel) officers and employees, and so on.
• **Reliability:**
  It is ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

• **Responsiveness:**
  willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.

• **Assurances:**
  Knowledge and courtesy of staff and their ability to convey and confidence.

• **Empathy:**
  The Personal care presented and individualized attention by the hotel for its customer.

*Generation of Scale Items:

Items representing various facets of the 5 service quality dimensions were generated to form the initial item pool for the SERVQUAL instrument. This process resulted in the generation of 40 items (approximately from 7 to 10 items per dimension). Each item was recast into two statements, one to measure expectations about firms in general within the service category being investigated and other to measure the perceptions about the particular firm whose service quality was being assessed, in accordance with recommended procedures for scale development [4]. A five point scale ranging from “Strongly Agree” (5) to “Strongly Disagree” (1), with no verbal labels for scale points 2 through 6, accompanied each statement.

*Summary:

The SERVQUAL is a concise multiple-item scale with good reliability and validity that managers can use to better understand the service expectations and perceptions of customers and, as a result, improve service. As such, it provides a basic frame through its expectations and perceptions format encompassing statements for each of the five service quality dimensions. SERVQUAL can be used to assess a given firm’s quality along each of the five service dimensions by averaging the difference scores on items making up the dimensions. It can also provide an overall measure of service quality in the form of an average score across all five dimensions. Because meaningful responses to the perception statements require respondents to have some knowledge of or experience with the firm being researched, SERVQUAL is limited to current or past customers of that firm. In summary, SERVQUAL has a variety of potential applications. It can be help a wide range of restaurants in the hotel industry in assessing customer expectations about and perceptions of service quality. It can also help in pinpointing areas requiring managerial attention and action to improve service quality.

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