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## **Service quality measurement instruments and their efficacy in evaluation of perceived value, customer satisfaction and loyalty: an integrative review**

**Vinod Kumar Rai**

Research Scholar, Amity University<sup>2</sup>.

**Prof.Radhe Shyam Rai**

Director, Research, planning & Statistical services, Amity University, Noida

**Prof Ashok Sharma**

Dean Academics

IMT, DLC, Ghaziabad

E mail : [vkrai1205@gmail.com](mailto:vkrai1205@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>.[rsrai@amity.edu](mailto:rsrai@amity.edu)

### **Abstract**

Service quality measurement has been used to assess customer perception of service and customer satisfaction through various scales which have been developed, refined, and reassessed in the context of various services. SERVQUAL and SERVPERF have emerged as favourite instruments for various researchers in the context of service industries but services being exchanged for services argument, evolving by service dominant logic researchers has brought goods dominant industries also in the ambit of service quality measurement. There is strong need for assessing whether service quality measurement instruments are measuring customer perception and customer value proposition in all industries irrespective of their classical categorization between goods and services or there is need for development of a new scale. This paper attempts to review the service quality measurement literature in the back drop of developing service dominant logic and assess the efficacy of SERVQUAL and SERVPERF in measuring customer perception and customer value proposition. How these constructs are interrelated and direction of causality among these towards influencing behavioral intentions.

**Key words** : service quality , satisfaction , SERVQUAL , Perceived value

**Introduction:** Service quality measurement has attracted lot of attention due to belief that providing superior service quality enhances market position of the provider (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985) But service quality is an abstract and elusive construct that is difficult to define and measure (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) Unlike goods quality , which can be measured objectively . Measurement of consumer perception of quality is a suitable approach for evaluating the quality of a firm's service in the absence of an objective metric. Consumers' perception of an entity's general excellence or superiority is known as perceived quality (V. A. Zeithaml et al., 1996)

Till date the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and buying behavior is not properly established. SERVQUAL instrument developed by (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) is based on gap theory which offers to measure the gap between expectation and perception of the performance by the consumer which is based on disconfirmation paradigm .Service quality has been described as an attitudinal measure as opposed to satisfaction, which is a transaction-specific assessment, a long-term overall evaluation (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) Both the constructs are related as satisfaction incidents over a period result is perceived service quality. Perceived

service quality stems from the comparison between degree and direction of discrepancy between consumers perception and expectation (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) In service quality assessment, comparison is made what a consumer should expect whereas in satisfaction what a consumer would expect. But (Woodruff et al., 1983) suggest that experience norms should be the basis of expectations). Since disconfirmation only mediates not defines consumers perception of service quality. (Bolton & Drew, 1991) postulate that current performance adequately captures consumers perception of the service quality. In place of disconfirmation based SERVQUAL ((Cronin & Taylor, 1992) have proposed performance-based measure SERVPERF. ((Babakus & Boller, 1992) suspected that the "difference scores do not provide any additional information beyond that already contained in the perceptions component of the SERVQUAL scale" (Kahneman & Miller, 1986) have also suggested that rather than having expectations beforehand, consumers may develop "experience-based norms" as a result of their service interactions. Three elements of SQ were recognized by (Gronroos, 1982): technical, functional, and reputational quality but the measurement of the service quality construct in literature so far has been dominated by two measures namely SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, proposed by (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) and (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) respectively.

(Mano & Oliver, 1993) claim that satisfaction is an attitude or evaluative assessment that varies over the hedonic continuum and is judged after consuming the product. (W Anderson et al., 1994) believe that there is a lack of clarity in the literature regarding the difference between quality and satisfaction. They state that customer satisfaction is dependent on value. Value can be thought of as the ratio of perceived quality to price. In other words value is benefits received against cost incurred. (Bolton & Drew, 1991a) and (J. Bitner et al., 1990) suggest that satisfaction is an antecedent of service quality. Prior perceptions of the quality of the service are mediated by satisfaction to create the current perception (Oliver, 1980) While SQ could be considered to have a significant cognitive component, customer satisfaction could be comparatively loaded with affective elements. (Oliver, 1993) (Iacobucci et al., 1994) An extensive review of the discourse surrounding the conceptual and practical distinctions between Service Quality (SQ) and Customer Satisfaction (CS) leads to the conclusion that these constructs 'have not been consistently defined and differentiated from each other in the scholarly literature.'",

The above discussion throws light on three unresolved debates of service quality literature as follows:

- 1 Whether to measure the gap between expectations and perceptions or to focus on performance-based perception only embodied in SERVQUAL and SERVPERF instruments respectively.
- 2 The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the context of antecedent / consequent conceptualization.
- 3 Does the measurement of service quality indicate behavioral intention like loyalty? Do better service quality levels encourage patronage only indirectly by enhancing value and/or satisfaction.

**Service quality:** (A. Parasuraman et al., 1985) The well-known SERVQUAL model posits the existence of five dimensions, namely, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibility. (Gronroos, 1984) suggests that there are two dimensions that contribute to a patron's perceived level of quality: technical and functional. Moreover, it is suggested that these dimensions are subject to moderation by the image projected by the company. (Rust & Oliver, 1994) To augment Gronroos' proposition, it is imperative to incorporate the environment wherein the service is rendered as a third dimension. The evaluation of service quality is established on

numerous dimensions, and a consensus has not been reached yet concerning the fundamental features or content of these dimensions. Dimensions vary in various studies from two dimensions (Gronroos, 1984) three dimensions (Rust & Oliver, 1994) to five dimensions (PZB, 1988) Operationalization of service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) as a gap between expectation and perception and perception only has been debatable. The disconfirmation-based SERVQUAL scale is not effectively gauging either the level of service quality or the degree of consumer satisfaction. (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) "Perceived quality, "is best conceptualized as an attitude". The lack of a clear definition for perceived service quality in terms of attitudes has led to criticism for Parasuraman et al. They contend that SERVPERF demonstrates a higher degree of construct validity, as indicated by their comprehensive analysis of relevant literature and they claim convergent and discriminant validity. (A. Parasuraman et al., 1998) and (Cronin & Taylor, 1994) agree that establishment of the directional relationship between service quality and satisfaction remains undetermined. There is criticism by (Buttle, 1996) that Parasuraman and colleagues obtained data on service quality using ordinal scale techniques, specifically the Likert scales. However, the analytical methods employed were more suited for interval-level data, such as factor analysis.

(Teas, 1993a, 1993b, 1994) Evaluate the relevance of identified gaps and pose the question Is it possible that the equal gaps signify an equivalent perceived service quality? It is evident that the Parasuraman et al. framework is deficient in terms of outcome quality. (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994) (Babakus & Mangold, 1994)

SQ is categorized as a construct of the second order, indicating its factorial complexity, as it is comprised of multiple first-order variables. (Gronroos, 1984) study has recognized three distinct components that contribute to the overall quality of a product or service, namely technical, functional, and reputational quality (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 2006); have identified another three components that are pivotal to quality, namely interactive, physical, and corporate quality. Parasuraman et al. found evidence that the five dimensions are generic across service contexts. They claim "SERVQUAL's dimensions and items represent core evaluation criteria that transcend specific companies and industries" (A. Parasuraman et al., 1991)

There are several studies involving four factor, three factors and even single factor implying that "the domain of service quality may be factorially complex in some industries and very simple and unidimensional in others" (A. Parasuraman et al., 1991) study discovered that the items pertaining to Assurance and Responsiveness exhibited a loading on a singular factor. Additionally, their previous research conducted in 1988 revealed a mean intercorrelation ranging from 0.23 to 0.35 among the five dimensions. An additional finding was that the dimensions of Responsiveness and Assurance displayed a significant amount of overlap and loaded onto the same factor. The number of dimensions regarding Service Quality (SQ) is influenced by both contextual circumstances and analytical processes. (Carman, 1990) suggests that the factors of Personal Attention, Access, and Convenience should be retained and subjected to further contextualized research in order to identify their significance and meaning. Carman also advocates expansion of items pertaining to dimensions like Responsiveness and Access. (Babakus & Boller, 1992) inferred that the rules governing convergence and discriminant validity do not provide empirical evidence for the presence of the five RATER dimensions. Additionally, the expectations element of the model lacks discriminant validity. (A. Parasuraman et al., 1994) have addressed criticism through a redefinition of expectations, aligned with those typically associated with exceptional service

organizations and the level of service that customers would reasonably expect.(A. Parasuraman et al., 1994)developed a three-column format to capture the difference between the perceived service and the desired service, which was termed as the measure of service superiority (MSS), and the difference between the perceived service and the adequate service, which was labeled as the measure of service adequacy (MSA).

### **Difference between E and P vs Performance Measure :**

Of the psychometric issues raised by Cronin and Taylor regarding SERVQUAL, the sole concern that has garnered consistent empirical evidence is the relatively lower predictive capacity of the P-E measure compared to the P-only measure.(A. Parasuraman et al., 1994) that SQ measurements that include customer expectations offer a more comprehensive assessment and possess greater diagnostic value compared to those that solely concentrate on perception.The diagnostic value of SERVQUAL is superior and thus compensates for any loss in predictive power. It has been asserted by (V. A. Zeithaml et al., 1996) that the psychometric properties of SERVQUAL's difference score formulation are largely comparable to those of its P only component.

The SERVQUAL scores of each company manifest a consistent pattern of exhibiting more pronounced variation across dimensions in comparison to the perceptions-only scores. However, the cumulative empirical evidence surrounding the difference and non-difference measures has yet to establish conclusively the preeminence of one measure over the other.

### **Convergent Validity**

C&T's findings suggest that SERVPERF boasts superior validity compared to SERVQUAL. However, PZB's research indicates that the nearly identical average correlations between SERVPERF and SERVQUAL do not justify the inference made by Cronin and Taylor that SERVPERF possesses greater convergent validity than SERVQUAL.

### **Discriminant Validity**

C&T assert discriminant validity for SERVPERF, while PZB contend that the similarity of the average within-construct intercorrelations between the two scales, as previously demonstrated, suggests a somewhat more robust discriminant validity in favor of SERVQUAL.

**Dimensionality**(A. Parasuraman et al., 1994) Further suggest that the conclusion drawn by C&T regarding the unidimensional scale of the 22 SERVQUAL items is not justified.Their studies have revealed notable correlation among the five dimensions initially extracted for SERVQUAL. Therefore, it is questionable to assert that the SERVQUAL items constitute a unidimensional scale, as claimed by C&T.

Hence, investigating the causality and interconnectedness of the five dimensions of service quality, including the possibility of certain dimensions serving as antecedents to others, presents a promising avenue for further research (A. Parasuraman et al., 1994)

**Alternative Models:**(Rust & Oliver, 1994)held that the comprehensive assessment of service quality is contingent upon the customer's analysis of three specific aspects of the service encounter. These facets include the interaction between the customer and employee, which constitutes the first dimension. (i.e., functional quality; see(Gronroos, 1982, 1984) the service environment (J. Bitner, 1992).(Dabholkar et al., 1996) posit that the perceptions of service quality are structured in a manner that is both multilevel and multidimensional. Such a framework is necessary as it better captures the intricate nature of human perceptions.There is theoretical support for a multidimensional, multilevel model (e.g., (Carman, 1990; Dabholkar, 1996);(Solomon et al.,

1985); (Brady & Cronin, 2001) propose a hierarchical structure having 3 dimensions (interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality) further sub-divided in 9 subdimensions.

**Satisfaction**: Oliver (1997) postulated that satisfaction connotes the consumer's response to fulfillment, a judgement that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over-fulfillment. Numerous scholars emphasize the differentiation of service quality and satisfaction as separate constructs. (Jo Bitner, 1990); (Boulding et al., 1993); (A. Parasuraman et al., 1988); (Taylor & Baker, 1994)) The paradigm of expectancy/disconfirmation within process theory serves as the foundational basis for the majority of studies on satisfaction, and includes four core constructs: 1) expectations; 2) performance; 3) disconfirmation; and 4) satisfaction.

In the realm of service quality, the concept of expectations pertains to the notion of an optimal or ideal level of service provision that a customer anticipates from an exemplary firm. In contrast, customers' expectations of service satisfaction are based on their belief of what will happen. (A. Parasuraman et al., 1988); (Boulding et al., 1993). Service quality can be contemplated without experience but satisfaction is based on experience (Bolton & Drew, 1991a); (Cronin & Taylor, 1994); (Oliver, 1989, 1993), (A. Parasuraman et al., 1988); (Spreng & Mackoy, 1996) who conducted a test on a modified iteration of Oliver's (1993) model, which aimed to combine the literature on satisfaction and service quality, were able to offer evidence supporting service quality as a precursor to satisfaction. (E. Anderson & Sullivan, 1993); (Oliver, 1993) In cases where a customer has not had the opportunity to experience the service firsthand, an evaluation of service quality may still be expressed, albeit solely based on word-of-mouth and/or promotion. However, the evaluation of satisfaction would remain impossible without the actual experience of the service.

The evaluation of service quality is mainly cognitive (Bitner 1990; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1988), while the evaluation of customer satisfaction is a combination of cognitive and affective elements (Mano & Oliver, 1993), (Woodruff et al., 1983). Some researchers suggest that customer satisfaction is in fact mainly affective (Oliver, 1989), (Westbrook, 1987)

When service quality is evaluated prior to customer satisfaction evaluation, followed by the customer's intention to repurchase, the order of evaluation aligns with the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions as predicted in traditional attitudinal models (Dabholkar, 1996) conversely, if the customer's evaluation of service quality is outside the zone of indifference, it is more probable that emotional reactions, such as delight or anger, will occur, and the causal link will shift from customer satisfaction to service quality. (Bloemer & Polesz, 1989)

**The direction of causality between SQ and CS**: The perspective posited by numerous researchers on service quality that customer satisfaction leads to service quality is incongruent with the causal direction insinuated in the models outlined by customer satisfaction researchers. According to Teas (1993), these divergent viewpoints may be attributed to the emphasis on a global or all-encompassing attitude in the majority of service quality research as opposed to the transaction-specific focus in most customer satisfaction research. PZB 1994 study suggests the inclusion of two additional prospective antecedents, namely product quality and price. Furthermore, the study proposes (1) a transaction-specific conceptualization of the constructs' interconnectedness and (2) a comprehensive framework that encompasses customers' assessments of numerous transactions. This proposed conceptualization is in line with the "quality leads to satisfaction" paradigm frequently advocated by satisfaction researchers. (Reidenbach & Smallwood,

1990; Woodside et al., 1989). Understanding the roles of service quality, product quality, and price evaluations in determining transaction-specific satisfaction is an important area for further research. An interesting avenue for further inquiry involves examining the potential existence of discrete customer segments who hold uniform perspectives regarding the fundamental characteristics of service attributes.

**Perceived Value:** Perceived value is a customer's overall assessment of utility of a product based on the perception of what is received and what is given (V. Zeithaml, 1988). Customers' assessment of benefits received versus the sacrifice made in monetary and non-monetary terms and differences in tastes and customer characteristics result in difference in assessment of value. Any firm can exist and survive only when it is offering better value propositions than its competitors from customers' point of view. Value propositions by organizations can be made only if they have core competence, knowledge and skill set to derive advantage as compared to competitors. The core competence, knowledge, skill set and organizational processes termed as operant resources, produce effects (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Operant resources multiply the value of natural resources and create additional operant resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). Thus, tangible products can be viewed as embodied knowledge or activities (Normann & Ramirez, 1993). The matter embodied with knowledge is an "appliance" for the performance of services: it replaces direct service (Norris 1941, p136). Value shifts from tangible output and value in exchange to appreciation of reciprocal skills and services and value in use. Goods centered view of matter embedded with utility placed emphasis on physical distribution of goods whereas service centered view focuses on process of exchange. Because matter which is transformed is not central in value creation but human labour, mental skills and knowledge which is applied on the matter take the Centre stage in value creation. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a)

According to (Gummesson, 1998) if the consumer is the focal point of marketing, value creation is only possible when a good or service is consumed. An unsold good has no value and a service provider without customers cannot produce anything. "Gronroos 2000, p24-25 emphasizes "value for customers is created throughout the relationship by the customer, partly in interactions between the customer and the supplier or service provider. The focus is not on products but on customers value creating processes where value emerges for customers and is perceived by them."..... the focus of marketing is value creation rather than value distribution, and facilitation and support of a value creating process rather than simply distributing readymade value to customers." Now focus shifts on interaction and relationships due to heterogeneity, intangibility and inseparability of services according to (Glynn & Lehtinen, 1995) "Goods may be instrumental in relationships being distribution mechanism for service provision, but they are not parties to the relationship: inanimate items of exchange cannot have relationships. according to (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). "The common denominator for this customer centric, relational focus is a view of exchange that is driven by individual consumer's perceived benefits from potential exchange partner's offerings. In general consumers do not need goods. They need to perform mental and physical activities for their own benefit, to have others to perform mental and physical activities for them" (Gummesson, 1994). Regardless of whether the service is provided interactively or indirectly by a tangible good (Vargo & Lusch, 2008c) argue that value is co-produced and in the case of all tangible goods, the customer must interact with them over some period that extends beyond the transaction." Service provision and co-creation of value imply that exchange is relational. They argue service is more fundamental than relationship. Given specialization the Service is

exchanged for service through relationship, mutual service provision is required (desired), relationship, particularly in the normative sense in which it is most often used, is the means. That is service is exchanged for service through relationship.” the co-creation of value by both parties in a relationship, even when repeat patronage is not the end goal, is an implication. In order to positively impact the customers' value creation, the service provider must develop a set of resources and interactions that enhance the customer-firm relationship and service outcomes. This, in turn, increases the probability of repeat purchasing and promotes the development of a strong bond between the service provider and the customer. The rationale behind adopting a service-based perspective is to assist in the generation of value for customers. This is because the consumption of services by customers occurs within the context of their value-generating processes (referred to as value-in-use). Therefore, the service provider's role is to support these processes, as it is through them that value is created for customers. Consequently, services can be defined as a set of processes that involve various resources to facilitate and enhance customers' value-generating processes, thereby enabling the creation of value in these processes. Customer value perception has traversed a path from being unidimensional interpretive construct to social constructionist dependent on human practices being created out of human interactions in a social context. It is through social interactions that individuals infer meaning by assimilating norms, assumptions, and values into any phenomena. Research on customer value evolved being focused on cognitive and economic aspects to multidimensional experiential perspective involving hedonic, symbolic and aesthetic aspects also (V. A. Zeithaml et al., 2020) Holbrook defined it as interactive relativistic preference experience integrating both cognitive and affective aspects. (Gallarza et al., 2011) Methodological problems (e.g., number of value dimensions, structure of the models of value, and uncertainty regarding the links between satisfaction and value) threaten the reliability of quantitative value measurements.

The goods, which are often deemed as valuable, are actually only a means of supporting value. Among a bundle of resources that includes goods, tangible items, service employees, systems, processes, and customers themselves, the goods are merely one type of resource. The interactions between these resources are necessary to enable customers to create value for themselves. In essence, this bundle of resources - in which goods are merely one resource among many - is essential to support customers' processes and create value within those processes. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008c)

**Conclusion :** According to (Shostack, 1977) “marketing offers no way to treat intangibility as the core element it is, nor does marketing offer usable tools for managing, altering or controlling this amorphous core” “To truly expand marketing's conceptual boundaries requires a framework which accommodates intangibility” But a service is already abstract. To compound the abstraction dilutes the reality that the marketer is trying to enhance. Product marketing typically prioritizes the establishment of intangible connections, whereas service marketers must concentrate on amplifying and distinguishing concrete experiences by means of tangible manipulation. (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b) “ Perception of value is determined by the consumer on the basis of value in use which results from the beneficial application of operant resources “ In their view human skills ( operant resources ) transform matter in such a way that satisfies human desires and Goods centric logic has ignored this aspect of human skills ( Services) creating usefulness for the consumer. Distribution driven marketing has given importance to” time, place and possession utility” (Weld 1916) ignoring the process of exchange. In order to synthesize the service quality and value creation

process dominated by value in use rather than value in exchange, we need to incorporate such dimensions of exchange in our measurement instruments so that the abstract and elusive constructs are manipulated through tangible clues. Quality expectations and perceptions and customer satisfactions are dynamic attributes which are created and manifested in the exchange process between interactions and encounters with organizations who are continually in the process of creating competitive advantage through differentiated and innovative products and services in a disruptive and creative environment, interacting and co-creating with customers. SERVQUAL has served its purpose well in measuring service quality perceptions but it needs to be augmented and adapted according to evolving realities in which exchange and distribution paradigm is being replaced by value in use and interactive and relational paradigm in which services are being exchanged for services.

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