
Pervasiveness of SERVQUAL and its potential for the standards for functional quality of service

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Abstract: This study examines how pervasive the applications of SERVQUAL are in the service industries and explores if SERVQUAL items can be used to derive standards for service quality. SERVQUAL has been used to measure service quality in a wide variety of service industries in many different countries. However, there is a limited effort to examine how pervasively SERVQUAL has been utilised since its inception in 1988. This study collected data on the applications of SERVQUAL from ABI/INFORM Complete and found that SERVQUAL has been extensively utilised for measuring service quality. Researchers have also criticised SERVQUAL due to its use of the gap approach to assess service quality. Nonetheless, SERVQUAL items contain service measures, which, when stripped of the expressions of expectation and perception, can provide standards for service quality. This study identified the functional standards quality of service and proposed a theoretical model for measuring the functional fitness of service.

Keywords: SERVQUAL; service quality; service fitness; services standards; functional quality; normative requirements; service expectation; service performance; disconfirmation theory; gap analysis.

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1 Introduction

Service is characterised by four 'Is' representing four salient features of service: intangibility, inseparability, inconsistency and inventory. Services are intangible because they are a deed, a performance or an effort (Moeller, 2010), and thus are difficult to assess before a sale (Lovelock, 1981; Khan, 2003). They are inseparable because they are usually simultaneously produced and consumed. They are inconsistent because they can differ based on time, place, producer and customer (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Markovic, 2006). Finally, they have no inventory because they cannot be stored and/or sold on another day (Ladhari, 2009). These four distinctive characteristics of service make service quality a more elusive and abstract construct than product quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Swersey, 2013). However, service quality has a profound impact on company performance, profitability, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Santos, 2003; Santouridis and Trivellas, 2010). Extant literature suggests that service quality plays a critical role in retaining existing customers, attracting new customers, reducing costs, enhancing corporate image, gaining positive word-of-mouth recommendation and thereby enhancing profitability (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990; Rust and Zahorik, 1993; Cronin et al., 2000; Kang and James, 2004; Yoon and Suh, 2004). Due to its powerful impact on the bottom line, service quality has been the focus of scholars and practitioners for the last two and a half decades (Ladhari, 2009). Various instruments have been developed to assess service quality in a variety of settings. SERVQUAL is by far the most popular and best known instrument for measuring service quality (Ladhari, 2009). The SERVQUAL scale was originally developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and later refined by Parasuraman et al. (1991). To date, SERVQUAL has been used to measure service quality in a wide variety of service industries in many different countries. It has been widely applied and valued by both academicians and practitioners (Buttle, 1996; Lam and Woo, 1997; Ladhari, 2009). Though the widespread use of SERVQUAL is evident, there is a limited effort to examine how pervasively SERVQUAL has been utilised since its inception in 1988. The first objective of this study is to fill this void.

Service organisations must identify their critical service measures that contribute to their success and specify service standards, each of which will have its corresponding measure or measures (Swersey, 2013). Swersey (2013) also posits that some measures may not correspond to service standards but will involve key variables that can be measured and thus can provide insights into the development of service standards. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) defines a standard as "a document that provides requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose" (ISO, 2013). This definition points out that standards take the form of measures that indicate a product's or service's fitness for use. Service standards are, therefore, service measures that are utilised to determine if a service serves its purpose. The latest version of the SERVQUAL scale consists of 22 items purported to measure quality of service. The second objective of this study is to examine whether the SERVQUAL scale items provide service quality standards.

Therefore, this study addresses the following two research questions:

- How pervasive is the application of the SERVQUAL scale for measuring service quality?
- Can the SERVQUAL scale items be used as service quality standards?

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Addressing these research questions will benefit both academicians and practitioners. The pervasiveness of the application of SERVQUAL can result in academicians' and practitioners' gaining insight into service quality measurements relevant to their research or practical applications involving SERVQUAL. The use of the SERVQUAL scale items as service quality standards can benefit practitioners in determining the fitness of their services delivered to customers. It can benefit academicians by providing them with new avenues of research resulting from the utilisation of service quality standards in assessing fitness of service.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: a brief discussion on the SERVQUAL scale is presented followed by expositions of the research methodology, analysis and findings, and implications, limitations and future direction of the study.

2 The SERVQUAL scale

The SERVQUAL scale was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Parasuraman et al. (1988) to measure perceived service quality, which has been defined as “the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' perceptions and expectations” (Parasuraman et al., 1988, p.17). Customers' expectations refer to their desires or wants of a service rather than their predictions of the service, and perceptions are their views of the performance of the service provider. The SERVQUAL instrument is a 22-item questionnaire. Each item contains two matching statements, one of which measures an expectation of the service and the other measures the corresponding perception of the service. For each item, a difference score Q measures the perceived quality along that item. The difference score Q is defined as $Q = P - E$, where P and E are the Likert-scale ratings on the corresponding perception and expectation statements, respectively (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The service quality as measured by SERVQUAL is a multi-dimensional construct. Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified ten components of service quality, namely reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowing the customer and tangibles. In their 1988 work, these ten components were regrouped into five dimensions with the following labels and definitions (Parasuraman et al., 1988, p.23):

- *Tangibles*: physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel;
- *Reliability*: ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately;
- *Responsiveness*: willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
- *Assurance*: knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence;
- *Empathy*: caring, individualised attention provided to customers.

The SERVQUAL items embody service quality attributes, each expressed in terms of expectation and perception. A service quality attribute represents an expectation when the customers think that the service provider *should* offer it, and reflects a perception of performance when they view that the service provider *has* it. For example, a service

quality attribute of the physical facilities is the visual appeal of it. This attribute becomes an expectation statement when expressed as ‘the service provider should have visually appealing physical facilities’, and represents the corresponding perception statement when expressed as ‘the service provider has visually appealing physical facilities’. Table 1 provides brief descriptions of the service quality attributes making up each of the SERVQUAL dimensions.

Table 1 Service quality attributes of the SERVQUAL dimensions

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Number of items</i>	<i>Quality attributes</i>
Tangibles	4	Up-to-date equipment; visual appeal of physical facilities in general and with respect to the service; dressing and neatness of employees
Reliability	5	Dependability; accuracy; providing promised service; performing service at promised time; sympathetic and reassuring to customer problems
Responsiveness	4	Informing exact time of service; prompt service; willingness to help; prompt response to customer requests
Assurance	4	Trustworthiness of employees; politeness of employees; sense of safety of transactions with employees; knowledge of employees about the service
Empathy	5	Individualised customer attention; personalised customer attention; customers’ best interests at heart; convenient operating hours; understanding customer needs

The service quality for each of these dimensions is measured by calculating the gap scores between the matching items comprising the dimension. For each customer, the service quality of a dimension is calculated as follows:

$$Q_j = \frac{1}{n_j} \sum_{i=1}^{n_j} (P_{ij} - E_{ij})$$

where Q_j is the service quality for the j th dimension, P_{ij} is the perception for the i th item in the j th dimension, E_{ij} is the expectation for the i th item in the j th dimension and n_j is the number of items in the j th dimension. The overall service quality score can then be computed by taking the mean of the values of Q_j . A positive overall score indicates a better-than-expected service quality, a negative overall score represents a poor service quality and an overall score of zero implies a satisfactory level of service quality.

3 Methodology

The research questions presented in this study are interpretive in nature and thus can be addressed by means of qualitative methods (Hossain et al., 2010). However, the pervasiveness of the SERVQUAL application can also be substantiated by means of quantitative evidence. Thus, the methodology of this study is divided into two parts. The

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first part employs both qualitative and quantitative reasoning to deal with the research question of how pervasively SERVQUAL has been applied to assess service quality. The second part of the methodology uses qualitative inductive analysis to address the second research question of whether the SERVQUAL instrument provides service quality standards.

3.1 SERVQUAL application data

Data pertaining to the applications of SERVQUAL were collected from 'ABI/INFORM Complete' using the ProQuest search engine. For our search, we included only those studies that utilised the SERVQUAL scale in its entirety, extended the instrument by adding constructs such as moderators and/or modified SERVQUAL to accommodate esoteric needs of a service industry. A ProQuest search with the keyword 'SERVQUAL' resulted in a total of 4902 studies since SERVQUAL's inception in 1988. The ProQuest search engine filters search results based on several criteria. The search results can be narrowed by the following options: full text, peer reviewed, source type, publication title, subject, classification, company/organisation, location, person, tags, language, database and publication date. These filtering options were used to determine where and how SERVQUAL was applied. For example, a ProQuest search for SERVQUAL narrowed by the 'Subject' keywords 'airlines' or 'airline industry' resulted in a total of 55 studies. A similar search narrowed by the 'Subject' keywords 'bank technology', 'banking industry', 'bank marketing', 'bank services', 'automated teller machines-atm', 'banking', 'banks' or 'bank loans' resulted in a total of 512 studies.

4 Analyses and findings

In line with the research questions and methodology, the analyses and findings are presented in two parts: pervasiveness of SERVQUAL and SERVQUAL as service quality standards.

4.1 Pervasiveness of SERVQUAL

The extant service quality literature suggests that the SERVQUAL instrument is the most extensively used tool for measuring and managing service quality. The widespread use of the SERVQUAL scale is evident in many forms such as a large number of publications involving SERVQUAL and the application of SERVQUAL in numerous service industries to measure a variety of service qualities in various parts of the world.

4.1.1 Number of publications

A total of 4902 studies have used, extended or made reference to SERVQUAL from 1988 to 2013. Table 2 shows the breakdown of these studies on the basis of five-year periodic intervals from 1988 to date. About 83% of these studies appeared in scholarly journals, 11% in dissertations and theses, 3% in trade journals and the rest in conferences, magazines, reports and wire feeds. Over 68% of the studies were peer-reviewed.

Table 2 Number of publications involving SERVQUAL

	1988-1992	1992-1997	1998-2002	2003-2007	2008-2012	2013-2013	Total	% of total	Peer reviewed (of total)
Scholarly journals	45	420	744	982	1541	359	4090	83.5	66.0%
Trade journals	3	11	27	37	55	9	142	2.9	1.5%
Dissertations and theses	1	9	189	238	117	14	554	11.3	0.6%
Conference and proceedings				4	36	14	54	1.1	-
Working papers				8	45	1	54	1.1	-
Reports, magazine, wire feeds					6	1	7	0.1	-
Total	49	440	960	1269	1800	383	4901	100	68.1%

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4.1.2 Industries

SERVQUAL has been used to measure service quality in various industries. A ProQuest search for SERVQUAL narrowed by various industry-related ‘Subject’ keywords, for instance ‘airlines OR airline industry’ for the airline industry reveals that SERVQUAL has a widespread use in the airline, banking, electronic commerce, healthcare, higher education, fast food and restaurant, hospitality, information systems, retailing and tourism industries. These are the top-ten industries, where the number of studies utilising the SERVQUAL instrument to measure service quality ranged from 55 to 512 during 1988–2013. In addition to these industries, the SERVQUAL scale was also used in the real estate (e.g. Tuzovic, 2009), telecommunications (e.g. van der Wal et al., 2002) and library services (Cook and Thompson, 2000).

4.1.3 Countries

SERVQUAL has seen widespread use in 80 countries around the world. From 1988 to 2013, 50 or more studies were conducted using SERVQUAL in countries that include the USA, the UK, Australia, India, China, Malaysia, Taiwan, Iran, Pakistan and Greece. During the same period, SERVQUAL was used in 20–45 studies in each of the following countries: Canada, Turkey, Hong Kong, France, Spain, Thailand, New Zealand, South Africa, Ghana, Brazil, Germany, Singapore, Jordan and South Korea. In many countries, for example Croatia, Portugal, Sweden, Ireland, UAE, Romania, Bangladesh, Italy, Japan, Slovenia, Cyprus, Egypt, Scotland, Finland, Indonesia and Norway, the SERVQUAL scale has been applied in at least ten studies to measure service quality.

4.1.4 Variety of phenomena

SERVQUAL was used to measure a range of service quality phenomena. A great number of studies have employed SERVQUAL to assess consumer attitude, customer satisfaction, customer relationship management, job satisfaction, customer retention, patient satisfaction, quality of care, quality of education, relationship marketing, corporate image and brand loyalty, among others.

4.1.5 Journals publishing SERVQUAL

SERVQUAL research works have been published in a wide array of academic and practitioner journals. Table 3 lists the journals that have published SERVQUAL since 1988.

Table 3 Journals publishing SERVQUAL

<i>African Journal of Business Management (10)</i>	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics (26)</i>
<i>Asian Journal on Quality (10)</i>	<i>Australasian Marketing Journal (9)</i>
<i>Benchmarking (23)</i>	<i>British Food Journal (10)</i>
<i>Business Process Management Journal (10)</i>	<i>Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly (20)</i>
<i>Database for Advances in Information Systems (10)</i>	<i>Decision Sciences (30)</i>
<i>Emerald Management Reviews (10)</i>	<i>EuroMed Journal of Business (10)</i>

Table 3 Journals publishing SERVQUAL (continued)

<i>European Business Review</i> (11)	<i>European Journal of Marketing</i> (96)
<i>Facilities</i> (13)	<i>Health Care Management Review</i> (13)
<i>Health Marketing Quarterly</i> (10)	<i>Industrial Management + Data Systems</i> (17)
<i>Information Systems Frontiers</i> (10)	<i>Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business</i> (83)
<i>International Business Research</i> (20)	<i>International Journal of Business and Management</i> (33)
<i>International Journal of Business and Social Science</i> (42)	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i> (69)
<i>International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance</i> (83)	<i>International Journal of Innovation, Management and Technology</i> (13)
<i>International Journal of Management</i> (18)	<i>International Journal of Marketing and Technology</i> (18)
<i>International Journal of Marketing Studies</i> (29)	<i>International Journal of Operations & Production Management</i> (31)
<i>International Journal of Organizational Innovation (Online)</i> (11)	<i>International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management</i> (16)
<i>International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences</i> (37)	<i>International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management</i> (39)
<i>International Journal of Service Industry Management</i> (123)	<i>International Marketing Review</i> (18), <i>Internet Research</i> (14)
<i>IUP Journal of Marketing Management</i> (17)	<i>Journal of American Academy of Business, Cambridge</i> (34)
<i>Journal of Applied Business Research</i> (11)	<i>Journal of Brand Management</i> (12)
<i>Journal of Business Logistics</i> (17)	<i>Journal of Electronic Commerce Research</i> (10)
<i>Journal of Financial Services Marketing</i> (30)	<i>Journal of Health Care Marketing</i> (26)
<i>Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce</i> (12)	<i>Journal of Marketing</i> (32)
<i>Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice</i> (28)	<i>Journal of Professional Services Marketing</i> (23)
<i>Journal of Retailing</i> (37)	<i>Journal of Service Management</i> (14)
<i>Journal of Service Research</i> (92)	<i>Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing</i> (10)
<i>Journal of Travel Research</i> (23)	<i>Journal of Vacation Marketing</i> (15)
<i>Leadership in Health Services</i> (9)	<i>Library Management</i> (23)
<i>Management Decision</i> (12)	<i>Management Research News</i> (10)
<i>Managing Service Quality</i> (236)	<i>Marketing</i> (9)
<i>Marketing Health Services</i> (10)	<i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i> (50)
<i>Measuring Business Excellence</i> (14)	<i>MIS Quarterly</i> (12)
<i>Online Information Review</i> (13)	<i>Production and Operations Management</i> (15)
<i>Psychology & Marketing</i> (14)	<i>Psychology & Marketing (1986–1998)</i> (10)
<i>Quality and Quantity</i> (20)	<i>Quality Progress</i> (9)
<i>Recherche et Applications en Marketing</i> (22)	<i>Revista de Administração Contemporânea</i> (10)
<i>Revista de Ciencias da Administracao</i> (9)	<i>Service Business</i> (15)

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Table 3 Journals publishing SERVQUAL (continued)

<i>SSRN Working Paper Series (56)</i>	<i>The Business Review, Cambridge (25)</i>
<i>The International Journal of Bank Marketing (111)</i>	<i>The International Journal of Educational Management (20)</i>
<i>The International Journal of Public Sector Management (14)</i>	<i>The International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management (91)</i>
<i>The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing (20)</i>	<i>The Journal of Computer Information Systems (15)</i>
<i>The Journal of Consumer Marketing (11)</i>	<i>The Journal of Product and Brand Management (17)</i>
<i>The Journal of Services Marketing (229)</i>	<i>The Quality Management Journal (47)</i>
<i>The Service Industries Journal (59)</i>	<i>The TQM Magazine (18)</i>
<i>Total Quality Management & Business Excellence (29)</i>	<i>TQM Journal (79)</i>

Note: The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of articles published.

4.1.6 Languages

Researchers have conducted studies involving SERVQUAL in various languages other than English. These languages include French, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Turkish, Lithuanian, Czech, Slovenian, Croatian, Arabic and Chinese.

The use of SERVQUAL in a large number of academic and practitioner publications covering a wide variety of industries for measuring multiplicity of service quality phenomena is a clear indication of the acceptance of the instrument by its stakeholders. A great number of researchers and practitioners have been and are still involved in the process of evaluating SERVQUAL for measuring service quality. SERVQUAL has its footprints not only in journals on service quality but also in other reputed journals. SERVQUAL is taught in courses on quality management at the universities and colleges. Studies involving SERVQUAL have been conducted in many countries using many different languages. With these considerations, the existence of SERVQUAL does not fall short of being ubiquitous in the service quality literature.

4.2 SERVQUAL as service quality standards

Several studies have critiqued the SERVQUAL instrument (e.g. Carman, 1990; Babakus and Boller, 1992; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Cronin and Taylor, 1994; Teas, 1993; Teas, 1994; Van Dyke et al., 1997; Landrum et al., 2007). One, and perhaps the most critical, criticism of the SERVQUAL instrument is the use of the gap approach in measuring service quality. The gap approach uses the disconfirmation score calculated as the difference between the expectation and the performance scores. The use of disconfirmation scores results in an inadequate level of reliability (i.e. Cronbach's α) for the instrument because of its dependence on the component scores (i.e. expectation and performance scores) (Peter et al., 1993). The correlation between the component scores adversely affects the reliability of disconfirmation scores (Peter et al., 1993). The reliability of disconfirmation scores decreases as the correlation of the component scores increases (Van Dyke et al., 1997). Other shortcomings of the SERVQUAL instrument

stemming from the use of disconfirmation scores include poor convergent validity and poor predictive validity (Bayraktaroglu and Atrek, 2010).

A SERVQUAL item can be dissected into three component parts: a service quality attribute, an expectation statement about the attribute and a perception statement about the attribute. Service quality attributes are the service measures. Expectation statements are what the customers think the service provider *should* offer and perceptions are customers' views about what service measures the service provider *has*. In the gap approach, the difference between expectations and perceptions may be greater if respondents place more emphasis on the ideal expectations instead of the realistic expectations (Bayraktaroglu and Atrek, 2010). Therefore, the disconfirmation scores become victims of how researchers use the expectation statements. For example, the use of the word 'excellent' in the expectations may encourage respondents to rate the highest Likert-scale score (Curry and Sinclair, 2002).

Teas (1993) posits that the conceptual and operational problems in the notion of expectations result in the poor validity of the gap concept and thereby of the SERVQUAL scale. However, Babakus and Boller (1992) found that the correlation between the performance-only quality score and the overall service quality measure was higher than the correlation between the gap score and the overall service quality measure. The approach that relies on measuring service quality by using performance-only scores rather than gap scores was proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992) and is called SERVPERF. SERVPERF was found to have a good model fit in settings where there was a lower level involvement such as fast-food restaurants (Qin and Prybutok, 2008) and in settings where the involvement level was high such as higher education (Bayraktaroglu and Atrek, 2010) and information systems (Landrum et al., 2010).

The criticisms of SERVQUAL revolve around how the component rating scores are analysed. Where analysing the difference scores results in SERVQUAL having a poor reliability and validity, analysing the performance-only scores results in SERVPERF having a good reliability and validity. Since the component rating scores (expectation and perception scores) of a SERVQUAL item pertain to the same service quality attribute of SERVPERF, the criticisms of SERVQUAL bear no significance on the merits of the service quality attribute as a normative requirement for the service. The relationship between the service attribute, expectation statement, perception statement and normative requirement of the service is illustrated in Figure 1 by taking a SERVQUAL item as an example.

The large number of studies that employed SERVQUAL casts no doubt on the merit of the SERVQUAL items' ability to capture service quality attributes. Rather, as Figure 1 illustrates, the SERVQUAL items when stripped of expectation and perception conceptualisations can act as generic standards for service quality. This study proposes that the SERVQUAL items be formulated to devise service quality standards.

Researchers claim that the SERVQUAL scale measures the functional quality of service only, arguing that it focuses on the process of service delivery rather than the outcome of the service performance (Gronroos, 1982; Gronroos, 1984; Rust and Oliver, 1994; Buttle, 1996; Ladhari, 2009). Gronroos (1982) and Gronroos (1984) identified three types of service quality, namely functional quality, technical quality and reputational quality of service. While the functional quality deals with the manner in which service is delivered, the technical quality and the reputational quality are concerned with the outcome of the service performance and the corporate image of the service organisation, respectively. Rust and Oliver (1994) support this perspective,

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suggesting that the service quality depends on the perceptions of the customer–employee interaction (i.e. the functional quality), the outcome (i.e. the technical quality) and the service environment. Buttle (1996) and Ladhari (2009) do not provide any classification of service quality but support the contention that the SERVQUAL model focuses on the functional quality and fails to pay adequate attention to the outcome of service encounter. In line with this argument, this study posits that SERVQUAL provides the basis for the standards for functional quality of service. These standards are presented in Table 4.

Figure 1 Illustration of service attribute, expectation statement, perception statement and normative requirement of service

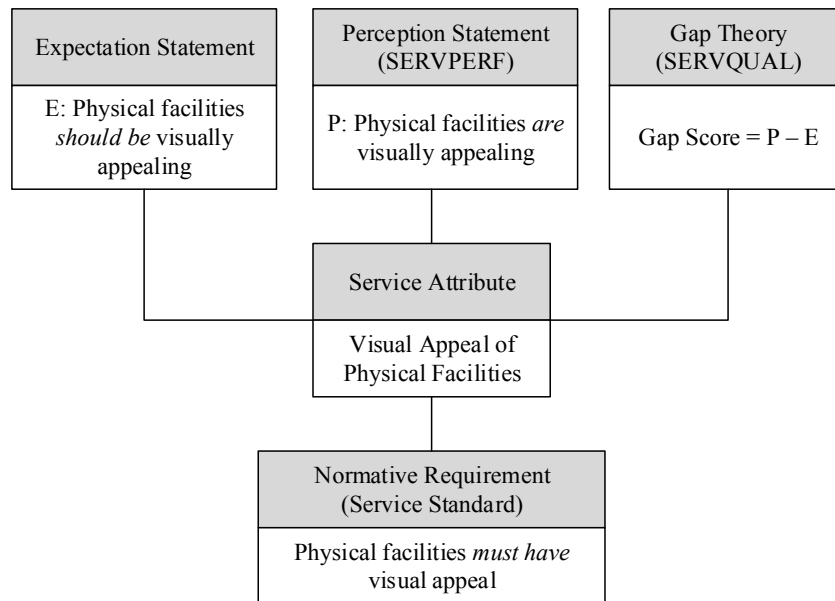


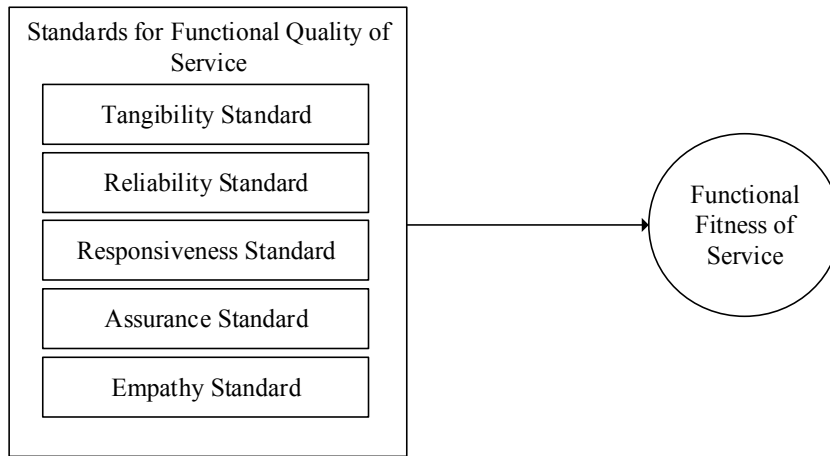
Table 4 Standards for functional quality of service

<i>Standards for functional quality of service</i>	<i>Normative requirements (that is, the service provider is required)</i>
Tangibility standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have up-to-date equipment • To have visually appealing physical facilities in general • To have visually appealing physical facilities with respect to the service • To have well-dressed and neat employees
Reliability standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be dependable • To be accurate • To provide promised service • To perform service at promised time • To be sympathetic and reassuring to customer problems

Table 4 Standards for functional quality of service (continued)

<i>Standards for functional quality of service</i>	<i>Normative requirements (that is, the service provider is required)</i>
Responsiveness standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be able to inform exact time of service • To provide prompt service • To be willing to help • To provide prompt response to customer requests
Assurance standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To have trustworthy employees • To have polite employees • To ensure safety of transactions with employees • To have employees with knowledge about the service
Empathy standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide individualised customer attention • To provide personalised customer attention • To uphold customers’ best interests at heart • To have convenient operating hours • To understand customer needs

Figure 2 Theoretical model for functional fitness of service



Standards are used to ensure that services are fit for their purposes (ISO, 2013). ISO states that standards provide “requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used consistently to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for their purpose”. By means of deductive reasoning, we can postulate that service standards are the determining factors for ensuring fitness of service. Fitness of service can take the form of functional fitness of service and technical fitness of service. Functional fitness of service is concerned with the fitness of service at the time of service delivery, whereas technical fitness of service refers to the resultant fitness of service after the service has already been rendered. Consistent with the above discussion, a theoretical model can be proposed for measuring functional fitness of service based on the standards

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for functional quality of service as identified from SERVQUAL. This theoretical model examines the relationship between the standards for functional quality of service and the functional fitness of service because SERVQUAL does not provide standards for technical quality of service. Figure 2 illustrates the proposed model.

5 Implications of the study

There are a number of academic and practical implications of this study. First, this study shows that the presence of SERVQUAL has been ubiquitous in the arena of service quality. Thus, both academicians and practitioners can easily gather service quality measurements in their relevant areas of research or practical applications involving SERVQUAL. Second, this study has derived service quality standards from the SERVQUAL items. Practitioners can capitalise on these standards in determining the fitness of their services at the time the services are delivered to customers. On the other hand, academicians are provided with new avenues of research in the arena of service quality resulting from future utilisation of the service quality standards in assessing fitness of service. Third, both academicians and practitioners may use the proposed theoretical model as a start-up model towards developing a comprehensive model for service fitness in their relevant areas of interest within the context of service quality. Due to ubiquity of SERVQUAL, this model has potential for measuring service fitness in numerous service industries. For instance, the fast-food industry can utilise the proposed model to initially determine the functional fitness of its service with regard to tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. It can then extend the model to explore additional service standards, which may relate to food quality, perceived value of the food, recovery, etc. Fourth, the proposed model embodies service standards derived from ubiquitous service measures. The ubiquitous nature of these service measures makes the derived service standards appreciative to customers, and thereby helps service organisations gain customer confidence in their services. This, in turn, can generate customer satisfaction and loyalty. Finally, the proposed model can pave the way for service providers to seek quality accreditations such as ISO. Organisations can utilise the model to determine which service standards are significant for their services and compare them with the ones required by the accrediting body. Thus, they can perform self-assessment of their current status with regard to accreditation and determine the possible courses of action towards achieving the accreditation.

6 Conclusions, limitations and future direction

This study suggests that the SERVQUAL instrument has been utilised ubiquitously for measuring service quality in numerous service industries. SERVQUAL has seen widespread use in about 80 countries around the world to measure a range of service quality phenomena. Research works involving SERVQUAL have been published in a wide array of academic and practitioner journals. These findings suggest that the applications of SERVQUAL are pervasive in measuring service quality across service industries around the world. Findings also suggest that the SERVQUAL scale items embody service attributes that represent service standards.

This study is not bereft of limitations. This study proposed a theoretical model for assessing fitness of service based on the functional quality standards of service. The model is not comprehensive as it does not account for the assessment of technical fitness of service. This shortcoming of the model is a result of another limitation of the study, which stemmed from the use of SERVQUAL as the basis for service quality standards. SERVQUAL provides the standards for functional quality of service only, not the standards for technical quality of service. Yet another limitation is that this study did not conduct any empirical study to test the proposed model.

With the limitations come opportunities for future studies. Future studies can test the proposed model by collecting data from various service industries. Studies can also be undertaken to identify the standards for technical quality of service. By so doing, the proposed model can be extended to account for both the standards for functional quality of service and the standards for technical quality of service.

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