

A HALF-CENTURY OF SERVQUAL: EXPLORING ITS IMPACT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN SERVICE QUALITY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the evolution and enduring significance of SERVQUAL, a widely recognized framework for measuring service quality. Since its inception in 1988, SERVQUAL has been extensively adopted and adapted across various industries, becoming a cornerstone of service quality research. We trace the development of the SERVQUAL model, from its original conceptualization to its subsequent refinement, application, and critique. We examine its impact on industry-specific contexts, its integration with other service quality models, and its cross-cultural adaptations. Further, we investigate the incorporation of emotional and experiential dimensions into contemporary service quality research, highlighting the need to move beyond purely functional assessments. We analyze later trends in SERVQUAL research, including its integration with emerging concepts like customer experience management and the growing role of data in service quality measurement. Finally, we explore the potential for future applications of SERVQUAL in the context of satisfaction research, specifically examining its relevance to the *Journal of Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior*. Through this historical and analytical lens, this paper aims to illuminate the ongoing relevance of SERVQUAL and its potential to contribute to advancing our understanding of service quality and customer satisfaction.*

INTRODUCTION

Service quality is a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty. SERVQUAL was developed by A. Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml, and Leonard Berry to address measuring service quality. They introduced the SERVQUAL scale in their pioneering research article "SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality," published in the *Journal of Retailing* in 1988. Since its publication, 50,771 scholarly articles have cited the SERVQUAL scale (Google Scholar 6/2024). The SERVQUAL model remains the most widely adapted and tested conceptualization of service quality.

This paper explores SERVQUAL's evolution, highlights its contributions, and assesses future publishing opportunities. We categorized existing literature into the following eras:

- **ERA OF INNOVATION:** The SERVQUAL Framework Emerges
- **ERA OF REFINEMENT:** Advancing the SERVQUAL model
- **ERA OF APPLICATION AND CRITIQUE IN SERVICE QUALITY**
 - Industry-specific Adaptation
 - Evolution of Alternative Models
 - Global Expansion
 - Integration with Satisfaction Metrics
- **ERA OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION:** Customization and Localization
- **ERA OF MODEL INTEGRATION:** Merging SERVQUAL with Other Frameworks

The history and pervasiveness of SERVQUAL, its' importance/use across industries, the critiques, and alternatives raised by academicians are discussed to elucidate the role of SERVQUAL in future satisfaction literature. We examine SERVQUAL's contributions to *The Journal of Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior* to look for future ways SERVQUAL can be utilized to contribute to the satisfaction literature.

ERA OF INNOVATION: THE SERVQUAL FRAMEWORK EMERGES

The original SERVQUAL model proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) had 10 dimensions for measuring service quality. However, this 10-dimension framework soon faced criticisms that led to a revision of the model. One of the key issues was the significant overlap and redundancy among the 10 dimensions, as many of the items were found to be measuring similar aspects of service quality. This lack of clear distinction between the dimensions was seen as a major limitation of the original model. Additionally, the 10-dimension structure was deemed too complex and difficult to implement in practical service quality assessments. Researchers and practitioners struggled to consistently differentiate between all 10 dimensions, particularly across diverse service contexts.

Further empirical validation of the 10-dimension SERVQUAL model also revealed issues, as the factor analysis often failed to replicate the distinct 10-factor structure. This raised concerns about the underlying theoretical foundation of the original framework. To address these criticisms, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry streamlined the SERVQUAL model, consolidating the 10 dimensions into a more parsimonious 5-dimension structure. The revised model included the dimensions of Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. This simplified 5-dimension framework was found to have better empirical support, increased practical applicability, and clearer conceptual distinctions between the dimensions, making it a more robust tool for measuring service quality.

The model was narrowed to five dimensions of service quality:

- Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.
- Empathy: Caring, individualized attention the company provides to its customers.
- Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to instill trust and confidence.
- Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

ERA OF REFINEMENT: ADVANCING THE SERVQUAL MODEL

The refinements aimed to improve the applicability and reliability of the SERVQUAL model in assessing service quality and enhancing customer satisfaction. Relying on feedback and further research the authors simplified the instrument, reassessed dimension importance, and clarified the distinction between customer expectations and perceptions. The simplification aimed to make the model more manageable and focused on core aspects of service quality. The authors expanded the original study industry beyond banking to include, a telephone company and two insurance companies (PZB, 1991).

ERA OF APPLICATION AND CRITIQUE IN SERVICE QUALITY

During the 1990s, the SERVQUAL model gained widespread adoption across industries such as healthcare, retail, hospitality, and banking. Critiques soon emerged, raising issues about

the model's generalizability and its challenge in distinguishing perceptions from expectations (c.f., Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Finn & Lamb, 1991).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) criticized SERVQUAL's reliance on the gap between customer perceptions and expectations, which are adjusted by the importance of each service dimension. They argued that employing importance weights to modify service quality assessments was conceptually flawed because importance should remain a separate construct. Their research demonstrated that a performance-only measure, SERVPERF, offered better predictive accuracy for overall service quality and customer satisfaction than SERVQUAL. They also noted that focusing on service delivery processes rather than outcomes limited SERVQUAL's ability to reflect a customer's holistic service evaluation.

Carman critiqued the SERVQUAL model for problematic items related to value, administration, and factor analysis. He suggested alternative methods for assessing expectations and stressed the need to measure the impact of individual attributes' importance on quality perceptions, which PZB inadequately addressed. Carman also questioned the terminology used by PZB, suggesting that integrating customer perceptions with technical quality specifications could create a more comprehensive approach to quality management. He concluded that PZB's work was not the final word on the subject, indicating room for further development.

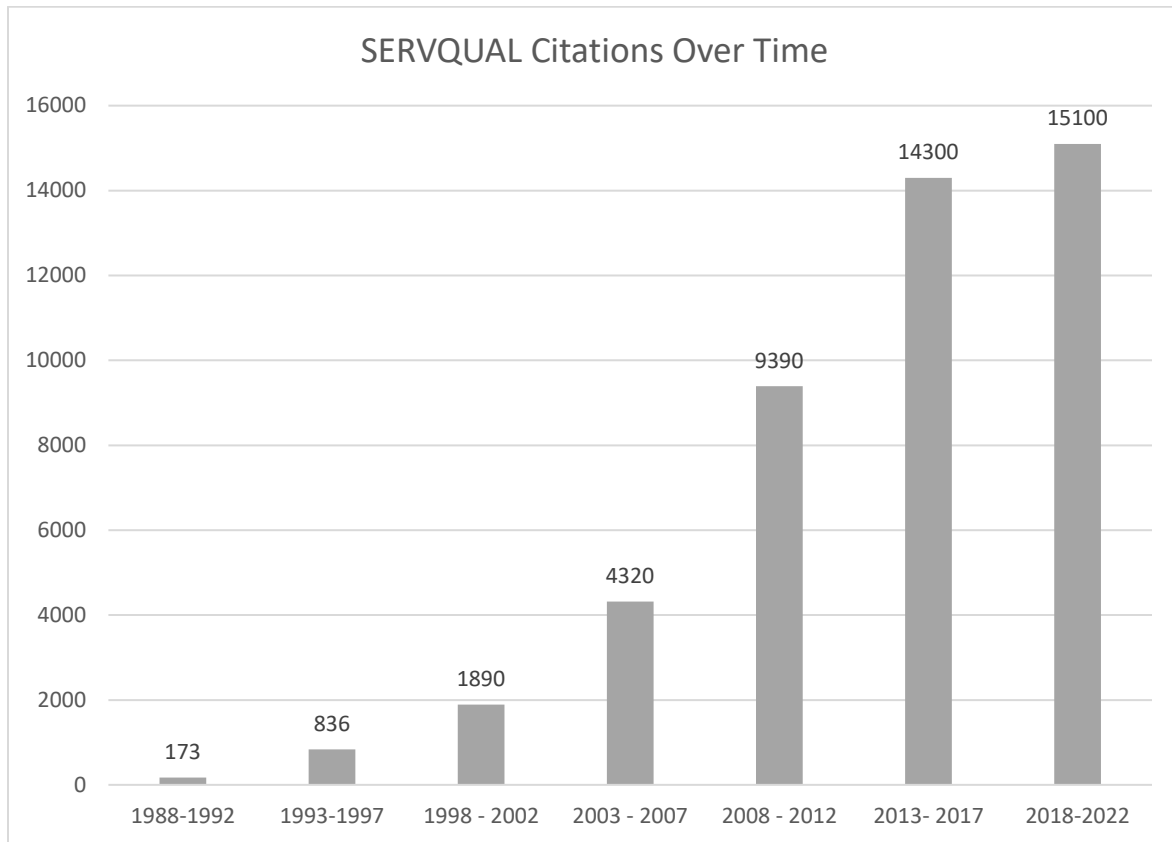
Finn and Lamb (1991) examined SERVQUAL in retail settings using confirmatory factor analysis and found a poor fit between the data and the model. This was particularly true for the "empathy" dimension, indicating that the 22-item scale may not fit retail contexts well. They questioned SERVQUAL's reliance on a single dataset, challenging its applicability across diverse industries. They proposed several reasons for SERVQUAL's poor fit in retail, including potential inadequacies in capturing retail service quality, different underlying dimensions, and data collection methods. However, these explanations could not fully explain the model's significant shortcomings. They concluded that SERVQUAL should not be seen as a universally applicable instrument and must be refined and validated for specific industries.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (PZB), in response to criticisms of SERVQUAL, acknowledged limitations and proposed refinements. They conceded that the original instrument might not perfectly suit all service contexts, advocating for context-specific adaptations and modifications to improve reliability and validity. Subsequent publications featured revised versions with improved item wording and scale lengths, addressing concerns about the instrument's factor structure and the reliance on the expectation-perception gap. Furthermore, PZB explored alternative measurement models to more comprehensively capture the nuances of service quality perception, emphasizing the need for flexibility and acknowledging that the original SERVQUAL was not intended as a universally applicable "off-the-shelf" measure. Their response, therefore, involved iterative improvements and methodological enhancements, recognizing the need for context-specific application rather than a complete overhaul of the model. Despite these criticisms, citations over time highlight the growing use of SERVQUAL as a source and/or measurement tool (Figure One).

Industry-Specific Adaptation

Thirty-six years later, the SERVQUAL model has been used in a wide variety of industries across numerous countries. SERVQUAL has undoubtedly established itself as a prominent tool in service quality. SERVQUAL is extensively used across diverse industries, including hospitality, healthcare, education, retail, and banking. Its popularity stems from its practicality and adaptability, allowing customization to specific service contexts.

Figure 1



Multitudinous studies and research papers utilize SERVQUAL, solidifying its academic and practical relevance. While SERVQUAL does not directly measure importance, studies have assessed which dimensions are important in various industries. In finance, for example, reliability and assurance are key. Reliability means consistently delivering the promised services with accuracy and dependability. On the other hand, assurance focuses on employees' expertise, courteousness, and ability to inspire trust and confidence. Customers prioritize these qualities, seeking high reliability and trust when handling their financial affairs. (c.f. Blanchard and Galloway 1994; Mon and Perry 1991; Newman 2001).

Within the tourism sector, responsiveness, a key dimension of SERVQUAL, is frequently regarded as a critical factor. Responsiveness pertains to the willingness and readiness of tourism service providers to help customers and provide prompt service. In the competitive tourism sector, being responsive to customer inquiries, needs, and requests can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. While responsiveness is crucial in tourism, all five SERVQUAL dimensions - tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy - collectively contribute to delivering a superior tourism experience. (c.f. Atilgan, Akinci, and Aksoy 2003; Khan et al.2024; Saleh and Ryan 1991)

Table 1 Illustrates the number of studies across industries by the number of citations (Google Scholar, June 2024). Duplication can occur as some studies utilize more than one industry.

Table 1
Citation Counts - SERVQUAL Across Industries

RETAIL: e-commerce Brick-and-mortar	29,400
EDUCATION: Universities and Colleges Training and Development Centers	26,700
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES: IT Support and Helpdesk Services Software Development Companies	22,500
RETAIL BANKING	21,400
HOTELS AND RESORTS	20,900
PUBLIC SERVICE AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES Municipal Services: waste management, public transportation. Public Utilities	17,200
HOSPITALITY AND FOOD SERVICES: Restaurants Event management	15,200
HEALTHCARE: Hospitals	12,300
RESTAURANTS	12,200
AIRLINES	7,980
INSURANCE	6,890
TELECOMMUNICATIONS: Internet, Cable, Mobile	6,130
AUTOMOTIVE SERVICES	1,640
*Google Scholar search within articles citing SERVQUAL	

Evolution of Alternative Models

SERVQUAL attracted criticism on both theoretical and operational grounds (Babakus & Boiler, 1992; Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994). Teas (1993) questioned its validity and expectations index specification, while Spreng and Mackoy (1996) argued that its reliance on difference scores raises concerns about statistical validity in customer satisfaction surveys, given it required respondents to assess both expectations and perceptions for every item. Numerous research works have addressed challenges related to the structure of SERVQUAL (see Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Finn & Lamb, 1991) and additional concerns.

Table 2
Sample, Non-Exhaustive, List of Alternative/Modified Service Quality Scales

LODGSERV	Knutson, B., Stevens, P., Wullaert, C., Patton, M., & Yokoyama, F. (1990). LODGSERV: A service quality index for the lodging industry. <i>Hospitality Research Journal</i> , 14(2), 277-284.
SERVPERF	Cronin Jr, J. J., & Taylor, S. A. (1992). Measuring service quality: A reexamination and extension. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 56(3), 55-68.
EP/NQ Model	Teas, R. K. (1994). Expectations as a comparison standard in measuring service quality: an assessment of a reassessment. <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 58(1), 132-139.
RSQS (Retail Service Quality Scale)	Dabholkar, P. A., Thorpe, D. I., & Rentz, J. O. (1996). A measure of service quality for retail stores: Scale development and validation. <i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science</i> , 24(1), 3-16.
LibQUAL+	Cook, C., & Thompson, B. (2000). Reliability and validity of SERVQUAL scores used to evaluate perceptions of library service quality. <i>The Journal of Academic Librarianship</i> , 26(4), 248-258.
Banking Service Quality (BSQ) Scale	Bahia, K., & Nantel, J. (2000). A reliable and valid measurement scale for the perceived service quality of banks. <i>International Journal of Bank Marketing</i> , 18(2), 84-91.
WEBQUAL	Barnes, S. J., & Vidgen, R. T. (2002). An integrative approach to the assessment of e-commerce quality. <i>Journal of Electronic Commerce Research</i> , 3(3), 114-127.
PAKSERV	Raajpoot, Nusser. "Reconceptualizing service encounter quality in a non-western context." <i>Journal of Service Research</i> 7.2 (2004): 181-201.
E-S-QUAL	Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Malhotra, A. (2005). E-S-QUAL: A multiple-item scale for assessing electronic service quality. <i>Journal of Service Research</i> , 7(3), 213-233.
HEALTHQUAL	Lee, D. (2017). HEALTHQUAL: A multi-item scale for assessing healthcare service quality. <i>Service Business</i> , 11(3), 491-516.

Numerous researchers have refined, expanded, or modified the SERVQUAL model to address limitations or different contexts. Table 2 highlights a non-exhaustive list of alternative and/or refined models. Notably, SERVPERF offered an alternative perspective on service quality measurement. In 1992, the SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992) model was introduced as an alternative to the SERVQUAL model emphasizing performance-only dimensions (SERVPERF).

According to Google Scholar (June 2024), SERVPERF has been cited 24,262 times. SERVPERF measures performance directly. The authors asserted there is greater predictive power for assessing both overall service quality and customer satisfaction compared to the expectation gap model used by SERVQUAL. Critics argue that the model is more focused on measuring service performance rather than explaining the underlying mechanisms of service quality. Also, understanding and managing customer expectations is essential for delivering high-quality services, and this aspect is not adequately addressed in the model.

The literature reveals that there hasn't been a consensus on one scale over the other. Both models have been used extensively in service quality research, offering different perspectives on assessing and improving service quality and, ultimately, satisfaction. Both scales have been used in businesses, government agencies, and non-profits to assess their service quality and/or satisfaction. Numerous studies have compared the two models to assess which scale is more efficacious. Table 3 contains a non-exhaustive list of highly cited articles. While the models propose different perspectives on assessing and improving service quality, both have provided immense value to the field.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that, despite criticisms, SERVQUAL has remained an important foundational model in service quality research. SERVQUAL has been adapted and built upon in subsequent studies. Its widespread use attests to its significant impact and usefulness in understanding and measuring service quality. SERVQUAL has proven to be very versatile and modifiable, as illustrated by the number of academic studies across industries (c.f. Engelland, Workman, & Singh. (2000). The gap model allows organizations to identify areas needing improvement. Its consumer-centric nature has appeal to both researchers and businesses. While the survey has been criticized, the number of case studies reflects SERVQUAL's value. SERVQUAL has been widely used and critiqued (c.f. Ladhari 2009) in academia and by practitioners. Google Scholar (June 2024) returns 50,900 to the search term list of SERVQUAL studies, which cite Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1988) paper.

Global Expansion

The use of SERVQUAL has spread geographically, gaining recognition and application worldwide. It has been used in a multitude of cultural contexts. This global reach showcases its versatility and applicability across diverse service environments. Figure One highlights the number of studies by country since the publication in 1988 of SERVQUAL dimensions to the present¹. The search terms used were "in country X" to limit results to case studies within the specific country (Google Scholar 6/24). Some duplication can occur as there were numerous cross-cultural comparison studies. Figure 2 shows the number of studies across countries by the number of citations (Google Scholar, June 2024). Duplication can occur as many articles utilize more than one country.

In Table 4, case study citation count by country since 1988 is listed. The count is then compared to the number of citations since 2020. A clear pattern emerges. It has now been 36 years since the SERVQUAL scale was published. While in the early years, publications were focused in North America, Western Europe, and Australia, recent SERVQUAL case studies have centered in Asia/Middle East. Figure 3 highlights the percentage of SERVQUAL publications between 2020 and the present. The search terms used were "in country X" to limit results to case studies within the specific country. Some duplication can occur as there were numerous cross-cultural

¹ The list is not all-encompassing. The goal is to illustrate the global reach of SERVQUAL studies. For the sake of brevity, countries with lower citation counts were left off the list.

Table 3
Sample, Non-Exhaustive, List of Highly Cited Articles
Which Compare SERVPERF To SERVQUAL

ARTICLE	CITATIONS
Cronin Jr, J. Joseph, and Steven A. Taylor. "SERVPERF versus SERVQUAL: reconciling performance-based and perceptions-minus-expectations measurement of service quality." <i>Journal of marketing</i> 58.1 (1994): 125–131.	6952
Taylor, Steven A., and Thomas L. Baker. "An assessment of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the formation of consumers' purchase intentions." <i>Journal of Retailing</i> 70.2 (1994): 163–178.	4037
Caruana, Albert. "Service loyalty: The effects of service quality and the mediating role of customer satisfaction." <i>European journal of marketing</i> 36.7/8 (2002): 811–828.	3886
Brady, Michael K., J. Joseph Cronin Jr, and Richard R. Brand. "Performance-only measurement of service quality: a replication and extension." <i>Journal of Business Research</i> 55.1 (2002): 17–31.	1788
Lee, Haksik, Yongki Lee, and Dongkeun Yoo. "The determinants of perceived service quality and its relationship with satisfaction." <i>Journal of Services Marketing</i> 14.3 (2000): 217-231.	1735
Teas, R. Kenneth. "Expectations as a comparison standard in measuring service quality: an assessment of a reassessment." <i>Journal of marketing</i> 58.1 (1994): 132–139.	1591
Abdullah, Firdaus. "Measuring service quality in higher education: HEdPERF versus SERVPERF." <i>Marketing Intelligence & Planning</i> 24.1 (2006): 31–47.	927
Ladhari, Riadh. "Alternative measures of service quality: a review." <i>Managing Service Quality: An International Journal</i> 18.1 (2008): 65–86.	851
Angur, Madhukar G., Rajan Nataraajan, and John S. Jahera. "Service quality in the banking industry: an assessment in a developing economy." <i>International journal of bank marketing</i> 17.3 (1999): 116-125.	843
McAlexander, James H., Dennis O. Kaldenberg, and Harold F. Koenig. "Service quality measurement." <i>Journal of health care marketing</i> 14.3 (1994).	768
Carrillat, François A., Fernando Jaramillo, and Jay P. Mulki. "The validity of the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF scales: A meta-analytic view of 17 years of research across five continents." <i>International Journal of Service Industry Management</i> 18.5 (2007): 472-490.	757
Sweeney, Jillian C., Geoffrey N. Soutar, and Lester W. Johnson. "Retail service quality and perceived value: A comparison of two models." <i>Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services</i> 4.1 (1997): 39-48.	676
Brochado, Ana. "Comparing alternative instruments to measure service quality in higher education." <i>Quality Assurance in Education</i> 17.2 (2009): 174-190.	605

comparison studies. (Google Scholar 6/24). Indonesia has the highest percentage of articles published in the last four years. Meanwhile, New Zealand has had the lowest percentage of articles within the last four years.

Figure 2

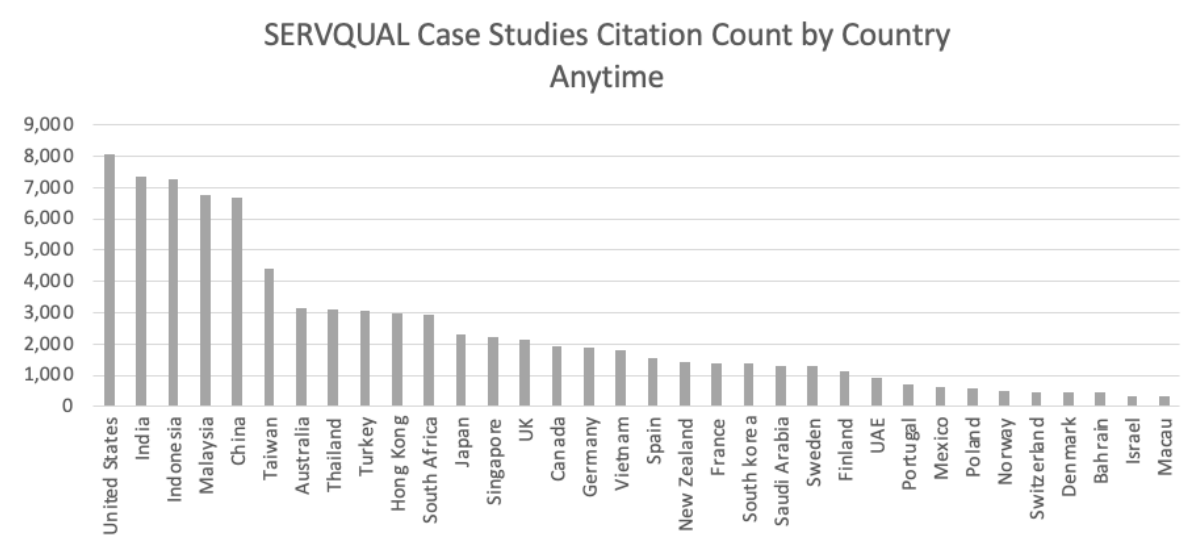


Figure 3

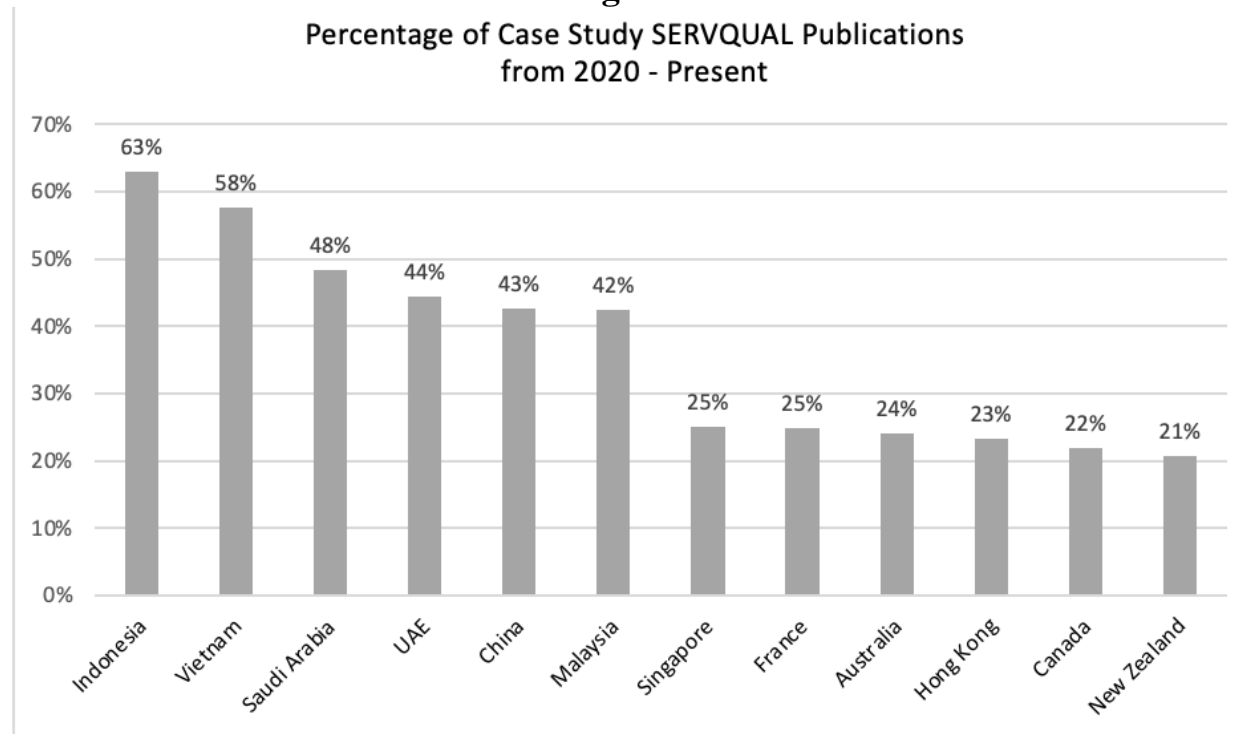


Table 4
Case Studies Across the Globe – Citation Count

Country	Citation count Anytime	Since 2020	%
United States	8,050	2,240	27.8%
India	7330	2660	36.3%
Indonesia	7270	4580	63.0%
Malaysia	6740	2860	42.4%
China	6,680	2,850	42.7%
Taiwan	4420	1400	31.7%
Australia	3140	758	24.1%
Thailand	3110	961	30.9%
Turkey	3070	1100	35.8%
Hong Kong	2970	694	23.4%
South Africa	2950	920	31.2%
Japan	2300	581	25.3%
Singapore	2230	559	25.1%
UK	2130	604	28.4%
Canada	1910	419	21.9%
Germany	1890	530	28.0%
Vietnam	1820	1050	57.7%
Spain	1530	547	35.8%
New Zealand	1410	291	20.6%
France	1390	345	24.8%
South korea	1390	521	37.5%
Saudi Arabia	1300	628	48.3%
Sweden	1300	330	25.4%
Finland	1120	323	28.8%
UAE	911	405	44.5%
Portugal	689	255	37.0%
Mexico	610	198	32.5%
Poland	571	128	22.4%
Norway	506	145	28.7%
Switzerland	458	92	20.1%
Denmark	439	118	26.9%
Bahrain	438	137	31.3%
Israel	343	88	25.7%
Macau	332	132	39.8%

Integration with Satisfaction Metrics

It's challenging to pinpoint a specific year when research on integrating SERVQUAL with satisfaction indices first emerged. Both SERVQUAL and satisfaction indices have been subjects

of study for decades, and their integration likely developed gradually. However, a noticeable shift occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s, marked by a growing interest in combining these concepts. This period saw an increase in research exploring how SERVQUAL could be used alongside customer satisfaction measures, leading to a deeper understanding of the relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. Researchers began developing hybrid models that integrated SERVQUAL elements with satisfaction metrics, aiming to capture a more comprehensive picture of the complex interplay between service quality, customer perceptions, and overall satisfaction (c.f. Baker & Crompton, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001; Lassar et al., 2000).

ERA OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION: CUSTOMIZATION AND LOCALIZATION

The role of culture in the choice and inclusion of dimensions and expectations first appear in the 1990s (c.f. Babakus & Boller, 1992; Buttle, 1996). This is a response to criticisms of SERVQUAL scale dimensions that lack reliability across cultures. Numerous studies have shown that culture can significantly influence the use and effectiveness of the SERVQUAL model. Cultural elements can influence how SERVQUAL is measured and understood. Service quality perceptions can vary between customers in developed and developing countries because of differences in their economic and sociocultural environments (Malhotra et al., 2005). Adoption of SERVQUAL revealed that culture can significantly influence the use and effectiveness of the model. Expectations vary across cultures and industries (c.f. Armstrong et al., 1997; Carrillat et al., 2007; De Ruyter, Perkins, and Wetzels, 1995; Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Ladhari et al., 2011; Tolliver et al., 1998).

As SERVQUAL became more widely adopted internationally, there was a growing recognition of the importance of incorporating cultural considerations into both service provision and assessment. This recognition ultimately resulted in the integration of culture into the evaluation of service quality. The SERVQUAL literature indicates that Edward T. Hall's high-context and low-context culture theory introduced in his 1976 book *Beyond Culture* is the most cited, but Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (1980) is the most operationalized. Cultural models provide frameworks to understand how cultural differences impact values, attitudes, and behaviors in different contexts, such as business, communication, and group dynamics. Understanding the impact of Hofstede's cultural dimensions or Hall's framework on the SERVQUAL model can help service providers tailor their strategies, improve service quality, and enhance customer satisfaction in culturally diverse contexts.

Hall's Theory of Cultural Dimensions

Hall's (1976) theory primarily revolves around concepts of high-context vs. low-context communication, time orientation (monochronic vs. polychronic), and space (proxemics). These three dimensions can significantly impact the various dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. The following section reviews research that incorporates Hall's cultural model elements into understanding service quality measurement interpretations. It highlights specific studies that have successfully implemented this approach. These studies demonstrate the importance of considering cultural nuances when interpreting service quality measures, leading to more effective service delivery across diverse customer groups.

In high-context cultures, much of the meaning of communication is conveyed implicitly through non-verbal cues, shared history, and cultural understanding. Relationships and trust are

paramount. Communication is indirect, relying heavily on context. Examples include Japan, China, and Mediterranean countries. In low-context cultures, communication is more explicit and direct. Information is conveyed clearly and directly through words, with less reliance on non-verbal cues or shared understanding. Examples include Germany, Switzerland, and the United States (Bluedorn, 1998; Hall, 1959, 1976).

Monochronic cultures value time as a linear, finite resource. They emphasize schedules, punctuality, and doing one thing at a time. Examples include Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavian countries. Polychronic cultures view time as more fluid and flexible. They are comfortable with multitasking, overlapping activities, and fluid schedules. Relationships and social obligations often take precedence over strict adherence to time schedules. Examples include Latin American, Arab, and Mediterranean countries. In M-time cultures, punctuality is highly valued. An example in Winsted (1997), is that both Japanese and American cultures view time as a precious asset, reflecting their strong focus on achievement and efficiency (Terpstra & David, 1985).

Proximity is close in high-contact cultures, which value close physical proximity and frequent touching during communication. Examples include Latin American and Mediterranean countries. In contrast, low-contact cultures maintain greater physical distance during interactions and consider excessive touching intrusive. Finland, Sweden, Norway, and several East Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, are low contact.

Mapping Hall to SERVQUAL

Tangibles. The perception of the physical environment impacts tangibles. In high-context cultures, the physical environment and presentation of services often carry implicit messages about the quality of the service. High attention to aesthetics and details may be more appreciated. In low-context cultures, the focus would be on clear, specific, and well-documented aspects of the physical environment and service procedures (c.f., Laroche et al., 2004; Ueltschy, et al., 2007).

Empathy. High-context cultures typically place a high value on empathy and personalized service. Understanding and responding to unspoken needs and expectations can significantly enhance perceived service quality. Whereas in low-context cultures, empathy is demonstrated through explicit acknowledgment of the customer's concerns and direct communication that addresses specific needs and expectations. Utilizing the PAKSERV instrument (Kashif & Sarifuddin, 2014), sincerity, formality, and personalization replace empathy and responsiveness. In Pakistan, consideration of the "social class customers belong to and treating them in a way they are used to in a culture" is included as a measure of service quality.

Assurance. In high-context cultures, the assurance dimension is closely tied to the service provider's ability to convey trust and confidence, often through non-verbal cues and relationship management. Professionalism and Transparency: In low-context cultures, assurance comes from transparency, credentials, and clear communication about the service.

Reliability. Studies that have examined SERVQUAL dimensions across low-context and high-context find reliability is just as important in both contexts.

Responsiveness. High-context cultures may expect service providers to be more intuitive and sensitive to their needs, even if those needs are not explicitly verbalized. Timely and culturally sensitive responses are essential. Low-context cultures expect quick, explicit, and clear responses to their requests and issues. There is less reliance on reading between the lines, and more emphasis is placed on direct action. Espinoza (1999) finds, as hypothesized, that responsiveness is more

important for monochronic-oriented individuals (Quebecers) than for polychronic-oriented ones (Peruvians).

Understanding whether a culture leans high-context or low-context can help tailor service strategies to improve across the various SERVQUAL dimensions by aligning communication styles with cultural expectations. High-context cultures may appreciate more nuanced, relationship-driven interactions, while low-context cultures may prefer clear, direct, and explicit communication and service standards. A review of the literature also reveals that modifications such as the replacement of existing or additional dimensions can enhance service quality measurement and, ultimately, consumer satisfaction, which we discuss in the later localizing service quality measurement section.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

The Hofstede cultural dimensions theory (1980) explores how cultural values influence behavior in organizations and societies. Many researchers from around the globe have utilized the various Hofstede dimensions to understand or explain cultural differences in service quality measurement. By analyzing SERVQUAL scores through the lens of Hofstede's dimensions, researchers can identify how cultural values shape customer expectations and perceptions of service quality. This understanding helps tailor service strategies to specific cultural contexts, leading to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Power Distance. This dimension reflects the extent to which societies accept unequal power distribution. Cultures with high power distance tend to have more hierarchical service interactions, where customers expect deference from service providers. In contrast, low power distance cultures value egalitarian relationships, leading to more informal and interactive service encounters.

Individualism Vs. Collectivism. Individualistic cultures prioritize individual needs and goals, whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize group harmony and belonging. People in individualistic cultures often place a higher value on personal image and uniqueness. The appearance and quality of tangibles such as the facility's aesthetics, the employees' dress, and the quality of materials (e.g., brochures, business cards) might be more critical, as they could reflect on the individual's choice.

Masculinity vs. Femininity. Masculine societies emphasize achievement and assertiveness, while feminine cultures prioritize cooperation and nurturing. Customers who score high in Masculinity tend to anticipate that male service employees will exhibit greater professionalism, thereby being more dependable, responsive, and reassuring. Conversely, they expect female employees to demonstrate higher levels of empathy (Furrer et al., 2000).

Uncertainty Avoidance: Cultures high in uncertainty avoidance need predictability and clear rules. They may prefer standardized service encounters with minimal ambiguity. In contrast, low cultures should be more comfortable with flexibility and improvisation in service delivery.

Long-Term Orientation. This dimension reflects a society's focus on long-term goals versus short-term gratification. Cultures with a long-term orientation prioritize future rewards over short-term benefits, emphasizing values such as perseverance, thrift, and adapting to changing circumstances.

Mapping Hofstede to SERVQUAL

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, researchers worldwide began to examine how expectations of SERVQUAL dimension importance, utilizing Hofstede, varied across cultures.

Articles that utilized multiple cultures include Dash, Bruning, and Acharya (2009), Donthu and Yoo (1998), Furrer et al. (2000), Mattila (1999), and Tsoukatos and Rand (2007).

Tangibles. Furrer et al. (2000) find a positive relationship between tangibles and individualism, masculinity, and power distance. They did not find support for uncertainty avoidance, which was contrary to their hypothesis. Similarly, Donthu and Yoo (1998) did not find a significant difference in tangible expectations across cultures (Canada, India, the UK, and the USA). Mattila (1999) found that customers with Western cultural backgrounds are more likely to rely on tangible cues from the physical environment to evaluate service quality than their Asian counterparts.

Empathy. In a study comparing Indian and Canadian consumers, Dash et al (2009) found that consumers who score high on individualism have lower expectations of empathy. In contrast, Donthu and Yoo (1998) observed that individualistic consumers had significantly higher empathy expectations. Furrer et al. (2000) distinguish frequent (e.g., supermarket) and infrequent (e.g., dental clinic) service situations. They asserted that establishing a close relationship with the service provider is essential to mitigate the uncertainty and ambiguity stemming from unfamiliar situations and found a negative relationship between empathy and power distance. They reason that weak customers are more likely to tolerate failure from more powerful service providers in cultures with a large power distance.

Assurance. Tsoukatos and Rand (2007) found masculinity and uncertainty avoidance to be inversely related to assurance expectations. Dash et al (2009) and Furrer et al. (2000) found that consumers who score high on individualism had lower expectations of assurance. Conversely, Donthu and Yoo (1998) observed that individualistic consumers had higher expectations for assurance than collectivistic consumers. Furrer et al. (2000) also find support for a significant negative relationship between assurance and long-term orientation; they find a positive relationship with uncertainty avoidance.

Responsiveness. Donthu and Yoo (1998), focused on dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, collectivism, and long-term orientation (masculinity was excluded due to its assumed weak association with service expectations). Short-term orientation, individualism, low power distance, and high uncertainty avoidance were associated with higher service quality expectations. They found that customers with low power distance placed more emphasis on both reliability and responsiveness. As with assurance, in the Greek retail insurance industry study (Tsoukatos & Rand, 2007), masculinity and uncertainty avoidance are inversely related to responsiveness. Furrer et al. (2000) find support for a significant negative relationship between responsiveness with power distance and masculinity and a positive relationship with uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation.

Reliability. One would expect cultures with a long-term orientation to value consistent, reliable services that build trust and establish enduring relationships over time. In contrast, cultures with a short-term orientation may prioritize immediate outcomes and may be more willing to overlook minor lapses in reliability. This was found to be supported by Furrer et al, (2000) and Tsoukatos and Rand (2007). Donthu and Yoo (1998) did not examine the relationship with LTO. As stated above, they found that customers with low power distance placed more emphasis on both reliability and responsiveness as these customers would be less likely to expect better/worse service due to their 'station in life'.

Organizations must align service delivery with cultural preferences and expectations, as diverse cultures have varying notions of service quality (Witkowski & Wolfinbarger, 2002; Furrer et al., 2000). What is viewed as prompt service in one culture may be considered rushed in another.

Laroche et al. (2004) note that differences in response styles and item interpretation affect the consistency of service quality and satisfaction measures across cultures.

SERVQUAL Localization

Adapting SERVQUAL to specific cultural contexts requires a deep understanding of local customs, values, and service expectations, a process known as localization. By applying insights from cross-cultural theories, businesses can improve their understanding of cultural nuances and enhance their ability to deliver high-quality service experiences across diverse markets. Researchers and practitioners from around the world have localized service quality measurement through the process of:

Identifying culturally relevant dimensions This may involve adding or modifying existing dimensions to reflect the specific values and expectations of the target culture.

Developing culturally appropriate measurement instruments ensures that the items used to measure each dimension are relevant and understandable to the target population.

Validating the adapted model involves testing the model with a representative sample of the target population to ensure it accurately measures service quality in that context.

There has been a recognition that culture impacts perceptions and expectations of service quality in a multitude of ways. Zhang et al. (2008) proposed the concept of cultural service personalities. It is defined as *the overall characteristics, tendencies, or desires related to consumer service experiences within a specific culture*. Researchers throughout the world have modified the SERVQUAL scale to customize dimensions that better reflect the specific culture of study. Measurements in these different assessment tools vary in how closely they resemble SERVQUAL (c.f., Othman & Owen, (2001), Al-Tamimi et al. (2003), Karatepe et al. (2005); Kashif & Sarifuddin, 2016). When using SERVQUAL in cross-cultural research, it is important to consider the cultural context and make appropriate modifications or additions to the instrument

Winsted's (1997; 1999) research compiled and summarized the following dimensions based on her cross-cultural research. While some of the dimensions are subsumed within SERVQUAL, others are not. Researchers have proposed additional dimensions that should be demarcated based on their specific importance in other cultures. Winsted's research highlights the importance of considering cultural context when evaluating service quality. Not all dimensions are equally important in every culture; additional dimensions may be relevant depending on the specific context. Winsted proposed the following dimensions:

Authenticity. Authenticity is not directly addressed in SERVQUAL. It could be linked to the trustworthiness and genuineness of service providers, which are critical components of assurance. Customers who perceive a service as authentic feel more assured about its quality and reliability. However, if authenticity refers to being true to promises and delivering services consistently, this would be closely related to reliability. Or if it involves genuine and prompt responses to customer needs, it could be part of responsiveness. If authenticity is about genuinely caring for and providing individualized attention to customers, it can also fit within empathy. As a stand-alone concept, the significance of authenticity in service encounters has been explored by Grandy et al. (2005).

Caring. Caring is directly addressed as a component in a SERVQUAL dimension. Empathy is defined as the ability of service providers to understand and care about customers.

Control. Bateson and Hui (1992) discuss the role of perceived control relating to the density of the physical space and the choice of staying in the environment. Winsted (1999) found,

contrary to the hypothesis, that while control was more important to Japanese than American respondents it was the lowest-rated dimension.

Courtesy. The definition of assurance includes courtesy, including the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to instill trust and confidence. It has been asserted that it should be a separate dimension (Carman, 1990). In Japan, China, South Korea, and other East Asian countries, for example, courtesy is highly valued. This is due to the emphasis on social harmony and respect for elders and authority figures.

Formality. Assurance covers the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Formality can convey professionalism, competence, and respect, which can make customers feel more confident in the service they are receiving. On the other hand, if formality is used to show respect and attention to individual customer needs, it can enhance the perception of empathy. Formality is included in PAKSERV (Kashif & Sarifuddin, 2016), but in their study, it was not found to have an effect.

Friendliness. Empathy entails providing caring and individualized attention to customers, ensuring they feel valued and understood. Friendliness can play a significant role in making customers feel comfortable, appreciated, and well-treated. There are many cultures where friendliness in service interactions is appreciated. However, how friendliness is expressed can differ based on cultural norms and practices. In the US, service providers often express friendliness by showing interest, asking about the customer's preferences, or making personalized recommendations. In other countries, friendliness is shown with respect and formality, which Winsted presents as a separate construct. Friendliness has been studied as an indicator of service quality (c.f. Goodwin & Smith, 1990).

Personalization. When services are personalized, it demonstrates that the company understands and values each customer's unique needs and preferences. Separating personalization and empathy allows for a more nuanced understanding of their respective roles in service quality. Mittal and Lassar (1996) propose SERVQUAL-P to recognize personalization as a stand-alone dimension.

Promptness. Responsiveness specifically addresses promptness. It is the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. The nuance lies in willingness paired with promptness. Time orientation, which refers to the way a culture perceives and values time, significantly influences perceptions of promptness (Hall, 1976). Different cultures have varied approaches to time and promptness.

The PAKSERV model, introduced by Raajpoot in 2004, is a well-cited (297) adaptation of existing service quality frameworks intended for non-Western contexts, particularly focusing on Asian cultures. This model incorporates dimensions that hold cultural significance in these regions, such as respect, personal trust, and attentiveness, alongside traditional service quality dimensions that are often emphasized in Western models. By incorporating these culturally specific elements, the PAKSERV model seeks to deliver a more precise evaluation of service quality perceptions in non-Western countries, thereby enabling service providers to better meet diverse cultural expectations and enhance overall service effectiveness.

While SERVQUAL is a robust and widely used model for measuring service quality, cultural factors can impact its effectiveness. Organizations using SERVQUAL in culturally diverse settings have considered these factors and adapted (localized) the model accordingly to ensure accurate and meaningful assessments of service quality. Tailoring the model to fit cultural contexts has led to better insights and more effective improvements in service delivery. Researchers and

practitioners must consider these cultural nuances when designing and delivering services to ensure they provide a truly high-quality experience for their customers.

ERA OF MODEL INTEGRATION: MERGING SERVQUAL WITH OTHER FRAMEWORKS

Pine and Gilmore (1998,) suggested that an experience is generated "when a company deliberately utilizes services as a platform, and goods as supporting elements, to actively involve individual customers in a manner that results in a remarkable event." This perspective situates the experience within the realm of practitioners while also considering the role of the customer. The SERVQUAL timeline reflects the gradual shift towards recognizing experience as integral to service quality. Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2001) explored how investment in experiential elements can lead to competitive advantages and improved consumer perceptions in the retail industry. They suggested future research explore the role of SERVQUAL as a measure of service quality as it relates to consumer judgment.

Today, businesses understand that providing a positive customer experience is crucial for success and differentiation in the marketplace. Businesses are increasingly designing services with a strong focus on creating positive customer experiences. For example, the study by Yuan and Wu (2008) investigates the connections between experiential marketing, experiential value, and customer satisfaction in the context of hospitality and tourism. They utilize SERVQUAL dimensions in their model of emotional and functional values impact on satisfaction.

Later Developments

While the original SERVQUAL model (reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, responsiveness) remains influential, researchers have identified additional dimensions relevant to contemporary service contexts. Beyond the traditional five dimensions, newer research highlights the importance of customization, innovation, trust, and sustainability. Customers today expect personalized experiences tailored to their individual needs, and they value services that are unique, innovative, and delivered with a strong emphasis on trust. Furthermore, consumers are increasingly drawn to businesses that demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility, making sustainability an increasingly important aspect of service quality.

Modern service quality research goes beyond simply measuring customer satisfaction. Researchers now focus on mapping the entire customer journey, from initial awareness to post-purchase interaction, understanding every touchpoint (interaction) a customer has with a service. This allows for a more nuanced analysis of service quality across different stages and channels. This approach, known as Customer Experience Management (CEM), emphasizes customers' holistic experience with a service, encompassing not just functional aspects but also emotional and psychological elements. By understanding the entire customer journey, businesses can identify areas for improvement and create more seamless and satisfying experiences for their customers. By integrating customer insights and perspectives into the service development process, businesses can create truly relevant and valuable solutions to their target audience. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and engagement, ultimately resulting in a stronger connection between customers and the brand.

The rise of online and digital services has brought about the need for new frameworks to measure service quality in online interactions. E-service quality (Parasuraman et al., 2005) focuses on evaluating key aspects such as website design, responsiveness, security, and ease of use. The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) and automation in service delivery raises new

questions about customer perceptions. How do customers interact with AI-powered chatbots or automated systems? As technology continues to shape service delivery, how to measure an increasingly complex digital experience is crucial for businesses to thrive in this evolving landscape.

Further, in the digital age, measuring and managing service quality involves embracing the power of data. Data can help identify areas for improvement, personalize service offerings, and ensure a more tailored customer experience. Companies also actively employ various methods to gather customer feedback, including online surveys, monitoring social media, and customer reviews. By analyzing this feedback, businesses can gain a deeper understanding of customer needs and preferences, allowing them to adapt and refine their services to meet evolving expectations continuously. For example, McCollin et al. (2011) explore the application of SERVQUAL in the context of process improvement initiatives. The study demonstrates how SERVQUAL can be effectively integrated with Six Sigma methodologies to identify and prioritize areas for service quality enhancement.

Overall, later developments in SERVQUAL literature reflect the evolving nature of service delivery and the need for more comprehensive and customer-centric approaches to measuring and managing service quality.

SERVQUAL IN THE JOURNAL OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION, DISSATISFACTION AND COMPLAINING BEHAVIOR

The *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior* website states that

The primary objective of the Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior, and our biennial conference, is to publish and disseminate cutting-edge research about the antecedents and consequences of satisfying and dissatisfying consumer experiences. The journal seeks to promote theory development in these areas via reporting quantitative and/or qualitative inquiries, as well as conceptual studies within relevant business disciplines. We are NOT a general consumer behavior journal, so the focus of your article MUST be on the antecedents or consequences of satisfying or dissatisfying experiences. If you are thinking of sending in a manuscript, please read through several recent issues and use our archive function to make sure you cite relevant literature that has already appeared in our journal.

As such, there has been interest in SERVQUAL over the years. It's been integrated into empirical studies. Articles have utilized SERVQUAL to measure and analyze consumer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific services or industries. Other research has focused on refining, comparing, and/or integrating SERVQUAL, exploring its limitations and proposing improved or alternative models that provide a more precise measure of satisfaction in specific service settings. Essentially, the journal utilizes SERVQUAL as a valuable tool for advancing the understanding of consumer satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and complaining behavior within various service contexts. Table 5 highlights the key themes explored in SERVQUAL research published within the journal.

Table 5
Representative SERVQUAL articles in the JCS/D&CB

Author	Title	Vol.	Year	SERVQUAL
Patterson, Paul G., and Lester W. Johnson.	Disconfirmation of expectations and the gap model of service quality: an integrated paradigm	6	1993	Comparison of SERVQUAL & Disconfirmation
Tolliver, James M., Robert W. Armstrong, and Daniel F. Coleman.	Service quality measures: A test of convergent validity and trait-method effects	11	1998	SERVQUAL items used to test – convergent validity
Kolodinsky, J., Nam, J., Lee, J., & Drzewiczewski, M.	Degree of Frailty and Elders' Satisfaction with Personal Care Services in a Community Setting	14	2001	Case study: SERVQUAL
Lien-Ti Bei, & Yu-Ching Chiao	An Integrated Model for the Effects of Perceived Product, Perceived Service Quality, and Perceived Price Fairness on Consumer Satisfaction and Loyalty	14	2001	Utilized SERVQUAL to assess service quality role in their integrative model
Hansen, S. W., & Barbara, R. W.	An Empirical Investigation of Complaint Behavior among Church Members	15	2002	Case study: SERVQUAL
McCull, R., Mattsson, J., & Morley, C.	The Effects of Service Guarantees on Service Evaluations During a Voiced Complaint and Service Recovery	18	2005	Used alternative scale to measure service quality
Salegna, G. J., & Goodwin, S. A.	Consumer Loyalty to Service Providers: An Integrated Conceptual Model	18	2005	SERVQUAL mentioned in model development
Katarachia, A.	Measuring Service Quality and Satisfaction in Greek Cooperative Banking: An Exploratory Study	26	2013	SERVPERF better fit for study
Meirovich, G., & Little, L.	The Delineation and Interactions of Normative and Predictive Expectations in Customer Satisfaction and Emotions	26	2013	Normative (SERQUAL) versus Predictive

Harrison-Walker, L.	Organizational and Customer Moderators of Service Recovery on Consumer Forgiveness in Healthcare	35	2022	Partially adapted
Jois, A., Chakrabarti, S., & Audrain-Pontevia, A.	Exploring the Impact of Consumer Satisfaction on the Co-Creation of a Global Knowledge Brand	35	2022	Adapted scale

Research is essential for advancing understanding and driving progress in various fields. Its fundamental role lies in expanding our theoretical knowledge and contributing to a deeper understanding of the world around us. Researchers uncover new insights and refine our understanding of complex phenomena by delving into existing theories, exploring unanswered questions, and testing hypotheses. This process of inquiry leads to innovation and advancements as research challenges established theories sparks creativity, and explores new perspectives. Furthermore, research often has practical implications, leading to the development of more effective strategies, tools, and solutions to address real-world problems. By building on the work of previous scholars and connecting past findings with discoveries, researchers create a more comprehensive theoretical framework, laying the foundation for future studies. Research also plays a crucial role in identifying gaps in current theories, highlighting methodological shortcomings, and addressing inconsistencies in existing knowledge. This process of critique and refinement strengthens theories and refines conceptual models. Finally, research enriches academic discourse and intellectual debates. By sharing findings, insights, and perspectives with the broader scholarly community, researchers stimulate discussions, encourage collaboration, and inspire further research efforts. Investing in research endeavors enhances our understanding of the world and drives intellectual progress, paving the way for future discoveries and developments.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The future of service quality measurement, particularly SERVQUAL, offers several promising research directions. Key areas include adapting SERVQUAL for emerging technologies such as AI, IoT, and virtual/augmented reality, exploring cultural service personalities across regions and industries, and conducting longitudinal studies on evolving service quality expectations in developing economies. There's a growing need to study personalization and customization in services and to potentially integrate a sustainability dimension into SERVQUAL. Developing a comprehensive digital version of SERVQUAL for online service quality across cultures is recommended. Researchers should consider combining SERVQUAL with qualitative methods for deeper cultural insights, assessing cross-cultural service recovery expectations, and adapting it for B2B contexts. Other potential areas include examining AI's influence on cultural biases in service evaluation, using neuroscience to explore cross-cultural differences in service quality responses, and studying generational differences in service expectations. Specific to the JCSDCB readership, future research could examine how specific SERVQUAL dimensions contribute to consumer complaining behavior, further enriching its application and relevance.

These directions aim to improve our understanding of service quality measurement in a globalized, technologically advanced landscape, acknowledging cultural differences.

CONCLUSION

SERVQUAL is a well-established and versatile tool for measuring service quality, but it may not always be the ideal choice. Originally designed for retail and service industries, it might not capture the nuances of sectors like healthcare or education. SERVQUAL is primarily suited for B2C contexts and might not fully address the complexities of B2B relationships. In the realm of online services, its original dimensions may not adequately capture the unique aspects of digital service quality. Moreover, cultural differences can challenge its applicability, as it was developed in a Western context and may not translate well in all cultural settings.

SERVQUAL excels in certain scenarios. Its generic nature allows for cross-industry comparisons, making it valuable for benchmarking. It is adept at gap analysis, identifying customer expectations and perceptions discrepancies. SERVQUAL provides a comprehensive assessment by covering multiple dimensions of service quality, offering a holistic view. Its established validity, backed by extensive testing, adds to its credibility. SERVQUAL also offers customization potential, allowing adaptation to specific contexts. Lastly, its stability makes it suitable for longitudinal studies, enabling service quality tracking over time.

In conclusion, while SERVQUAL is a powerful tool, the specific context, industry, and research objectives should guide the choice of service quality measurement. SERVQUAL remains superior in many cases due to its comprehensiveness and adaptability, but industry-specific alternatives may be more suitable in certain scenarios.

SERVQUAL has stood the test of time, remaining a cornerstone and foundational theory for measuring service quality. Its continued relevance in a rapidly changing service landscape is a testament to its adaptability. By embracing new technologies and data-driven approaches, SERVQUAL continues to be a valuable tool for understanding, measuring, and managing service quality, particularly in in-person service delivery. However, in research, its role is more nuanced. SERVQUAL serves as a starting point for new theoretical developments, and exploring theory-driven paths to expand or tailor it is crucial for enhancing our understanding of the links between service quality and satisfaction.

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