



SERVICE QUALITY GAPS IN OFFLINE RESTAURANTS: AN APPLICATION OF SERVQUAL

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ABSTRACT

Service quality has emerged as a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and competitive advantage in the restaurant industry. As customer expectations continue to evolve, restaurants must consistently deliver high-quality services to retain customers and sustain long-term business performance. The SERVQUAL model provides a widely accepted framework for assessing service quality by examining the gap between customer expectations and perceptions across multiple service dimensions. The present study applies the SERVQUAL model to evaluate service quality gaps in offline restaurant services. Data are collected from customers of restaurants operating through traditional dine-in service channels. The study examines customer expectations and perceptions with respect to key service quality dimensions, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Gap scores are computed by comparing perception and expectation ratings, and paired sample statistical techniques are employed to assess the significance of differences between expected and perceived service performance. The findings are expected to identify areas where service delivery falls short of customer expectations and provide insights for improving customer experience and service effectiveness. The study contributes to the service quality literature by offering empirical evidence on offline restaurant services and provides practical implications for restaurant managers seeking to enhance customer satisfaction and service excellence.

KEYWORDS: SERVQUAL, Service Quality, Offline Restaurants, Customer Expectations, Customer Perceptions, Service Quality Gap.

1. INTRODUCTION

The restaurant industry plays an important role in the service sector by providing customers with food, hospitality, and dining experiences. In an increasingly competitive environment, restaurants are required not only to offer quality food but also to deliver superior service experiences that meet or exceed customer expectations. Service quality has therefore become a critical factor influencing customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth communication, and overall business performance. As customers become more informed and demanding, understanding their expectations and perceptions of service quality has become essential for restaurant managers seeking to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

Unlike tangible products, restaurant services are characterized by intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability. Consequently, customers often evaluate restaurants based on multiple service attributes such as employee behavior, promptness of service, cleanliness, ambience, reliability of service delivery, and personalized attention. The subjective nature of service evaluation makes it important for restaurant managers to understand how customers perceive service performance and whether it aligns with their expectations.

The concept of service quality has received considerable attention in marketing and service management literature. Among the various approaches developed to measure service quality, the SERVQUAL model remains one of the most widely accepted and extensively applied frameworks. The model evaluates service quality by examining the gap between customer expectations and perceptions across five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. By identifying discrepancies between expected and perceived service performance, SERVQUAL enables organizations to recognize areas requiring improvement and develop customer-focused service strategies.

In the context of offline restaurants, customer experiences are shaped primarily through direct interactions with service personnel and the physical service environment. Factors such as cleanliness, seating arrangements, employee courtesy, responsiveness to customer requests, accuracy of service delivery, and personalized attention contribute significantly to customer evaluations of service quality. Failure to meet customer expectations in any of these aspects may result in dissatisfaction and reduced customer loyalty. Therefore, measuring service quality gaps is essential for understanding customer concerns and improving overall service effectiveness.

Although several studies have examined service quality in hospitality and restaurant settings, service expectations and perceptions may vary across geographical locations, customer segments, and business environments. Continuous assessment of service quality is therefore necessary to identify evolving customer expectations and emerging service deficiencies. The present study applies the SERVQUAL model to assess service quality gaps in offline restaurant services by comparing customer expectations and perceptions across the five SERVQUAL dimensions. Through the identification of significant service quality gaps,



the study seeks to provide insights that can assist restaurant managers in enhancing customer experiences and improving service delivery performance.

The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on restaurant service quality while offering practical recommendations for improving customer satisfaction and service excellence in offline restaurant environments.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The present study is primarily grounded in the SERVQUAL model developed by A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml, and Leonard L. Berry. SERVQUAL conceptualizes service quality as the discrepancy between customer expectations of a service and their perceptions of the actual service received. According to the model, customers evaluate service quality by comparing expected performance with perceived performance across five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. A negative gap indicates that perceived service performance falls short of customer expectations, whereas a positive gap suggests that service delivery exceeds customer expectations.

The SERVQUAL framework has been extensively applied across service industries, including hospitality, healthcare, banking, education, and tourism. Within the restaurant industry, the model provides a systematic approach to identifying service deficiencies and understanding customer evaluations of service encounters. Since restaurant services involve direct interaction between customers and service providers, assessing service quality through customer perceptions and expectations is particularly relevant for improving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The study is also supported by Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory, proposed by Richard L. Oliver. The theory suggests that customers form expectations before experiencing a service and subsequently compare actual performance with those expectations. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from the degree of confirmation or disconfirmation between expected and perceived performance. Positive disconfirmation occurs when performance exceeds expectations, while negative disconfirmation arises when performance falls below expectations. The SERVQUAL gap approach reflects this theoretical perspective by measuring differences between expectations and perceptions.

By integrating SERVQUAL and Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory, the study provides a robust framework for evaluating service quality in offline restaurant settings. The combination of these theories enables the identification of service quality gaps and facilitates a deeper understanding of customer evaluations of restaurant services.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) remains one of the most widely used frameworks for measuring service quality across service industries. The model conceptualizes service quality as the gap between customer expectations and perceptions and evaluates service performance across five dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The authors argued that customers assess service quality by comparing actual service performance with their prior expectations, making gap analysis a useful tool for identifying service deficiencies.

Stevens, Knutson, and Patton (1995) adapted the SERVQUAL framework specifically for the restaurant industry through the development of DINESERV. Their study demonstrated that customers evaluate restaurant service quality based on both tangible aspects such as physical facilities and intangible aspects such as employee behavior and responsiveness. The authors concluded that service quality significantly influences customer satisfaction and repeat patronage in restaurant settings.

Namkung and Jang (2007) examined the relationship between service quality attributes and customer satisfaction in restaurants. Their findings revealed that service quality dimensions significantly affect customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The study emphasized that maintaining high standards of service delivery is essential for enhancing customer loyalty and restaurant performance.

Ryu, Lee, and Kim (2012) investigated the influence of the physical environment, food quality, and service quality on customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions in restaurants. The study found that service quality plays a critical role in shaping overall dining experiences and contributes positively to customer satisfaction and revisit intentions.

Marković, Raspor, and Šegarić (2010) applied the SERVQUAL model in hospitality services and reported significant gaps between customer expectations and perceptions across various service quality dimensions. Their findings highlighted the importance of continuous monitoring of service quality to identify areas requiring managerial improvement and enhance customer experiences.

Joung, Choi, and Wang (2016) explored customer perceptions of restaurant service quality and confirmed that reliability and responsiveness are among the most influential dimensions affecting customer satisfaction. The study suggested that restaurant managers should focus on improving service consistency and promptness to meet customer expectations effectively.

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that service quality remains a crucial determinant of customer satisfaction and loyalty in restaurant settings. While previous research has established the usefulness of SERVQUAL in assessing service quality, continuous evaluation of expectation–perception gaps remain necessary due to evolving customer expectations and increasing competition within the restaurant industry.

4. RESEARCH GAP

Previous studies have extensively applied the SERVQUAL model to evaluate service quality in hospitality and restaurant settings. However, customer expectations and perceptions of service quality continue to evolve due to changing customer preferences and increasing competition among restaurants. Moreover, service quality assessments in offline restaurant environments

require continuous examination to identify dimensions where service performance does not meet customer expectations. Therefore, there is a need to assess service quality gaps in offline restaurant services and identify areas requiring managerial attention for service improvement.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess customer expectations and perceptions of service quality in offline restaurants using the SERVQUAL model.
2. To identify and analyze service quality gaps between customer expectations and perceptions across the SERVQUAL dimensions in offline restaurants.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Aspect	Details
Research design	Descriptive research design
Study focus	Evaluation of service quality in offline restaurants
Data source	Primary data from restaurant customers
Data collection tool	Structured questionnaire
Framework used	SERVQUAL model
Service quality dimensions	Tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy
Response scale	Five-point Likert scale
Measurement approach	Customer expectations and perceptions measured for each dimension
Gap score formula	$P - E$ (Perception score minus Expectation score)
Interpretation of gap scores	Negative score = service below expectations; Positive score = service above expectations
Data analysis methods	Descriptive statistics, mean scores, gap analysis, paired sample t-test

7. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Customer Expectations of Service Quality in Offline Restaurants

Sl.No	Statement	Mean
1	An excellent restaurant should be located in a place that is easy to access in person.	4.2231
2	An excellent restaurant should provide error-free orders and services during in-person visits.	4.1077
3	An excellent restaurant should have an appealing and welcoming ambiance.	4.1026
4	An excellent restaurant should provide convenient parking facilities or services such as valet parking.	4.0667
5	An excellent restaurant should consistently provide food with great taste.	4.0333
6	An excellent restaurant should offer multiple reliable payment options for customers.	3.9795
7	Employees of an excellent restaurant should be attentive and respond promptly to customer needs and order modifications.	3.9872
8	Employees of an excellent restaurant should be polite and professional in their interactions with customers.	3.9590
9	An excellent restaurant should provide services that suit families, individuals, and groups.	3.9487
10	An excellent restaurant should serve meals within an acceptable waiting time after an order is placed.	3.9436
11	An excellent restaurant should offer a variety of services such as dine-in, takeaway, and catering.	3.9359
12	An excellent restaurant should provide a menu with clear descriptions and relevant images that are easy for customers to understand.	3.9179
13	An excellent restaurant should execute events according to customers' specified instructions.	3.9128
14	An excellent restaurant should assure customers of high-quality service.	3.8949
15	Employees of an excellent restaurant should follow proper hygiene and food handling practices.	3.8615

Source: Computed by researcher using SPSS

Interpretation

Customers reported relatively high expectations for all service quality attributes, with mean scores exceeding 3.80. The highest expectations were associated with accessibility of restaurant location (Mean = 4.2231), error-free service delivery (Mean =



4.1077), and appealing ambiance (Mean = 4.1026). This indicates that customers place considerable importance on convenience, reliability, and the physical dining environment when evaluating offline restaurant services.

Table 2: Customer Perceptions of Service Quality in Offline Restaurants

Sl.No	Statement	Mean
1	Restaurant's location is easy to access in person.	4.2154
2	Various payment mechanisms are available and are reliable to make payments.	4.1590
3	The restaurant staff is polite and professional.	4.0256
4	The time between placing an order and receiving the meal is acceptable.	3.9615
5	The restaurant staff follows good hygiene practices including food handling.	3.9462
6	The restaurant's services are well-suited for families, individuals and groups.	3.9462
7	The restaurant offers a wide range of services, including dine-in, takeaway and catering.	3.9410
8	The restaurant consistently delivers great taste.	3.9231
9	Restaurant assures high quality of service.	3.9231
10	Restaurants have an appealing and welcoming ambiance.	3.9205
11	Restaurants rarely make errors with orders or service when visited in person.	3.8718
12	The staff is attentive and responds quickly to my needs and any changes in orders are considered.	3.8641
13	The menu is designed with relating images to suit common persons understanding.	3.8641
14	Restaurants offer special services like valet parking to enhance parking convenience.	3.8410
15	Events are well executed as per specified instructions.	3.7846

Source: Computed by researcher using SPSS

Interpretation

The perception scores indicate that customers generally hold favorable views regarding offline restaurant services. The highest-rated attributes were accessibility of restaurant location (Mean = 4.2154), availability of reliable payment options (Mean = 4.1590), and staff professionalism (Mean = 4.0256). Lower perception scores were observed for event execution (Mean = 3.7846) and parking-related services (Mean = 3.8410), suggesting potential areas for service enhancement.

Table 3: SERVQUAL Gap Analysis (Perception – Expectation)

Sl.No	Statement	Expectation (E)	Perception (P)	Gap (P-E)
1	Various payment mechanisms are available and are reliable to make payments.	3.9795	4.1590	+0.1795
2	The restaurant staff follows good hygiene practices including food handling.	3.8615	3.9462	+0.0847
3	The restaurant staff is polite and professional.	3.9590	4.0256	+0.0666
4	Restaurant assures high quality of service.	3.8949	3.9231	+0.0282
5	The time between placing an order and receiving the meal is acceptable.	3.9436	3.9615	+0.0179
6	The restaurant offers a wide range of services, including dine-in, takeaway and catering.	3.9359	3.9410	+0.0051
7	Restaurant's location is easy to access in person.	4.2231	4.2154	-0.0077
8	The restaurant's services are well-suited for families, individuals and groups.	3.9487	3.9462	-0.0025
9	The menu is designed with relating images to suit common persons understanding.	3.9179	3.8641	-0.0538
10	The restaurant consistently delivers great taste.	4.0333	3.9231	-0.1102
11	The staff is attentive and responds quickly to my needs and any changes in orders are considered.	3.9872	3.8641	-0.1231
12	Events are well executed as per specified instructions.	3.9128	3.7846	-0.1282
13	Restaurants have an appealing and welcoming ambiance.	4.1026	3.9205	-0.1821
14	Restaurants offer special services like valet parking to enhance parking convenience.	4.0667	3.8410	-0.2257
15	Restaurants rarely make errors with orders or service when visited in person.	4.1077	3.8718	-0.2359

Source: Computed by researcher using SPSS

Interpretation

The SERVQUAL gap analysis reveals both positive and negative service quality gaps. Positive gaps were observed for payment reliability (+0.1795), hygiene practices (+0.0847), and staff professionalism (+0.0666), indicating that restaurants exceeded customer expectations in these areas. Conversely, the largest negative gaps were identified for error-free service delivery (-0.2359), parking convenience (-0.2257), and restaurant ambiance (-0.1821), suggesting that customer expectations were not fully met. Overall, the findings indicate that while restaurants perform well in operational and staff-related aspects, improvements are required in reliability and tangible service attributes to reduce service quality gaps and enhance customer satisfaction.

Table 4: Dimension-wise Gap Analysis

Dimension	Average Gap
Tangibles	-0.1385
Reliability	-0.0282
Responsiveness	-0.0129
Assurance	+0.0009
Empathy	-0.0449

Interpretation

Tangibles recorded the highest negative gap, indicating that customers' expectations regarding physical facilities and supporting services exceeded actual service performance. Assurance exhibited a marginally positive gap, suggesting that restaurants generally met customer expectations related to trust, hygiene, and service quality.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference between customer expectations and perceptions of service quality in offline restaurants.

H₁: There is a significant difference between customer expectations and perceptions of service quality in offline restaurants.

Table 4: Paired Sample t-Test Results for Service Quality Gaps

Sl. No.	Service Attribute	Mean Difference (P-E)	t	Sig.
1	Location accessibility	-0.0077	-0.152	0.879
2	Parking convenience	-0.2256	-3.986	0.000*
3	Restaurant ambiance	-0.1821	-3.313	0.001*
4	Error-free service	-0.2359	-4.210	0.000*
5	Reliable payment mechanisms	+0.1795	3.570	0.000*
6	Staff professionalism	+0.0667	1.339	0.181
7	Staff responsiveness	-0.1231	-2.391	0.017*
8	Waiting time	+0.0180	0.370	0.712
9	Hygiene practices	+0.0846	1.421	0.156
10	Great taste	-0.1103	-2.131	0.034*
11	High quality service	+0.0282	0.507	0.612
12	Variety of services	+0.0051	0.098	0.922
13	Menu clarity	-0.0539	-0.944	0.346
14	Services for families and groups	-0.0026	-0.042	0.966
15	Event execution	-0.1282	-2.355	0.019*

Source: Computed by researcher using SPSS

*Significant at 5% level.

Interpretation

A paired sample t-test was conducted to determine whether significant differences existed between customer expectations and perceptions of offline restaurant services. The results revealed statistically significant differences for parking convenience ($p < 0.001$), restaurant ambiance ($p = 0.001$), error-free service delivery ($p < 0.001$), staff responsiveness ($p = 0.017$), food taste ($p = 0.034$), and event execution ($p = 0.019$).

Among these attributes, error-free service delivery recorded the largest negative mean difference ($P-E = -0.2359$), indicating that restaurants were unable to fully meet customer expectations regarding service accuracy. Significant negative gaps were also observed for parking convenience and restaurant ambiance, suggesting shortcomings in tangible service attributes. In contrast, reliable payment mechanisms exhibited a significant positive gap ($P-E = +0.1795$), indicating that restaurants exceeded customer expectations in this area.

For the remaining service attributes, no statistically significant differences were observed between customer expectations and perceptions. This suggests that restaurants were generally successful in meeting customer expectations with respect to staff professionalism, waiting time, hygiene practices, service quality assurance, service variety, menu clarity, and suitability for different customer groups.



8. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. Customers reported high expectations and perceptions across all service quality attributes, showing the importance of service quality in offline restaurants.
2. The highest expectations were for location accessibility, error-free service delivery, and restaurant ambiance.
3. The highest perception scores were for location accessibility, reliable payment mechanisms, and staff professionalism.
4. Gap analysis showed both positive and negative gaps. The largest negative gaps were for error-free service delivery, parking convenience, and restaurant ambiance.
5. Positive gaps were found for payment reliability, hygiene practices, and staff professionalism.
6. The paired sample t-test showed significant differences between expectations and perceptions for parking convenience, restaurant ambiance, error-free service delivery, staff responsiveness, food taste, and event execution.
7. Overall, offline restaurants generally meet customer expectations, but improvements are needed in some tangible and reliability-related service attributes.

9. SUGGESTIONS

1. Restaurants should strengthen service accuracy and order management processes to minimize errors in service delivery and improve customer satisfaction.
2. Greater attention should be given to enhancing parking facilities and customer convenience, particularly in locations where accessibility and parking availability influence dining decisions.
3. Restaurant managers should continuously improve the physical environment and ambiance to create a more appealing dining experience.
4. Employee training programs should focus on responsiveness and prompt handling of customer requests, complaints, and special requirements.
5. Restaurants should maintain their strengths in payment reliability, hygiene standards, and staff professionalism, as these attributes currently exceed customer expectations.
6. Periodic assessment of customer expectations and perceptions should be conducted to identify emerging service quality gaps and support continuous improvement initiatives.

Conclusion

The present study applied the SERVQUAL model to assess service quality gaps in offline restaurants by comparing customer expectations and perceptions across selected service attributes. The findings revealed that customers generally hold high expectations regarding restaurant services and perceive restaurant performance positively across most dimensions.

The gap analysis identified both strengths and areas requiring improvement. Restaurants performed particularly well in payment reliability, hygiene practices, and staff professionalism, where perceptions exceeded customer expectations. However, significant negative gaps were observed for error-free service delivery, parking convenience, restaurant ambiance, staff responsiveness, and event execution, indicating that these aspects require managerial attention.

The study demonstrates the usefulness of the SERVQUAL model in identifying specific service quality deficiencies and strengths within offline restaurant operations. By addressing the identified gaps and sustaining areas of strong performance, restaurant managers can enhance customer satisfaction, strengthen customer loyalty, and improve overall service quality. The findings contribute to the understanding of service quality in offline restaurant settings and provide practical insights for service improvement and customer experience management.

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