

## **Customer Expectation and Perception Towards Retail Chain: An Evaluative Study**

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**Abstract:** *Due to rapid globalization the demand of customers has been changed. Marketers are following different strategies to attract the customer for the long time that leads to customer satisfaction. In recent times the retail market has become more popular around the world and Bangladesh is no exception. The popularity of the retail market is increasing rapidly in Bangladesh. It is not only expanding but also moving in different dimensions. This paper is an attempt to identify the customer expectation and perception towards retail chains in Bangladesh. A structured questionnaire has been designed and 85 respondents are being chosen for the paper. Service gap has been found out by using the SERVQUAL model. SPSS version-20 has been used to analyze the data. This paper summarizes that there is a gap between customer expectation and customer perception towards organized retail chains in our country.*

**Keywords:** *Customer Expectation, Customer Perception, Service Quality, Retail Chain, SERVQUAL model*

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### **I. Introduction**

Retailing services have become very important in today's economy. For example, the retailing industry plays a crucial role in the overall economy of India and contributes 14 to 15 percent to their GDP. Over the last fifteen years, the Indian retailing industry has been experiencing phenomenal growth with major retailers expanding to broader South Asia and beyond. Retailers have positioned themselves for all kinds of customer needs and income levels, especially the growing young working population. Many retailers have been upgrading themselves by relocating to upcoming modern malls and shopping centers, providing superior shopping atmosphere and experience especially in the urban and semi urban centers. The retail sectors in India embrace the marketing orientation perspective basically applicable to any retailer. Because, consumers are looking for higher values and are seeking a fair return in goods and services for their hard-earned money and scarce time. They want products or services that meet their specific needs or wants and that are offered at competitive prices. Firms should attempt to find the most desirable balance between providing benefits to consumers and keeping their costs down. Consumers expect a good value in the form of reasonable price, selection, quality and service. In this, the marketing decisions revolving around the target market, product assortment, services and store atmosphere, store activities and experience, procurement, price decisions, discounts, communications and location decisions which are very critical to a retailer's success should be emphasized. Retail trade has emerged as one of the largest industries contributing to employment generation, revenue generation, increased turnover and many more sectors.

Thus, like any other service industries, the retail industry of Bangladesh also needs the attention of practitioners to ensure high service quality. In today's retailing market, consumer shopping behavior, customer satisfaction and customer retention have become major determinants of success, which can be ensured by service quality offered by the retail stores (Thenmozhi&Dhanapal 2011). Customers evaluate retail services through the comparison of perceived services and the services they actually receive (Levy & Weitz, 2005). Thus, the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of Customers in the retail industry depends on the service quality. Past researchers have agreed that delivery of high service quality is a vital strategy for creating competitive advantage in the retailing industry (Hummel & Savitt, 1988; Reichheld & Sasser 1990). Till now service quality has been a prime focus for study in several service sectors, i.e. banks, repair and maintenance services, telephone companies, physicians, hospitals, hotels, academic institutions, etc. But very few research initiatives are taken so far to explore the service quality of these superstores in terms of customer expectation and actual service quality, particularly no specific study on such research areas is found in terms of Bangladesh. That's why this study aims to compare the customers' perceptions and expectations of services offered by superstores in Bangladesh and find out the service gap by applying the SERVQUAL model. With the increased growth in retailing through superstores more urban dwellers are entering as customers of the superstores. So, the initiative taken in the current study will

definitely facilitate the superstore managers to devise their strategies to enhance continuous improvement in service quality and thus obtain satisfied and loyal customers, which has been a major concern in other service industries for a long time.

## **II. Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to find out the service gap, i.e. the gap between the expectations and perceptions of the customers about the service rendered by the superstores.

Specific objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the expectations of customers regarding service quality in the retail chain of Bangladesh.
2. To find out the perception of customers regarding service quality in the retail chain of Bangladesh.
3. To explore the gap between the expected and actual service quality in the retail chain of Bangladesh.

## **III. Literature Review**

Azhaganand Nagarajan (2011) analyzed that “most of the customers prefer Organized Retail sector because of more Tangibles and Empathy towards its customers. In order to retain and attract new customers, the organized retail sector should improve customer’s service level and should provide assurance towards its customer.” Singh (2013) stated that “In retailing perceived service quality is having a significant influence on purchasing and repurchasing decisions, positive word of mouth as well as on complaining behavior in retailing”

William and Prabakar (2012) concluded that “The customer perception of retail service quality is an important segment to the emerging and the existing retailers in the market as the study reveals that perception of service quality influenced by the various nature with various customers even some of the general factors like Personal interaction, physical aspects are the dimensions on of the customer perception remains constant and common to all the customer on a majority basis so the retail outlets have to frame their own strategies In order to attract the customers on a longer basis”

Kumar and Barani (2012) said that “service quality has long been accepted as the most basic marketing tool for retailers to differentiate their retail offers, create competitive advantage and to enhance the customers’ shopping experience. Nonetheless, maintaining excellent service quality within the stores is no simple task”

Dineshkumar and Vikkraman (2012) found in their study that “organized retail outlets provide better quality of service, product range as compared to the unorganized retail outlets. Most of the customers are satisfied with the quality of service provided by the organized retail outlets.”

### **Service Quality**

Service quality is defined as what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for” rather than “what the supplier puts in (Ducker, 1991). In some earlier studies, service quality has been defined to the extent where the service fulfills the needs or expectation of the customers (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990; Dotchin & Oakland, 1994). While Zeithaml et al. (1996) has conceptualized service quality as the overall impression of customers towards the service weakness or supremacy. Therefore service quality frequently has been conceptualized as the difference between the perceived services expected performance and perceived service actual performance (Bloemer et al., 1999; Kara et al., 2005).

Parasuraman et al. (1988) introduced the SERVQUAL model to measure service quality including 22 items in five dimensions: reliability, tangible, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These dimensions have specific service characteristic link to the expectation of customers. The SERVQUAL scale was developed in the marketing context and this was supported by the Marketing Science Institute (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Even though this model as an instrument has been used in various studies in across industries, the SERVQUAL has received many criticisms from other scholars (e.g., Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Brown et al., 1993). However, there are many researchers who opposed the use of SERVQUAL to measure service quality due to the industry characteristics differences. Other researches confirmed that SERVQUAL instrument is applicable in tourism industry (Fick & Ritchie, 1991; Yuan et al., 2005; Shaikh & Khan, 2011).

### **Customer Satisfaction**

In close connection with perceived service quality is customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is defined as the balancing of customer expectations against the perception of services delivered by the company (Oliver, 1996). The difference between the two constructs is that service quality often refers to concrete quality attributes, like friendliness and assurance, whereas customer satisfaction often refers to the service of a provider as an entity (Bruhn & Grund, 2000). According to Cronin *et al.* (2000), satisfaction with a service provider is both an evaluative and an emotion-based response to a service encounter. This means that two sets of items can be used to measure satisfaction: an evaluative set of satisfaction measures also referred to as cognitive measures and an emotion-based set including such items as enjoyment, surprise, interest, and

anger among others. For the purpose of this study, satisfaction is posited as having both a cognitive component and an affective component. The cognitive component (referred to as “perceived service quality”) refers to a customer’s evaluation of a series of service attributes that constitute a service performance. The emotional component (referred to as “emotional satisfaction”) consists of such emotions as anger, contentment, happiness, pleasure, irritation, and disappointment. The concept of “consumption emotion” refers to the set of such emotional responses elicited specifically during consumption experiences (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Consumption emotions have been conceptualized as positive emotions and negative emotions (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005). Edvardsson (2005) concluded that knowledge about the drivers and the consequences of emotional reactions elicited during service experience facilitates better management of service quality. Liljander and Strandvik (1997) contended that consumption emotions represent only one of many variables that influence satisfaction in certain contexts such as hotel and restaurant services whereas emotions experienced by consumers account for the greater part of service evaluation in other contexts such as concert performances, sports spectacles, and cinema experiences.

### **SERVQUAL Model and Service Gap**

The SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) was adapted for measuring service quality. As mentioned earlier, there are five dimensions of service quality according to SERVQUAL model. The model contained 22-item instruments which measured customers’ expectations (E) and perceptions (P) in five rater dimensions of service quality (see Table 1). Thus in total 44 statements were included in the questionnaire, one set for measuring the expectation and the other one for measuring the actual perception of service quality provided by superstores. The answer format was a 5-point ‘Likert’ scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A customer will be satisfied only when his/her expectations will be met, so in the year 1988 Parasuraman’s et al developed a model to measure the expectation & perception towards any service, which is named as a SERVQUAL model. In the context of retail service the model is based on following five dimensions:-

1. Reliability dimension is concerned with the store’s ability to perform the service accurately and dependably.
2. Responsiveness dimension is related with the employees’ willingness to help customers and provide prompt services.
3. Assurance dimension includes Employees’ knowledge, courtesy and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
4. Empathy dimension is related with Caring, individualized attention given to customers or the ease of access, approachability and effort taken to understand customers’ requirements.
5. Tangibles dimension is all about the appearance of the physical facilities and material relayed at retail outlet.

The negative gap score between the customers’ perception & expectation reveals lacunas in service & helps retailer to improve the service which enhances the customers’ satisfaction.

Gap1: The discrepancy between customers’ expectations and management’s Perceptions of these expectations.

Gap2: The discrepancy between management’s perceptions of customers’ expectations and service quality specifications.

Gap 3: The discrepancy between service quality specifications and actual service delivery.

Gap 4: The discrepancy between actual service delivery and what is communicated to customers about it.

Gap 5: The discrepancy between customer’s expected service and perceived service delivered.

The first four gaps contribute to Gap 5, that is, the gap between customer expectations and customer perceptions of service received- and it is this last gap which has been the main focus of this research

### **SCOPE OF STUDY**

Identifying service quality is essential for retailing which ultimately derives the customer satisfaction, so in this view scope of study is wide & valuable. The level of dissatisfaction will lead retailer to take corrective actions.

## **IV. Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The primary purpose of this research is to identify the customers’ expectation & perception towards organized retail sector and find out the level of customer satisfaction. Therefore descriptive research design is used to serve the purpose.

**Area of the Study**

The research has been conducted among the customers of organized retail outlets in Chittagong i.e Meena bazar, Agora, & Swapno. These are more popular in Chittagong city.

**Research Approach**

To collect Primary data structured questionnaire was designed which was divided under two heads i.e. demographics & service quality. In first part respondents were asked to reveal their personal characteristics i.e. gender, age, education, income & occupation. In second part respondents were asked to evaluate parameters of service quality on a 5 point scale, separately for their expectation & perception.

**Sampling**

The size of the sample was 85 & Convenience method was adopted for sampling.

**Time Frame of Study**

The study was conducted during the period November 2015 to January 2016

**Analytical Tools**

For analysis and interpretation Arithmetic mean & z-test were applied

**V. Analysis & Interpretations**

**Table-1:** Demography and socio economic characteristics of the responses of the Respondent, Sample size (n)=85

Particulars	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Male	55	65
	Female	30	35
<b>Education</b>	Intermediate	15	18
	Graduate	45	53
	Post Graduate	15	18
	Professional	10	11
<b>Age Group</b>	Below 25 years	15	18
	25-35yrs	35	41
	36-50 yrs	20	23
	51-60 yrs	15	18
<b>Monthly Income</b>	Less Than Tk. 30,000	10	11
	Tk. 30,001 - Tk.50,000	10	11
	Tk. 50,001 - Tk.80,000	30	36
	Tk. 80,001 - Tk.100000	20	24
	Above Tk. 100000	15	18
<b>Average Monthly Purchase at Organized Retail Outlet</b>	Less Than Tk. 3,000	10	11
	Tk. 3,001 - Tk.5,000	25	30
	Tk. 5,001 - Tk.8,000	25	30
	Tk. 8,001 - Tk.10,000	15	18
	Above Tk. 10,000	10	11

Source: Calculated by researcher

As per shown in table 1, Demography and socio economic characteristics of the responses of the Respondent, were classified according to their gender, education, age, monthly income & average monthly purchase from organized retail outlet. Out of total respondents 65% are male & rests are female. Majority of respondents are graduate (53%) & 41% respondents belong to the age group of 25 to 35 years. 36% of respondents have their monthly income in the range of Tk. 50,001 to Rs. 80,000 and 24% respondents have their monthly income from Rs. 80,001 to Rs. 1,00000. Majority of respondents (30%) spend Tk. 3001 to Tk. 5000 & Tk. 5001-Tk.8000 of their monthly budget towards their purchase in organized retail store.

**Customers' Expectation & Perception towards Service Quality**

This part included analysis on the basis of five factors of service quality i.e. tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy based on Parasuraman et al. (1988) SERVQUAL Model. Data explored customer's expectation and perception levels towards service quality of Organized Retail Outlet.

**Table-2:** Customer's Expectation & Perception towards Reliability Dimension

Items	Level of Expectation	Level of Perception	Mean Quality Gap Score=(P-E)
	Mean	Mean	
Retail outlets provide you service as promised	4.2118	4.1059	-0.1059

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Retail outlets Perform the service at right time	4.6000	3.7900	-0.81
Dependability in handling the customers' problems	4.5059	4.0824	-0.4235
Retail outlet always has the merchandise available when customer wants it	4.5900	4.1058	-0.4842
Services are error free	4.4000	3.8000	-0.6
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>	<b>4.4635</b>	<b>3.9788</b>	<b>-0.4847</b>

Source: Generated by researcher

From the table 2, it has been observed that there is a gap (-0.4847) between the expectation and perception of retail outlet services with respect to reliability dimension. Regarding expectation, the highest mean and the lowest is (M =4.6000, M=4.2118). On the other hand, regarding perception, the highest and the lowest mean is (M =4.1059, M =3.8000). It is also realized that all mean gap scores are negative which exposes the inadequacy of retail outlets towards reliability dimension. The overall mean gap is (-0.4847), which shows that the retail chains are incapable to accomplish the promised services.

**Table-3: Customer's Expectation & Perception towards Responsiveness Dimension**

Items	Level of Expectation	Level of Perception	Mean Quality Gap Score=(P-E)
	Mean	Mean	
Employees of A Retail Outlet tell exactly when services will be provided	4.4235	3.9059	-0.5176
Employees of A Retail Outlet gives me prompt service	4.5058	3.9059	-0.5999
Employees of A Retail Outlet are willing to help me	4.6000	3.9882	-0.6118
Employees of A Retail Outlet are never too busy to respond to my request.	4.6941	3.9176	-0.7765
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>	<b>4.5559</b>	<b>3.9294</b>	<b>-0.62645</b>

Source: Generated by researcher

It is shown from table 3 that all the parameters under responsiveness dimension customers' expectation are above 4 points which means expectation is very high, but situation is reverse for perception level where the mean of customer perception is lower than the mean of customer expectation and all are above 3.5 and less than 4. It is also seen that majority mean quality gap scores are negative. The overall mean quality gap score is (-0.62645) which shows that customers are not getting proper services.

**Table-4: Customer's Expectation & Perception towards Assurance Dimension**

Items	Level of Expectation	Level of Perception	Mean Quality Gap Score=(P-E)
	Mean	Mean	
The behavior of employees in Retail Outlet instill confidence in customers	4.4118	3.8000	-0.6118
Making customers feel safe in their transactions	4.6941	4.0000	-0.6941
Employees in Retail Outlet are consistently courteous with customers	3.8941	3.6941	-0.2
Employees in Retail Outlet have the knowledge to answer my question.	4.2941	3.8941	-0.4
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>	<b>4.3235</b>	<b>3.8471</b>	<b>-0.47647</b>

Source: Generated by researcher

It can be seen from the table 4 that all the parameters under assurance dimension customers' expectation are above 4 points which means expectation is very high, but situation is reverse for perception level where the mean of customer perception is lower than the mean of customer expectation and all are above 3.5 and less than 4. It is also understood that all mean gap scores are negative which reveals the inadequacy of retail outlets towards assurance dimensions. The overall mean quality gap score is (-0.47647) which shows that employees of the retail outlets don't have enough knowledge to answer customer questions.

**Table-5: Customer Expectation & Perception towards Empathy Dimension**

Items	Level of	Level of	Mean Quality Gap Score=(P-
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	Expectation	Perception	E)
	Mean	Mean	
Providing customers with individual attention	4.7176	4.1059	-0.6117
A Retail Outlet has employees who give me individual attention.	4.6118	3.7059	-0.9059
Having the customers' best interest at heart	4.4000	3.9059	-0.4941
Understanding the customers' requirements	4.0941	3.8000	-0.2941
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>	<b>4.4559</b>	<b>3.8794</b>	<b>-0.5764</b>

Source: Generated by researcher

Table 5 shows that all the parameters under empathy dimension customers' expectation are above 4 points which means expectation is very high, but situation is reverse for perception level where the mean of customer perception is lower than the mean of customer expectation and all are above 3.5 and less than 4. It is also seen that all mean quality gap scores are negative which reveals the inefficiency of retail outlets towards empathy dimension. The overall mean quality gap score is (-0.5764) which shows deficiency in efforts taken by employees in understanding customers' requirements.

**Table-6: Customer Expectation & Perception towards Tangibles Dimension**

Items	Level of Expectation	Level of Perception	Mean Quality Gap Score=(P-E)
	Mean	Mean	
A Retail Outlet has modern looking equipment	4.6000	4.0000	-0.6
A Retail outlet's physical facilities are visually appealing.	4.8000	3.8118	-0.9882
A Retail outlet's employees are neat and clean.	4.5176	3.8941	-0.6235
Convenient parking for customers	4.4118	4.0000	-0.4118
A Retail outlet has convenient business hours.	4.5176	3.8824	-0.6352
<b>Overall Mean Score</b>	<b>4.5694</b>	<b>3.9315</b>	<b>-0.70574</b>

Source: Generated by researcher

From the table 6, it has been observed that there is a gap (-0.70574) between the expectation and perception of retail chain services with respect to tangibles dimension. Regarding expectation, the highest and the lowest mean is (M =4.8000, M=4.4118). On the other hand, regarding perception, the highest and the lowest mean is (M =4.000, M =3.8118). The overall mean gap between the expectation and perception of retail chain services with respect to tangibles dimension is (-0.70574), which shows that the retail chains cannot perform the promised services to satisfy the customers.

**Hypothesis Testing**

From the above analysis it is found that, there is a negative difference between customer expectation and customer perception for 5 dimensions which leads to the customer dissatisfaction, still the significance of difference between mean scores should be identified. Therefore, it should necessary to test the hypothesis related to the dimension of service quality of retail chain in Bangladesh. Under the construction of methodology and consider the literature review hypothesis related to the attributes of service quality dimension is designed by the following aspects, i.e.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of expectation and perception for any attributes.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant difference between the mean scores of expectation and perception for any attributes.

**Table-7: Hypothesis Testing**

Attributes		Mean	S.D	t-values	Sig(2tailed)	Result
Reliability	Expectation	4.4635	0.22085	12.492	.000	Significant
	Perception	3.9788	0.29604			
Responsiveness	Expectation	4.5559	0.26552	14.926	.000	Significant
	Perception	3.9294	0.39643			
Assurance	Expectation	4.3235	0.36151	10.876	.000	Significant
	Perception	3.8471	0.36412			
Empathy	Expectation	4.4559	0.36632	11.727	.000	Significant
	Perception	3.8794	0.41835			
Tangibles	Expectation	4.5694	0.27690	12.848	.000	Significant

	Perception	3.9176	0.39315			
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From the table 6 it is seen that the significant value is 0.000 which means the null hypothesis may be rejected that proves there is a significant difference between customer expectation and customer perception regarding the dimensions on retail chain services in Chittagong.

### VI. Suggestions

Organized retail outlets of Chittagong can take following actions to reduce the mean quality gap score:-

1. Retail outlets should adopt the efficient inventory management system so that customers can find the merchandise available at the time of requirement very easily.
2. Employees of retail outlets should be trained to handle the customers' complaints effectively. Proper training must develop the skills of employees in Retail outlets.
3. Employees of retail outlets should have sufficient knowledge about products available in store so that they can answer any query of customers.
4. The Retail outlets should try and focus on the specific demands of its customers. This will help it to differentiate itself from the others and will provide customers with better satisfaction.
5. Adequate publicity material should be available to customers. This material should contain relevant and accurate information about the facilities available at the retail outlet.. Particular attention should be given to the appearance and quality of such communication material.
6. Employees should receive proper training on professional communication with customers. Employees should be encouraged to give personal attention to customers by addressing them by name whenever and wherever possible.
7. Each retail outlet should have an employee whose sole responsibility is to handle customer service problems and attend to customer queries. This will avoid situations where customers have to wait for the responsible person when there are problems which need to be resolved immediately.
8. Retail outlets managers should reward employees' performance and reinforce managers' expectations on a regular basis. This will ensure that employees are motivated and always willing to deliver excellent service.
9. Availability of physical facilities should be improved and Manger of Retail outlets should try to perform error free services.

### VII. Limitations

This study suffers from a number of problems. The geographic location of the study is Chittagong, which does not necessarily expose the complete picture of retail chain services in Bangladesh. The study used a convenience sampling techniques i.e. 85 purposively. The present study has employed the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988, 1991) to measure service quality gaps. But there are a number of criticisms of this instrument (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). As long as this instrument suffers from criticisms likewise this study may also suffer from similar criticisms.

### VIII. Scope for Further Research

Retail chain sector is a growing sector for conducting the research. Identifying customer expectation and customer perception are very important to develop this sector in Bangladesh. Further research should be carried out in order to enhance the understanding of customer perception and customer satisfaction. Moreover, a similar study could be conducted with a larger sample size so that results could be comprehensive to a large population to measure the levels of customer perception. This study has been carried out only in Chittagong so further study could be conducted in many other cities in Bangladesh which may find out a better result for developing this industry in Bangladesh.

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