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A STUDY OF SERVICE QUALITY PERSPECTIVES AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the level of service quality as perceived by customers of Bajaj Allianz Life insurance company working in Mangalore. To measure the Service quality Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed SERVQUAL Model which evaluates the service quality in five dimensions like Reliability, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance, and Tangibles. The data is analyzed by PZB gap analysis. The results of this study show that Responsiveness has maximum average gap score of 0.820 which is higher than other four dimensions, implying dissatisfaction of customers. The Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company should have positive approach towards customers and require individual attention which helps the company to improve their brand image in the mind of the customers.

KEYWORDS

customer satisfaction, Service quality, SERVQUAL Model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality is considered as an important issue in every organization. Every organizations give due importance to quality work and services and it is regarded as a strategic organizational weapon. Because of many service organizations, there is a demanding need for measuring of service quality. The accuracy and perfection is reflected in service quality. The organizations give greater attention to service quality and customer satisfaction because of increased competition and deregulation. To understand the determinants and process of customer evaluations, the Academicians are also involved in service quality research. To strengthen competitiveness and profitability, every organizations give due importance to improve their service quality. The customer satisfaction and service quality is positively associated with firm's performance and it is proved in much research. Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed conceptual model to measure the service quality of business organisations. Thereafter many researchers examined the service quality through this model and become an area of research interest in marketing. Bolton and Drew, 1991b; Brown and Swartz, 1989; Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1994; Teas, 1993, 1994; and Zeithaml et al., 1996 used SRQUEL Model to measure the service quality of many service organization. But some of them through their research questioned the validity of SRQUEL Model. Lewis and Mitchell (1990) found that if expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs. Cronin and Taylor (1992) revealed that perceived service quality has positive effect on satisfaction of customer in four service sector i.e dry cleaning, fast food, pest control and banking. Avikaran (1994) evaluated service quality in Australian Banks and found four dimensions of service quality i.e. communication, credibility, staff conduct and access to teller services. Johnston (1995) found assurance, empathy, responsiveness and reliability dimensions in banking industry. Lee and Ulgado (1997), Mels et al. (1997), Jiang et al. (2000), Cook and Thompson (2001), Van der Wal et al. (2002) and Kilbourne et al. (2004) used SERVQUAL Model for assessing the service quality of repair and maintenance service providing firm, long-distance telephone corporation, telecommunication, credit card company, information system, libraries, insurance, restaurant, health care and retail chains are found significant relationship with all the five dimensions. Bahia and Nantel (2000) developed six dimension scales for evaluating service quality in banks which includes reliability, tangibles, access, effectiveness and assurance, range of services and prices. Othman and Owen (2001) added an extra dimension of "compliance to the Islamic law" to the SERVQUAL five dimension scale. Jabnoun and Al-Tamimi (2003) modified SERVQUAL model based on three dimensions i.e. empathy, tangibles and human skill. Aldaigan and Buttle (2002) found significant correlations between overall customer satisfaction and service quality dimensions. Lam (2002) used SERVQUAL in Chinese banking sector and identified six dimensions of service quality i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy of understanding of needs and empathy of convenient operating hours. Wong and Hui (2003) found that service quality enhances the customer loyalty and it helps to reach the success in service organizations. Zhou (2004) found that service quality and customer satisfaction in banking sector is strongly influenced by reliability and assurance. Arasli et al. (2005) identified three dimensions influencing the service quality i.e tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness-empathy in Cyprus banking industry. Brady et al (2005) and Arsalı et al. (2005) reported that there is a direct impact of service quality on customer satisfaction in USA, Netherland, Hong Kong, morocco Australian and Greek banking industry. Bei and Chiao (2006) reported positive influence of perceived service quality on three service providers i.e. petrol station, automobile repair and banking. Nam (2008) evaluated service quality in retail banking in US and South Korea and identified four dimensions of service quality i.e trustworthiness, functionality, appearance and helpful employees. Guo et al. (2008) examine service quality of corporate banking in China was evaluated. The service quality dimensions identified were reliability, technology, communication, technical quality and human capital.

The above literature review shows that the perceived service quality has positive impact on satisfaction of customers and it can be measured by SERVQUAL Model. This study intends to contribute to the existing literature on customers' perceptions of service quality by using the gap analysis. The rest of the paper organized as follows. Section 2 provides a brief review of the service quality and its dimensions, section 3 presents objectives of the study, section 4 provides sample, data and methodology, section 5 presents the results and discussions and finally conclusion is presented in section 6.

2. SERVICE QUALITY AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Service quality is increasingly becoming a major strategic variable and the researchers have tried to develop conceptual models to explain the service quality and to measure consumers perceived service quality in different industries. A good operational example of a standardized framework for understanding service quality is the SERVQUAL Model developed by Parasuraman. The researchers discovered five general dimensions with focus group interviews which they labeled: reliability, responsiveness, tangibles, assurance and empathy. Parasuraman et al (1985, 1988) developed 5 general dimensions of service quality of any service provider. These dimensions include:

1. Tangibility: physical facilities, tools, machines, personnel, materials and communication channels.
2. Trustworthiness: the ability to provide promised services in a proper and reliable way.
3. Accountability: to have the interest in providing appropriate service and generally helping customers.
4. Reliability: knowledgeable and polite personnel and their ability to win customers trust and confidence.
5. Sympathy: taking care and paying attention to individuals

In the present scenario if any service organizations fail to surpass customer expectations and meet customer satisfaction will not be able to compete with their rivals. It is the most difficult challenge for any organization to manage their customers who switch their transactions to the rival firm because of better services. Currently Indian financial service industry has a competitive environment. Increasing private participation in the area and improvements in the kind and way services have been offered, increasing expansion of financial and credential institutions an organs to provide financial and non-financial services, and increasing development of technology in service industry offers a competitive and special environment to any organization. It requires that active organization in any industry in the country should pay more attention to customer satisfaction. This goal will not be achieved without localized models and indicators through which one can make sure of customer satisfaction. This study aims to estimate and evaluate indicators of Parasuraman model of service quality through a survey from

customers of Bajaj Allianz Life insurance to have a better understanding of these dimensions. We intend to evaluate five dimensions of service quality according Parasuraman SERVQUAL Model.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are objectives of the study.

- To study dimensions of service quality and to evaluate the effects of these dimensions on satisfaction of Bajaj Allianz Life insurance company customers
- To evaluate the perceived service quality of Bajaj Allianz Life insurance company

4. SAMPLE, DATA AND METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE AND DATA

The study was carried out with an objective to understand the gap of the e-services offered by the Bajaj Allianz Life insurance company. The study is based on the primary data collected from the customers who are using e-services services of Bajaj Allianz Life insurance company. Data collection was done through survey method. A sample size of 100 respondents who were the customers of Bajaj Allianz Life insurance company is selected randomly from Mangalore City. A structured questionnaire is used to collect the data.

METHODOLOGY

To find out the perceived service quality, the structured questionnaire is used which was originally developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988). The SERVQUAL Model consists of two sections i.e. Perception and Expectation. Both sections have five dimensions as Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Perceived Service Quality is the difference between Perception and Expectation (P-E). There are also five gaps between each dimensions of service quality i.e. Tangibles Gap= Perceived Tangibles – Expected Tangibles, Reliability Gap = Perceived Reliability- Expected Reliability, responsiveness Gap= Perceived Responsiveness – Expected Responsiveness, Assurance= Perceived Assurance – Expected Assurance and Empathy = Perceived Empathy– Expected Empathy. The questionnaires were given to the customers of the Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company to judge their perceived service quality.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The result of SERVQUAL Model of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company is presented in table 1, 2, 3 and 4. Table 1 present the average gap score Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company, table 2 present the un-weighted score, table 3 show assigning weights and table 4 shows Weighted Score. The average mean score on five dimensions of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company is presented in figure 1.

TABLE 1: AVERAGE GAP SCORE OF BAJAJ ALLIANZ LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

Expectation		Perception		Gap score
	E		P	E-P
Tangibility		Tangibility		
will have modern equipment as well as technology	5.017	Has modern-looking equipment and technology.	4.683	0.334
Physical facility will be visually appealing	5.133	Physical facilities are visually appealing	4.817	0.316
Employees will appear neat	5.200	Employees and agents are neat appealing	4.717	0.483
Total	15.35		14.217	1.133
Average Gap Score[Total of E-P/3]				0.38
Reliability		Reliability		
When employees/agents promise to do something by a certain time, will they do so	5.133	Keep up promises	4.583	0.55
When a customer has a problem employees and agent will show a sincere interest in solving it.	5.350	Employees and agents show a sincere interest in solving it	4.517	0.833
Will perform the service right the first time as soon as you login.	5.117	Perform the service right the first time	4.667	0.45
Will provide the service at the promised time	5.417	Provide service at the promised time	4.567	0.85
Total	21.017		18.334	2.683
Average Gap Score[Total of E-P/4]				0.67

Expectation		Perception		Gap score
	E		P	E-P
Responsiveness		Responsiveness		
Will inform the customers exactly service will be performed	5.333	Inform customers exactly when services will be performed	4.417	0.916
Will offer prompt service to customers.	5.383	Employees and agents offer prompt service to the customers.	4.633	0.75
Will always willing to help customers	5.633	Always willing to help its customers while using e-channels.	4.583	1.05
Will never being busy to respond to customer requests	5.350	Employees and agents never be too busy to respond customer request	4.767	0.583
Total	21.699		18.4	3.299
Average Gap Score[Total of E-P/4]				0.82
Assurance		Assurance		
The behaviour of employees/agent in will in still confidence in customers.	5.367	Employees and agents behaviour installs confidence in customer.	4.683	0.684
Policy holder feel safe in their transactions	5.667	Customer feel safe in their transactions	4.933	0.734
Employees and agents will be consistently courteous with customers	5.450	Employees are consistently courteous with the customers	4.733	0.717
Employees and agents will have adequate knowledge to answer customers' questions.	5.500	Employees and agents possess sufficient knowledge to answer customers questions	4.550	0.95
Total	21.984		18.899	3.085
Average Gap Score[Total of E-P/4]				0.77
Empathy		Empathy		
Will give customers individual attention.	5.100	Gives me individual attention to its customers.	4.583	0.517
Will have operating hours convenient to all their customers.	5.333	Have convenient operating hours	4.650	0.683
Will have employees who give customers personal attention.	5.500	Have employees and agents give personal attention.	4.450	1.05
Will have their customer's best interest at heart	5.300	My life insurance has my best interest at their heart	4.667	0.633
Will understand the specific needs of their customers.(Ability to understand)	5.450	Employees and agents understand my specific needs of the customer	4.533	0.917
Total	26.683		22.883	3.8
Average Gap Score[Total of E-P/5]				0.76

Source: Source-based on primary data

The un-weighted score was calculated to normalize the total average score of each dimension. Weights were assigned by the respondents to identify the level of importance given to each dimensions.

TABLE 2: UN-WEIGHTED SCORE

	Categories	Gap Score
1	Average gap score for Tangibles	0.380
2	Average gap score for Reliability	0.670
3	Average gap score for Responsiveness	0.820
4	Average gap score for Assurance	0.770
5	Average gap score for Empathy	0.760
Total		3.40
Un-weighted score [Average(Total/5)]		0.68

Source: Source-based on primary data.

The weights are assigned by the respondents to identify the level of importance given to each dimensions

TABLE 3: ASSIGNING WEIGHTS

Dimensions	Un-weighted score	Weights	Weighted score
Tangibles	0.380	0.23	0.0874
Reliability	0.670	0.21	0.1407
Responsiveness	0.820	0.19	0.1558
Assurance	0.770	0.20	0.154
Empathy	0.760	0.17	0.1292
Total weighted score			0.6671

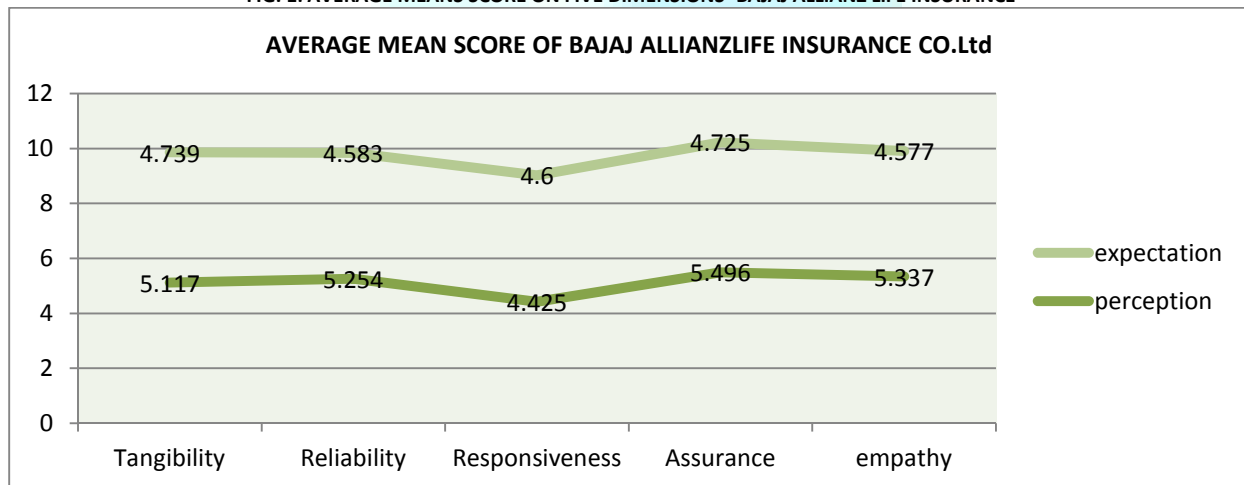
Source: Source-based on primary data.

TABLE 4: WEIGHTED SCORE

	Dimensions	Weights
1	The appearance of life insurance company's physical facility equipment, personnel and communication materials.	23
2	The life insurance company's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.	21
3	The life insurance company's willingness to help customer and provide prompt service.	19
4	The knowledge and courtesy of the employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence.	20
5	Caring, individualized attention by life insurance company to its customers.	17

Source: Source-based on primary data.

FIG. 1: AVERAGE MEANS SCORE ON FIVE DIMENSIONS- BAJAJ ALLIANZ LIFE INSURANCE



Source: Source-based on primary data.

The SERVQUAL Model measures of service quality in terms of difference between customers' perceptions (P) and expectations (E). The degree of difference between them measures how well the facilities and services provided by the Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company match the customer expectations. The above results show that the difference between expectation and perception regarding the service quality is positive for all the five dimensions. This implies that the respondents rated these dimensions between 'agree' and 'partially disagree' for the service rendered by the Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance. The mean gap score analysis is done which shows that all the dimensions with positive scores i.e. tangibility gap score is 0.380, reliability is 0.670, responsiveness is 0.820, assurance is 0.770 and empathy is 0.760. All gaps have positive values with highest being responsiveness followed by assurance and the lowest is tangibility. The SERVQUAL Model states that the larger the gap score is the more is the dissatisfaction (Parasuraman (1988)). Since the gap score is minimum in tangibility, it reveals that customers are highly satisfied with physical facilities, tools, machines, personnel, materials and communication channels associated with the service of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company. Responsiveness has maximum average gap score of 0.820 which is higher than other four dimensions, implying dissatisfaction of customers. Responsiveness means preparedness of organisation's employees to help customers and provide them with quick service". This refers timeliness and promptness in providing the service. Therefore, the company should take adequate measures to pay attention on individuals to understand their requirements and respond them positively. Further the results also shows that the Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company is are not exceeding customer expectations in all the five dimensions of SERVQUAL Model

6. CONCLUSION

The customer satisfaction and perceptions of quality depends on the level to which customer expectations are matched with products/services delivered by the insurance company. The customer expects the responsiveness and reliability from the company in their services. They also expect that the company should be equipped with good resources and services. Understanding customers' preferences in the service delivery dimensions reveal their priorities and this help the

company to reduce the gap in the services quality. Good word of mouth presentation increases customer loyalty and attracts new customers. Service quality is a strategic tool used by every organization as competitive advantage over the competitors. The level of competition in insurance industry is increasing and better service quality is the need for an hour. In a competitive environment every insurance company will analyses their service quality. Analysis of gap score of Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company reveals that 'Responsiveness' has maximum average score among other four dimensions. The results also show that the Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company is not exceeding customer expectations in all the five dimensions of SERVQUAL Model. Therefore the company should implement those strategic policies which help the company to reach the customer expectations. The Bajaj Allianz Life Insurance Company should have positive approach towards customers and require individual attention which helps the company to improve their brand image in the mind of the customers.

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