



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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## SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMERS: A STUDY OF THE CUSTOMERS' OF PUBLIC SECTOR AND PRIVATE SECTOR COMMERCIAL BANKS IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Service quality in banks has been subject to extensive research since long and remains a topic of research priority in the banking sector due primarily to its apparent association with costs, financial performance, customer satisfaction and customer retention. The study was conducted to examine the service quality perceptions of customers of public sector and private sector banks in the city of Visakhapatnam, India. A total of 300 respondents were surveyed using the universally accepted SERVQUAL model in which 42 quality measurement parameters are used under the five dimensions of service quality: Tangibles, Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, and Empathy. The study reveals that the Reliability and Assurance dimensions of service quality scored the highest ratings while the Tangibles dimension got the lowest score. Moreover, the study found a strong dissimilarity in service quality perceptions between customers of private sector and public sector banks.*

### KEYWORDS

SERVQUAL model, service quality, Tangibles, Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness, and Empathy.

### INTRODUCTION

Banks are required to balance and meet the incongruent demands of their stakeholders; policy makers, investors, customers, employees and the public at large. Banks need to bring in new ways of doing their businesses to satisfy and retain their existing customers and attract potential customers. Though banks provide undifferentiated services, they cater different quality of services (Al-Fawzan, 2005). As banks continue to provide more identical products, switching costs of customers will be lower and inexpensive (Wei, 2009); allowing them to make a switch easily from one bank to another. This implies that the manner in which banks deliver their services will eventually differentiate them from their competitors. Kangis and Voulkelatos (1997) suggested that banks will enjoy a competitive advantage over their rivals if they are able to contrive their service delivery schemes to the new rivalry scenarios by enhancing the level of the service quality that they offer to their clients. Thus, service quality has remained critical for banks to keep their competitive advantage in the dynamic business conditions. When customers perceive the service quality of a bank favorably, the bank will be able to reap the fruits of its efforts and will be able to retain its customers for long. Tang and Zairi (1998) noted that banks that are able to cater quality services better than their rivals are more likely to be successful. As a matter of fact, the rapid change in technology is influencing banks across the globe to reconsider their strategies in delivering services to their clients (Hossain and Leo, 2009).

As competition gets tougher and tougher, somehow it is how the customers perceive the service quality that dictates the way the banks should operate, not what actually the banks want to offer to its customers that matters most or the price that they charge since the products are more identical and the price derivatives are minimum (Ellwood, 1994 cited in Kangis and Voulkelatos, 1997). Thus, it is paramount important for the banks to understand how their customers perceive the quality of the services that they offer and accordingly adjust their service production delivery system to meet the expectations of their customers.

Of course, quality is all about one's subjective judgment concerning a certain product, be it goods or services, and as such its meaning varies from individual to individual, location to location, organization to organization, scenario to scenario and across time (Manjunata and Shivalingaiah, 2004). According to Webster and Hung (1994) quality is "what the customer says it is". Indeed, the intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability of production and consumption features of a service make service quality a nonfigurative and obscure construct (Parasuraman et al. 1985), and thus it lacks objective measures (Karatepe et al., 2005). Unlike tangible goods, most services are hardly easy to reckon, quantify, take stock, try out and verify before sale to ascertain quality delivery and, as such it is extremely difficult for service marketers to craft and put into effect defined built-up specifications for standardized quality (Zeithamal et al., 1998).

Service quality in banks has been subject to extensive research for several years (Sadek, 2010; Tahir and Bakar, 2007; Hossain and Leo, 2009; Shafie and Haron, 2004; Kangis and Voulkelatos, 1997; Berry et al., 1994 ; ) primarily due to its apparent association with costs, financial performance, customer satisfaction and customer retention (Al-Hawari and Ward, 2006; Bennett and Higgins, 1993). Research studies time and again found that enhancing service quality results in better financial performances and greater customer satisfaction and market share (Roth and van der Velde, 1991; Bowen and Hedges, 1993; Berry et al., 1994).

Kangis and Voulkelatos (1997) carried out a study on service quality perception of customers in state-owned banks and private banks in Greece and found that customers of private banks perceived receiving a better quality of services than customers of state-owned banks. The study further indicated that state-owned banks were perceived as catering convenient locations, good appearance of staff, and modern looking equipment, and private banks perceived as offering good appearance of staff, accurate statement and willingness to help customers' banking problems. Sadek et al. (2010) examined the service quality perceptions of customers of two group of banks; Cooperative and Islamic banks of Britain. The findings of the study indicated that the compliance issues were found to be very important for customers of Islamic Banks of Britain while responsiveness and empathy were found to be important for customers of cooperative banks. Berry et al. (1994) assessed the service quality perception of customers of banks and found the reliability dimension as important in which case the customers provided the highest ratings. Similarly, Shafie and Haron (2004) carried out a study to examine the service quality perceptions of customers of banks and found compliance, assurance and reliability as the most important service quality dimension and responsiveness, empathy and tangibles as the least important dimensions. The present study has been taken up with an objective of finding customers' perception on service quality of banks from both public sector and private sector.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the city of Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. Visakhapatnam is one of the fastest growing cities in India. A total of 300 respondents were interviewed among the customers of public sector and private sector banks that are operating in the city. Two public sector banks (State Bank of India and Bank of Baroda) and two private sector banks (Axis Bank and ICICI bank) were chosen using year of establishment, asset size and branch network as the criteria. From each category of banks, two branches were randomly selected; totaling 8 branches for the study. **Ten (10)** respondents were interviewed each day over Monday through Friday during business hours of the banks. The customers were approached and asked for willingness immediately after leaving the counter, and each willing customer was interviewed at the premises of the banks.

SERVQUAL model was used to ascertain the perception of the bank customers on service quality. The SERVQUAL model was initially developed in 1988 as an instrument for measuring service quality by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry. Though the SERVQUAL has been duly criticized, it is still a powerful tool as it provides useful techniques for gauging and managing service quality (Othman and Owen, 2001). The quality perceptions of respondents were ascertained in 42 parameters under the five dimensions of the model: Tangibles, Reliability, Assurance, Responsiveness and Empathy.

## QUALITY PERCEPTIONS (QP) ON TANGIBLES

To study the quality perceptions of customers on the tangibles, nine parameters, as shown in table 1, are used. The study revealed that the influence of modern equipment is more in quality perception (mean= 4.4) among tangibles followed by the simplification of account opening forms ( mean =4.39) and visually appealing materials used by the banks (mean =4.27). The opinion of the respondents is close to similarity among the public and private sector banks except in two parameters. The public sector banks scored better ratings in the case of provision of drinking water and washroom facilities (mean =3.32 and p-value =.003), and sufficient number of contact counters ( mean = 4.2 and p-value =0.005). The private sector banks secured a mean value of 1.18 in the case of the provision of drinking water and washroom facilities, and 3.89 in case of sufficient number of contact counters. This implies that customers of private sector banks have perceived that they are receiving much less service in terms of the provision of drinking water and washroom facilities as compared to the customers of public sector banks. In addition, the customers of private banks have perceived that the number of contact counters provided by the banks is insufficient compared to the customers of public sector banks. The overall analysis of quality perception on tangibles reveals that this quality dimension secured a mean value of 3.96. The mean value of this dimension for the public sector banks (mean=4.12) is higher compared to private sector banks (mean= 3.81) which indicate that the quality perceptions on tangibles in public sector banks score better rating by the customers compared to private sector banks.

TABLE 1: SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS ON TANGIBLE

Parameter	Mean score			
	Overall	Public bank	Private bank	P-value
Bank has modern equipment	4.40	4.39	4.40	.92
Bank materials visually appealing	4.27	4.26	4.29	.762
Forms for opening accounts easy to fill	4.39	4.44	4.35	.251
Employees are well dressed	4.08	4.10	4.05	.647
Adequate seating arrangement provided	4.17	4.26	4.09	0.10* <sup>1</sup>
Bank provides adequate infrastructure facilities	3.95	3.96	3.94	.865
Supporting materials (pads, pins etc) provided	4.11	4.15	4.07	.441
Sufficient number of contact counters provided	4.05	4.20	3.89	.005** <sup>2</sup>
Drinking water and washroom facilities provided	<u>2.25</u>	<u>3.32</u>	<u>1.18</u>	<u>.003**</u>
Overall	3.96	4.12	3.81	.212

<sup>1</sup> Significant at 10 percent

<sup>2</sup> Significant at 5 percent

## QP ON RELIABILITY

The reliability dimension of service quality is an important service quality dimension as it provides an insight as to the ability of a bank to perform promised service dependably and accurately from the customers' point of view. To assess the perception of the respondents in so far as the reliability is concerned, 12 parameters are used (Table 2). Of the total parameters considered under this dimension, bank reputation scored the highest value (mean =4.41) followed by wide range of branch networking (mean=4.33) and maintenance of accurate records (mean=4.26). The mean score comparison between the perceptions of customers of private sector banks and public sector banks reveals statistically significance difference between only two parameters; 'bank is progressing well' (p-value = 0.038) and 'bank provides various income generating options' (p-value = 0.004). From the view point of the customers, the public sector banks attained better mean scores in the cases of banks' progress (mean =4.29) and the provision of various income generating options to customers (mean = 4.22) while the private sector banks scored mean values of 4.13 and 3.97, respectively. The overall analysis revealed that the reliability dimension scored a mean value of 4.15. Sector wise, the public sector banks scored an overall mean of 4.14 whereas the private sector banks scored 4.16.

TABLE 2: SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS ON RELIABILITY DIMENSION

Parameter	Mean score			
	Overall	Public Bank	Private Bank	P-value
Employees show sincere interest in solving problems	3.99	3.89	4.09	.057*
Employees perform tasks within the time framework	4.05	4.00	4.10	.300
Bank performs all the time correctly	4.02	3.95	4.10	.102
Employees are hard working	4.03	3.97	4.09	.224
Employees are aware of all services offered by the bank	4.12	4.05	4.20	.108
Banks keeps records correctly	<b>4.26</b>	4.18	4.33	.074
The bank has good reputation	<b>4.41</b>	4.41	4.40	.857
Bank has wide range of branch network	<b>4.33</b>	4.37	4.29	.350
Bank committed for customers benefits	4.17	4.19	4.15	.663
Bank is progressing well	4.20	4.29	4.13	.038**
Bank provides various income generating options	4.10	4.22	3.97	.004**
Bank provides all banking services	<u>4.13</u>	<u>4.19</u>	<u>4.07</u>	<u>.185</u>
Overall	4.15	4.14	4.16	.689

**QP ON ASSURANCE**

To study the perceptions on 'assurance' as a quality dimension eight parameters, as shown in Table 3, are used. The study indicated that the security the banks provide to deposits attained the highest score (mean =4.32) followed by the extent the banks provide security to customer information (mean =4.31) and the safety the banks provide in transacting with customers (mean =4.29). The comparative analysis of perceptions of the customers of public sector banks and private sector banks on this dimension revealed that two parameters, maintenance of fire safety system (p-value=0.001) and location of ATM (p-value=0.001), have shown significant difference. The analysis indicated that the private sector banks scored better in terms of locating the ATM (Automatic Teller Machine) in physically safe locations (mean =4.37) and keeping fire safety system (mean =4.03). This suggests that customers of private sector banks favorably perceived that their banks have located the ATM in physically safe places whereas customers of public sector banks perceived less secured in this regard. The customers of private sector banks perceived that their banks maintained well fire safety system compared to the customers of public sector banks. Generally, the assurance dimension scored a mean value of 4.15; the public sector banks scored an overall mean of 4.11 while the private sector banks scored a mean value of 4.19. This implies that the customers of the private sector banks perceived relatively better in assurance dimension compared to the customers of the public sector banks.

**TABLE 3: SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS ON ASSURANCE DIMENSION**

Parameter	Mean score			
	Overall	Public Bank	Private Bank	P-value
Bank provides high security to deposits	<b>4.32</b>	4.29	4.35	.415
Bank provides high security to customer information	<b>4.31</b>	4.32	4.29	.756
ATM is located in physically safe location	4.21	4.06	4.37	.001**
Employees constantly care for customers with courtesy	4.03	4.00	4.06	.571
Bank instills confidence in customers	3.98	3.97	3.99	.847
Employees ensure safety while transacting with customers	<b>4.29</b>	4.32	4.25	.415
Security personnel are usually present in bank premises	4.24	4.27	4.21	.497
Bank maintains fire safety system	<u>3.82</u>	<u>3.62</u>	<u>4.03</u>	<u>.001**</u>
Overall	4.15	4.11	4.19	.205

**QP ON RESPONSIVENESS**

To assess the responsiveness dimension of service quality, five parameters (Table 4) are considered. The study indicated that timely provision of services to customers scored the highest ratings (mean =4.07) followed by responding to customers' enquiry (mean =4.03) and resolving customer grievances (mean =4.01). The perceptions of the customers of both public sector banks and private sector banks concerning responsiveness are not significantly different except in one parameter; employees show willingness to help customers (p-value=0.002). Private sector banks scored better ratings (mean =4.13) in terms of employees' willingness to help customers than the public sector banks (mean =3.85). The overall analysis reveals that the responsiveness dimension scored a mean value of 4.01; the mean value of the public sector banks on responsiveness is 3.96 while it is 4.06 for private sector banks. Thus, the customers of private sector banks perceive relatively high quality in responsiveness compared to the quality perceptions of the customers of public sector banks.

**TABLE 4: SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS ON RESPONSIVENESS DIMENSION**

Parameter	Mean score			
	Overall	Public Bank	Private Bank	P-value
Employees tell the time required to perform the service	3.99	4.02	3.96	.539
Employees provide timely services to customers	<b>4.07</b>	4.09	4.04	.593
Employees show willingness to help customers	3.99	3.85	4.13	.002**
Employees answer customers' enquiry	<b>4.03</b>	3.94	4.11	.085
Bank is prompt in resolving customer grievances	<u>3.99</u>	<u>3.92</u>	<u>4.07</u>	<u>.126</u>
Overall	<b>4.01</b>	3.96	4.06	.213

**QP ON EMPATHY**

Empathy as a quality dimension is measured using eight parameters as shown in Table 5. The suitability of bank location to customers is the parameter that scored the highest rating (mean =4.19) followed by the extent the banks understand the specific needs of customers (mean =4.15) and the provision of a wide range of account information (mean =4.13). The parameter that the waiting time is not extensive got the lowest rating (mean =3.78). The study found statistically significance difference in the perception of customers of the public and private sector banks in four parameters: 'bank takes care to prevent service failure' (p-value =0.000), 'bank provides individual attention to customers' (p-value=0.009), 'waiting time to receive service is not extensive' (p-value=0.001) and 'bank provides a wide range of account info' (p-value=0.003). The private sector banks scored better ratings compared to the public sector banks in terms of taking care to prevent service failures (mean =4.12) and providing individual attention to clients (mean =4.17). On the other hand, the public sector banks scored better ratings than the private sector banks in terms of providing a wide range of account information (mean =4.26) and the waiting time to receive services (mean =3.99). Overall, the empathy dimension of service quality scored a mean value of 4.04; the mean values for the public sector and the private sector banks on this dimension are 4.03 and 4.05, respectively. Thus, the differences in quality perceptions on empathy between public sector and private sector banks are considered insignificant.

**TABLE 5: SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS ON EMPATHY DIMENSION**

Parameter	Mean score			
	Overall	Public Bank	Private Bank	P-value
Bank attends to specific problems of customers	4.09	4.01	4.16	.113
Bank takes care to prevent service failure	3.89	3.66	4.12	.000***
Bank provides individual attention to customers	4.03	3.89	4.17	.009**
Bank arranges convenient operating hours for customers	4.09	4.03	4.14	.288
Bank location is convenient for customers	<b>4.19</b>	4.21	4.17	.627
Waiting time to receive service is not extensive	3.78	3.99	3.57	.001**
Bank provides a wide range of access to account info	<b>4.13</b>	4.26	4.00	.003**
Bank understands the specific needs of customers	<b>4.15</b>	<u>4.20</u>	<u>4.10</u>	<u>.263</u>
Overall	4.04	4.03	4.05	.831



The mean scores of customers' perception on the five dimensions of service quality are summarized in table 6. The reliability and assurance dimensions of service quality scored the highest ratings (mean =4.15 each) whereas the tangibles dimension scored the lowest rating (mean =3.96). In the case of public sector banks quality perceptions on reliability got the highest rating followed by tangibles and assurance. However, the quality perceptions on responsiveness got the lowest rating. The quality perceptions on private sector banks indicate that the assurance dimension scored relatively high rating followed by reliability. Nevertheless, tangibles got the lowest rating for the private sector banks. The public sector banks scored marginally but not significantly better than the private sector banks as indicated by the mean values of service quality of the respective sector.

TALE 4.9: OVERALL SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS ON THE FIVE DIMENSIONS

Dimension	Mean score			
	Overall	Public bank	Private bank	P-value
Tangible	3.96	4.12	3.81	.212
Reliability	4.15	4.14	4.16	.689
Assurance	4.15	4.11	4.19	.205
Responsiveness	4.01	3.96	4.06	.213
Empathy	<u>4.04</u>	<u>4.03</u>	<u>4.05</u>	<u>.831</u>
Overall	<u>4.06</u>	<u>4.07</u>	<u>4.05</u>	<u>.821</u>

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Understanding how customers perceive the service quality is vital for managerial purposes of the service companies. It is of paramount importance to banks particularly because they deliver undifferentiated products and the way they deliver their services ultimately affects their success and growth. An overall analysis of the five dimensions of service quality indicates that Reliability and Assurance dimensions are the two that scored the highest value while the tangibles as a dimension of service quality got the lowest rating. In the case of the public sector banks the Reliability dimension of service quality scored the highest rating while the Responsiveness dimension got the lowest value. On the other hand, the Assurance dimension of service quality relatively got highest score for the private sector banks while the Tangibles dimension scored the lowest rating. The study revealed a strong dissimilarity of profile in the customers' service quality perceptions. The findings of the study suggest that the private sector banks need to focus more on tangibles, empathy and responsiveness to enhance quality perceptions of the customers. The study suggests improvements in drinking water and washroom facilities, number of contact counters and infrastructure facilities in tangibles; provision of income generating options in reliability; enhancing confidence in customers in assurance; informing customers the time required to perform the service in responsiveness, and; waiting time to receive services in the empathy besides possible improvements in other parameters of the respective dimensions. The public sector banks need to focus more on responsiveness. The findings of the study suggest the areas that need special attention for improvement including: drinking water and washroom facilities and infrastructure facilities in tangibles; showing sincere interest in solving customer banking problems, performing tasks correctly all the time, and hard work of employees in reliability; maintenance of fire safety system, and instilling confidence in customers in assurance; showing willingness to help customers, answering customer's enquiry, and resolving customer grievances in responsiveness, and; taking care to prevent service failure, providing individual attention to customers, and the waiting time to receive services in empathy. Quality is a journey, not a destination. Consumers' quality perceptions do change as a response to changes in business as well as other surrounding environments. Service companies need to carry out research studies continually to study quality perceptions of the customers and initiate measures for improvement. This requires total management commitment as well as employee involvement in the process.

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