

Assessment of Service Gap in Superstores of Bangladesh by using SERVQUAL Model

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Globalization has changed the lifestyle of the urban people in Bangladesh. The retail market is not only expanding but also moving towards a different dimension as the number of superstores is increasing. As more and more urban people are entering to the shopping zone of superstores, service quality has been identified as a critical strategic issue in the retail industry. In this paper, the service quality determinants from the standpoints of both perceptions and expectations of the customers in the superstores in Bangladesh were explored. An initiative was made to extract the crucial factors affecting the service quality that are necessary to increase the customer satisfaction, ensure customer retention and to gain a competitive edge. The study utilizes the SERVQUAL model to examine the service quality of several retail stores and explores the factors affecting the service quality. For conducting this research, 50 respondents in the Dhaka city were selected who are customers of the superstores. From data analysis it is found that significant gaps exist between the customers' expectations and perceptions in all the items under all of the dimensions of the chosen model. The highest gap exists in the assurance dimension and second highest gap exists in the tangibles dimension of the SERVQUAL model.

Field of Research: Marketing.

Keywords: Service gap, service quality, SERVQUAL model, superstores, retail industry.

1. Introduction

With the enormous growth of urban population in Bangladesh, the retail market of the country is modernizing, particularly in Dhaka, the capital city (Siddiqui, Hasan & Ahmed 2006). Besides increased urbanization, increased income per capita, increased number of working women (Bachmann 2008), changes in consumer needs, attitude and behavior of customers are fostering the increased investment in the retailing sector of Bangladesh (Siddiqui, Hasan & Ahmed 2006). As a result the annual turnover of the superstores now stands more than Tk. 15 billion (1500 crore) with a sales growth rate of 15-20 percent, according to Bangladesh Supermarket Owners Association (BSOA) (Munni 2010). This scenario has forced the superstore owners to expand their operation with 600 more retail outlets in the next five years (Munni 2010). With this exponential growth in retailing, customer satisfaction is becoming a critical success factor (Morelli 1997) and customer satisfaction can be ensured through the delivery of high service quality in this competitive retail environment (Siu & Cheung 2001).

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That's why the measures of service quality obtained through consumer surveys have become a widely used business performance barometer (Hurley & Estelami 1998). It is obvious for a business because service quality is related to costs (Crosby 1979), profitability (Buzzell & Gale 1987; Rust & Zahorik 1993; Zahorik & Rust 1992), customer satisfaction (Bolton & Drew 1991; Boulding, Kalra, Staelin & Zeithaml 1993), and customer retention (Reichheld & Sasser 1990). According to Kumar, Kee and Manshor (2009) high quality of service can result in high customer satisfaction and increases customer loyalty. In fact, customer satisfaction is the outcome of service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988).

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 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 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 area 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.

The current study is organized throughout the paper beginning with objectives and literature review. Then the conceptual framework is developed based on the literature and current study context, which guides for hypotheses development. Data are collected from the customers of superstores in Bangladesh and the study hypotheses are tested. Data are analyzed and results are represented through discussion and conclusion based on previous study findings.

2. 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:

- To find out the expectations of customers regarding service quality in the superstores of Bangladesh.

- To identify the perceptions about the actual or experienced service quality in the superstores of Bangladesh.
- To recognize the gap between the expected and actual service quality in the superstores of Bangladesh.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Superstores and Retail Industry in Bangladesh

The retailing industry in Bangladesh is fragmented and undeveloped compared to its South Asian counterparts. However, this structure is changing due to the globalization, economic and trade liberalization, changing patterns of consumers' shopping behavior, the growth of urbanization, substantial increase of middle class consumers, and the government's liberal attitude towards foreign imported food products, and the growth of organized superstores (Hussain & Ara 2004). Siddiqui, Hasan and Ahmed (2006) explored five types of retail shops in Bangladesh; (1) Roadside Shops (*Traditional & Unstructured*), (2) Municipal Corporation Markets (*Traditional & Unstructured*), (3) Convenience Stores (*Traditional & Unstructured*), (4) Supermarkets (*Organized and Structured*), (5) Superstores (*Organized and Structured*). These superstores offer nearly 20,000 products of different kinds with the main focus on food items — ranging from a wide variety of fish, meat, vegetables to fruits, bakery, dairy and grocery items, also offer a vast array of other household, personal care and miscellaneous products (Siddiqui, Hasan & Ahmed 2006; Munni 2010). According to these authors, the high-income urban consumers in Dhaka favor supermarkets and superstores, as they are willing to pay a higher price for having the choice of quality products and at the same time they want to have the complete shopping experience. The first initiative in opening superstore was taken by Rahimafrooz, which introduced Agora, a chain superstore around a decade ago (Munni 2010). Now the annual turnover of the superstores stands at around Tk. 15 billion (Tk. 1500 crore), with 30 companies investment in more than 200 outlets (Munni, 2010). The prominent superstores of Bangladesh are, Agora with four outlets, Meena Bazar with nine outlets, PQS with five, Prince Bazar with two, Nandan with five and Swapno with 70 outlets, and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) with 11 outlets (Munni 2010). It is expected that the rise in the superstores will diversify the choices of consumers and boost their spending. Besides, the wet markets, or the traditional and unstructured markets (known as *kacha bazaar*) will also improve its quality and services following in the footsteps of supermarkets (Munni 2010). Compared to the retailers in the *kacha bazaar*, where commodities are sold mostly in unhygienic condition, the superstores offer hygienic foods at competitive prices (Munni 2010). Though there is an enormous amount of potentiality in terms of the growth of the superstores, the contribution of superstores are small in overall retail sales of Bangladesh. According to Bachmann (2008), Thomas Reardon, a researcher from Michigan State University stated, "Bangladesh is part of a fourth wave that just barely has emerged in the last few years. The diffusion of supermarkets will be quite slow for the fourth wave, compared to the first three waves. The reason is that the key socioeconomic changes necessary for a change in the retail environment are happening in Bangladesh at a pace much slower than, for example, in India." This can be better interpreted from the fact that Sri Lanka with a population of over 20 million people has 240 supermarkets, while Dhaka with its 15 million inhabitants does not even have 50 such stores (Bachmann 2008). Despite its massive growth over the past ten years, the retailing sector has not expanded structurally due to lack of attention

from government and public funded bodies and lack of academic researches (Datta 2010).

3.2 Service Quality

The term 'service quality' is defined by the classic researchers as the difference between customer expectations of the service to be received and perceptions of the service actually received (Grönroos 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). Here, perception is defined as consumer's beliefs relating to the received service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985). Perceived service is also known as "experienced service" (Brown & Swartz 1989). On the other hand, expectation is the desire or want of the consumer about the service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985). This classic definition is based on the "disconfirmation" theory (Wang, Lo & Hui 2003). Later on, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) defined perceived service quality as the judgment of customers, who usually define the service as superior.

Service quality is regarded as a multi-dimensional concept in the researches (Kouthouris & Alexandris 2005). Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) defined service quality in terms of three dimensions; these are physical quality, interactive quality and corporate quality. The tangible aspect of the service is referred as physical quality, interaction quality emerges from the nature of interaction between customer and service provider, and corporate quality refers to the image of a service provider (Lehtinen & Lehtinen 1982). Later on, to Grönroos (1982) stated about two service quality dimensions, the technical aspect ("what" aspect of service) and the functional aspect ("how" aspect of service). Whereas Grönroos (1982) emphasized on both the dimensions, Parasuraman and colleagues (1985) focused only on the functional aspect of service quality. In their 1988 research, they developed SERVQUAL model based on five components of service quality.

3.3 Significance of Service Quality

Service quality is undoubtedly important for the success of business, which is discussed in many researches since a long time. Quality is a decisive aspect and imperative for the success of any service organization Bebeko (2000), as it is the key factor to ensure sustainable competitive advantages (Hampton 1993). It is found in researches that perceived service quality can influence customers' behavioral intentions, such as purchase intention, paying a price premium for the service, positive word-of-mouth communications, etc. (Alexandris, Dimitriadis & Kasiara 2001; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1996). That's why service quality is found to be positively related with customer loyalty in past researches (Baker & Crompton 2000; Bloemer, Ko de Ruyter & Wetzels 1999; Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1996). Service quality is also related with increased customer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor 1992; Boulding, Kalra, Staelin & Zeithaml 1993) and customer retention (Kouthouris & Alexandris 2005). As a result, service quality is considered as a driver for corporate marketing and financial performance of a service organization (Buttle 1996).

3.4 SERVQUAL Model and Service Gap

Current study uses SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) as study instrument to explore service quality. In their original formulation Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) identified ten components of service quality.

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These are (1) reliability, (2) responsiveness, (3) competence, (4) access, (5) courtesy, (6) communication, (7) credibility, (8) security, (9) understanding/knowing the customer, and (10) tangibles. Later on, these scholars published a modified version of this model with only five components. These are reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, responsiveness (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). Definitions of each dimension along with the number of item statements are represented in Table 1. It can be observed from Table 1 that SERVQUAL model is a 22-item instrument with which customers' expectations (E) and perceptions (P) are measured across the five rater dimensions. The instrument is administered twice in different forms, first to measure expectations and second to measure perceptions. Then the gap in service gap is calculated by subtracting the expectation from actual perception. Thus the measurement of service quality through SERVQUAL model can be expressed with the following equation (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1986).

$$SQ = \sum_{j=1}^k (P_{ij} - E_{ij})$$

where:

SQ = overall service quality; k = number of attributes.

P_{ij} = Performance perception of stimulus i with respect to attribute j .

E_{ij} = Service quality expectation for attribute j that is the relevant norm for stimulus i .

Table 1: SERVQUAL dimensions

Dimensions	Definition	Items in scale
Reliability	The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately	4
Responsiveness	The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service	4
Assurance	The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence	5
Empathy	The provision of caring, individualized attention to customers	5
Tangibles	The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials	4

Source: Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) define five gaps from their research data. These are as follows:

Gap 1: The discrepancy between customers' expectations and management's perceptions of these expectations.

Gap 2: 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.

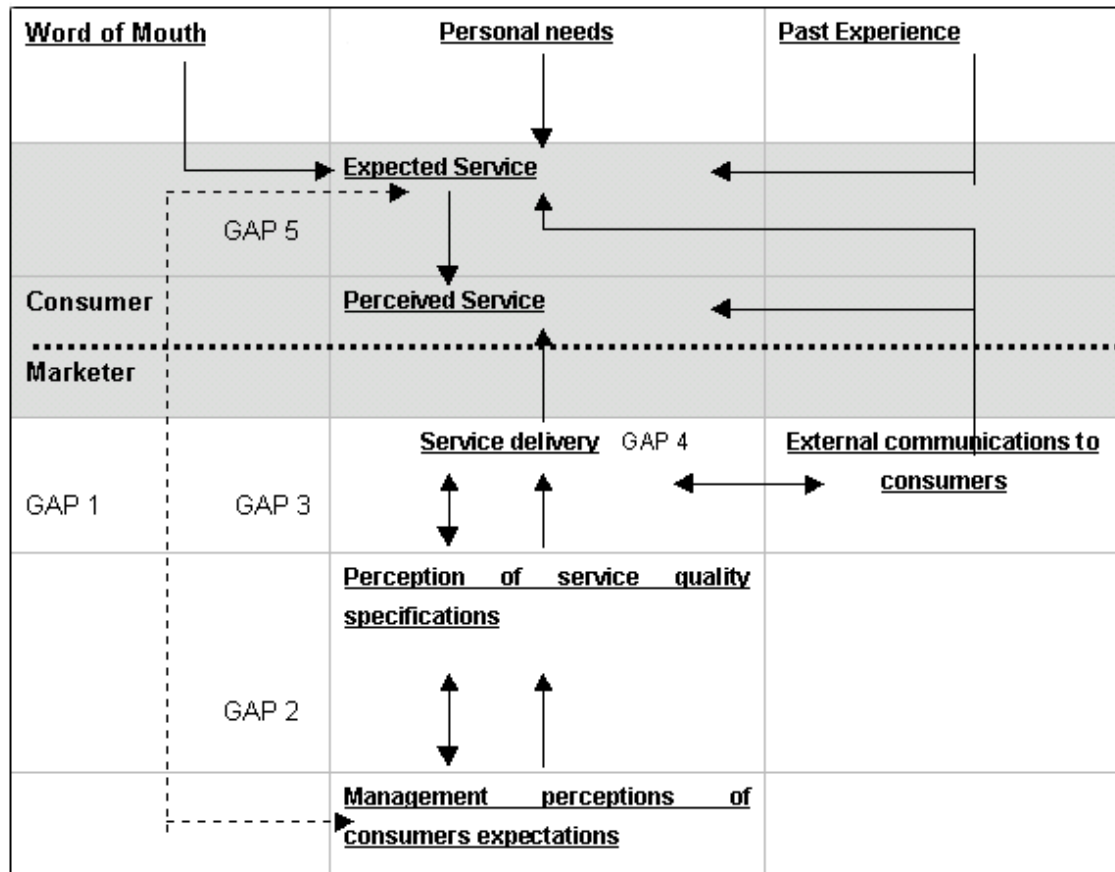
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Gap 4: The discrepancy between actual service delivery and what is communicated to customers about it.

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. The figure of the gaps of SERVQUAL Model is represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Model of service quality gaps



Source: Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985)

3.5 Application of SERVQUAL Model in Research

SERVQUAL is regarded as one of the earliest service quality models. Though it is widely used in researches, the scale has also gone through a great amount of criticism. Among these, operationalization of the model (Markovic & Raspor 2010), difficulty in replicating the model's dimensions (Babakus & Boller 1992; Carman 1990), measurement problems in the use of difference scores (Churchill & Peter 1993), measurement problem in cross-sectional studies (Andaleeb & Basu 1994), etc. are prominent in terms of service marketing. In addition, Cronin and Taylor (1992) mentioned that expectations were not necessary in the measurement of service quality, thus conceptualizing their own model, called SERVPERF. Despite of such numerous limitations, the model's framework has guided numerous studies in the service sector that focus on banks, repair and maintenance services, telephone companies,

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physicians, hospitals, hotels, academic institutions and retail stores (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988; Carman 1990; Boulding, Kalra & Zeithaml 1993; Kouthouris & Alexandris 2005). In fact Siddiqi (2010) concluded in his study that the SERVQUAL model is still suitable as an assessment tool to measure the service quality perceptions.

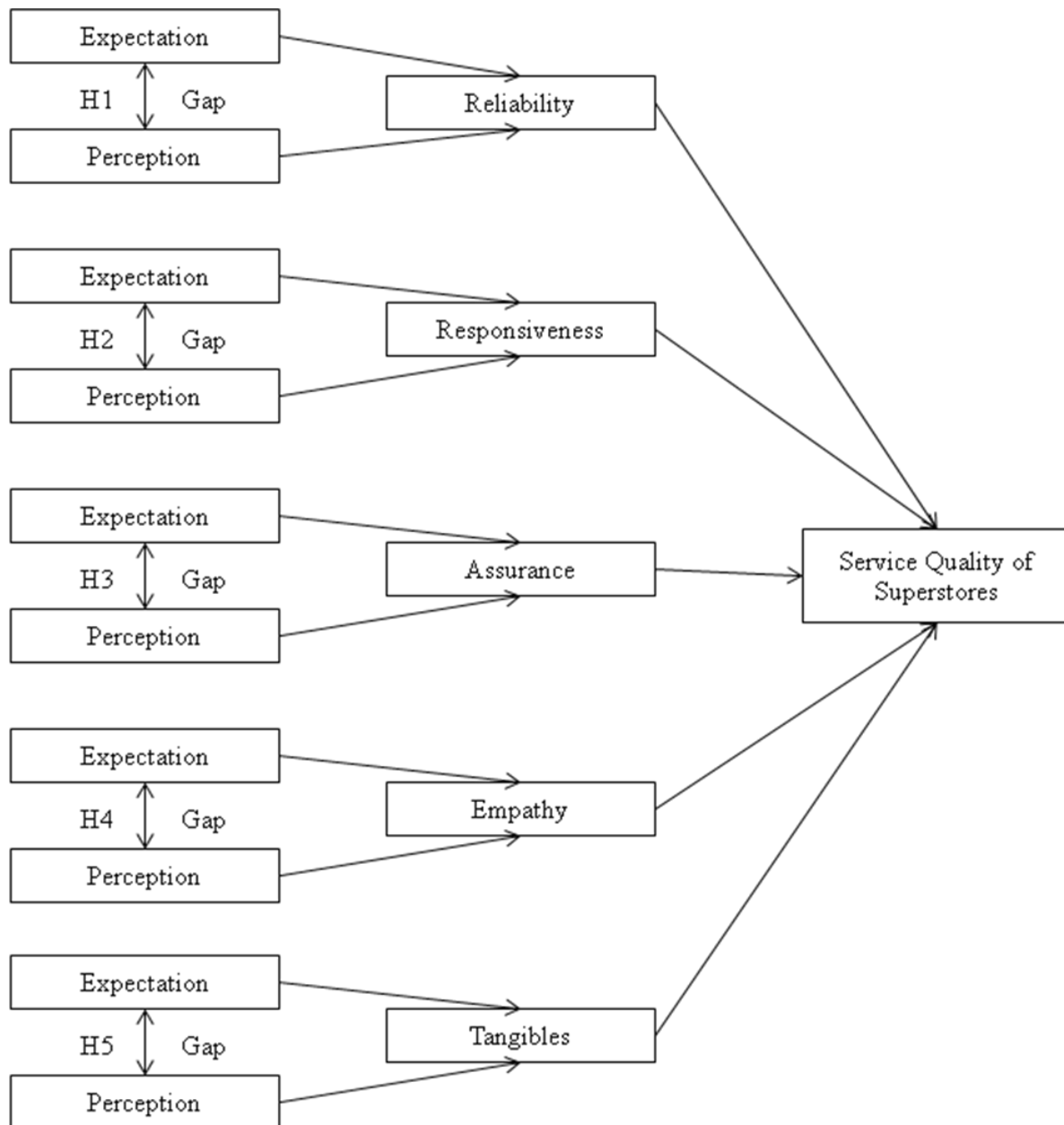
Several researchers tested SERVQUAL model in retail environment. Among these the earliest Carman (1990) concluded that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL were not generic in terms of tyre retailers (a retail setting, offering a mix of merchandise and services). He recommended that the tool can be adapted by adding new items or factors. Next year, Finn and Lamb (1991) tested SERVQUAL in different types of retail stores (department stores and discount stores) and found that the confirmatory factor analysis was unable to provide a good fit and so the instrument could not be used as a valid measure of service quality in retail environment. Another study was found in terms of application of SERVQUAL model by Guiry, Hutchinson and Weitz (1992) who have modified the original 22 item SERVQUAL to a 51 item instrument by dropping 7 items and adding 36 new items designed to measure service attributes at the retail store level. Due to these deficiencies, the later researchers adapted a specialized scale for retail environment popularly known as RSQS developed by for measuring service quality in retail settings (see Singh & Singh 2011).

In Bangladesh the SERVQUAL model has been used to measure the service gap in different industries such as, private universities (Chowdhury, Iqbal & Miah 2010), advertisement agencies (Khan 2010), SME, retail banking (Siddiqi 2010), hospitals (Siddiqui & Khandaker 2007), luxurious hotels (Tabassum & Rahman 2011; Khan 2008), tourism hotels (Tabassum, Rahman & Jahan 2012), etc. But no study was found based on the application of SERVQUAL model in retail setting of Bangladesh.

4. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The current research focuses on service quality provided by the superstores in terms of SERVQUAL model's five dimensions of service quality measurement. So here the variable service quality is dependent on the five dimensions of quality measurement in service sector; reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility. Service quality in terms of these dimensions is determined with the measurement of service gap in each dimension. This phenomenon is illustrated through the following conceptual framework (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Conceptual framework for the study based on SERVQUAL model



Based on the above conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are developed.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): There is a gap between expected and actual perception of customers regarding the reliability of service in the superstores of Bangladesh.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): There is a gap between expected and actual perception of customers regarding the responsiveness of service in the superstores of Bangladesh.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a gap between expected and actual perception of customers regarding the assurance of service in the superstores of Bangladesh.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There is a gap between expected and actual perception of customers regarding the empathy of service in the superstores of Bangladesh.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): There is a gap between expected and actual perception of customers regarding the tangibility of service in the superstores of Bangladesh.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Procedure

The data were collected in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh by mean of structured questionnaire. Participants were included in the study on a voluntary basis by visiting the prominent superstores. In total 50 responses were included in the study. According to Nunnally (1978), the ideal sample size for any exploratory research is within 40 to 60. Thus the current study with 50 samples meets the criteria of the sample size. The superstores included in the study were Agora, Meena Bazaar, Nandan, and Swopno.

5.2 Participants

Among the 50 superstore clients, 22 were male and the rest 28 were female. Customers from various age groups used to visit the superstores; 20% respondents were from 20 to 30 years of age range, 34% were from 31 to 40 years of age range, 38% were from 41 to 50 years of age range and the rest 8% were older than 50 years of age. In terms of occupation, 62% were service holders, 26% were housewives and the rest 12% had own businesses.

5.3 Measures

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).

5.4 Reliability and Validity of Data

Reliability is the extent to which a variable or set of variables is consistent in what it is intended to measure (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham 2007). The current study applied internal consistency method because multiple items were used for all constructs. The Cronbach alpha value of at least 0.70 is the basis of reliability (Cronbac 1951) and thus the 0.70 alpha value demonstrates that all attributes are internally consistent (Fujun, Hutchinson, Li & Bai 2007). The Cronbach alpha value for this study was 0.974 that meets the criteria of cut off point. Thus all the attributes of the study were found as reliable. Reliability for each dimension of service quality was also measured, which is presented in Table 2.

On the other hand, validity is defined as the degree which measure accurately represents what it is supposed to by Hair *et al.* (2007). There are three types of validity; content validity, predictive validity, and construct validity (Siddiqi 2010). The current study emphasized on content validity. Content validity was defined as the assessment of the correspondence between the individual items and concept (Duggirala, Rajendran & Anantharaman 2008). In social sciences, the content validity can be verified with the professional knowledge of the researchers. Appropriate and relevant measurements for

a study can be identified from literature review and the assistance of experts (Sharafi & Shahrokh 2012). This study concentrated on content validity through the review of literature and adapts instruments which are used in previous research.

5.5 Statistical Tools for Data Analysis

The study was based on the data collected to measure the customers' expectation and observation of service quality to assess the service gap in superstores. For this purpose 5-point 'Likert scale' was used that is a numerical and more specifically, interval-scaled data. The corresponding probability distribution of this numerical data point will be a continuous distribution but as the data is informing about the opinion of the customers through ranking, it is very likely that the parent distribution will not follow a normal pattern. This pre-assumption was further confirmed by illustration of the Probability-Probability plot (P-P plot) of items. The central view and the diversity among the views of the respondents have been observed in case of each item individually. The distribution pattern of all the components as a whole expressing all the basic features was observed along with Box-plot diagram.

Lastly, Test of Hypothesis was performed to draw a final conclusion about identifying the gap between the customers' expectation and observation about the service quality of superstores. In the present study, each of the respondents has been asked about his or her expectation and also observation. As the same person was chosen for both measurements, the samples were related or dependent. Because of the subjective nature of the scores, it was assured that the data does not follow the normal distribution and in consequence the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was decided to use. The distribution pattern of data was observed and confirmed from the Box-plot diagram. Dissimilarity between the ratings of expectations and also the ratings of observation pattern of the customers were tested through non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test.

6. Results

The mean values, standard deviation values, inter-item correlation among the dimensions and Cronbach Alpha values for each of the service quality dimensions are represented in Table 2. The highest mean value was observed in reliability dimension and lowest mean value was found in tangibles dimension. Standard deviation values were smaller than one for all the dimensions. Cronbach Alpha values for all the dimensions were greater than 0.9, indicating high reliability of study data in terms of all the dimensions of service quality.

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Table 2: Descriptive statistics, correlation and reliability statistics for service quality dimensions

Dimensions		1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Reliability	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000					3.682	0.898	0.959
Responsiveness	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	0.796** 0.000	1.000				3.660	0.958	0.954
Assurance	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	0.818** 0.000	0.814** 0.000	1.000			3.633	0.969	0.948
Empathy	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	0.748** 0.000	0.802** 0.000	0.844** 0.000	1.000		3.656	0.911	0.957
Tangibles	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	0.837** 0.000	0.859** 0.000	0.883** 0.000	0.829** 0.000	1.000	3.595	0.896	0.947

* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Table 3 represents results for Mann Whitney U test conducted on superstore customers' response regarding expected service and actual service they experience. The gap between expected service and actual service for reliability dimension of service quality was significant as p-value was less than 0.01. This result was later combined with the results of Mann Whitney U test applied on individual item statements for each dimensions (see Table 4). It is evident from the table that actual mean was smaller than the expected mean for all the item instruments and these gaps were found to be as significant (p-value<0.01). Thus Hypothesis 1 was rejected by concluding that a significant service gap exists in the superstores in terms of reliability dimension of service quality.

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Table 3: Service gap for the dimension of service quality in superstores

Dimensions	Ranks				Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test Statistics		Decisions
	Response Type	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	P-value (2-tailed)	
Reliability	Expected	50	69.73	3486.50	-6.650	0.000*	H1 rejected
	Actual	50	31.27	1563.50			
	Total	100					
Responsiveness	Expected	50	70.83	3541.50	-7.044	0.000*	H2 rejected
	Actual	50	30.17	1508.50			
	Total	100					
Empathy	Expected	50	71.75	3587.50	-7.353	0.000*	H3 rejected
	Actual	50	29.25	1462.50			
	Total	100					
Assurance	Expected	50	73.55	3677.50	-7.967	0.000*	H4 rejected
	Actual	50	27.45	1372.50			
	Total	100					
Tangibles	Expected	50	72.88	3644.00	-7.756	0.000*	H5 rejected
	Actual	50	28.12	1406.00			
	Total	100					

* Significant at 0.01 level

Table 4: Statistical significance of mean differences for the item instruments of reliability dimension of service quality

Dimensions	Item instruments	Actual Mean (P)	Expected Mean (E)	Gap (P - E) Mean	Z	P-value (2-tailed)
Reliability	Delivery of promises	3.22	4.30	-1.08	-5.510	0.000*
	Dependability in handling the customers' problems	3.08	4.26	-1.18	-5.967	0.000*
	Delivery of services at the time promised	2.92	4.22	-1.30	-6.204	0.000*
	Maintenance of error-free records	3.08	4.30	-1.22	-5.839	0.000*
	Correct performance of the service the first time	3.22	4.22	-1.00	-5.472	0.000*

* Significant at 0.01 level

Hypothesis 2 was also rejected as significant gap was found between expected service and actual service for responsiveness dimension of service quality (p-value<0.01) (see Table 3). From Table 5, it is evident that actual mean was smaller than the expected mean for all the item instruments of responsiveness dimension and these gaps were found to be as significant (p-value<0.01). Thus it is concluded that a significant service gap exists in the superstores in terms of responsiveness dimension of service quality.

Table 5: Statistical significance of mean differences for the item instruments of responsiveness dimension of service quality

Dimensions	Item instruments	Actual Mean (P)	Expected Mean (E)	Gap (P - E) Mean	Z	P-value (2-tailed)
Responsiveness	Keeping customers informed about when the service will be performed	3.12	4.32	-1.20	-5.735	0.000*
	Providing Prompt service to customers	2.88	4.26	-1.38	-6.870	0.000*
	Willingness to help customers	2.94	4.38	-1.44	-6.390	0.000*
	Responsiveness to customers' requests	3.12	4.26	-1.14	-5.648	0.000*

* Significant at 0.01 level

Similar results were found for assurance dimension of service quality in terms of superstores. A significant gap can be observed from Table 3, between expected service and actual service for assurance dimension of service quality (p-value<0.01). Combining this result with the Mann Whitney U test results conducted on the individual item instruments of the assurance dimension (see Table 6), Hypothesis 3 was rejected. So a significant service gap was observed in terms of assurance dimension of service quality in the superstores.

Table 6: Statistical significance of mean differences for the item instruments of assurance dimension of service quality

Dimensions	Item instruments	Actual Mean (P)	Expected Mean (E)	Gap (P - E) Mean	Z	P-value (2-tailed)
Assurance	Ability of staff to instill confidence in customers	3.00	4.30	-1.30	-6.117	0.000*
	Making customers feel safe in their transactions	3.00	4.32	-1.32	-6.364	0.000*
	Courteous staff	2.92	4.22	-1.30	-6.310	0.000*
	Knowledgeable staff to answer customer questions	3.00	4.30	-1.30	-6.398	0.000*

* Significant at 0.01 level

Table 7 represents the Mann Whitney U test results conducted on the individual item instruments of the empathy dimension. The results explored significant gaps between expected service and actual service for all the item instruments under empathy dimension (p-value<0.01). Combining these results with Table 3, Hypothesis 4 was rejected. Thus it can be inferred that a significant service gap exists in the superstores in terms of empathy dimension of service quality.

Table 7: Statistical significance of mean differences for the item instruments of empathy dimension of service quality

Dimensions	Item instruments	Actual Mean (P)	Expected Mean (E)	Gap (P - E) Mean	Z	P-value (2-tailed)
Empathy	Providing customers with individual attention	2.94	4.26	-1.32	-6.501	0.000*
	Convenient operating hours	3.08	4.36	-1.28	-6.044	0.000*
	Dealing with customers in a caring fashion	2.62	4.46	-1.84	-8.158	0.000*
	Having the customers' best interest at heart	2.94	4.36	-1.42	-6.880	0.000*
	Understanding the customers' requirements	3.08	4.46	-1.38	-6.592	0.000*

* Significant at 0.01 level

Hypothesis 5 was rejected as well, based on the results of Mann Whitney U test conducted on the tangibles dimension and the individual item instruments of tangibles dimension (see Table 3 and Table 8). The p-values were found to be as smaller than 0.01 for all the cases. Thus it was confirmed that a significant service gap exists in the superstores in terms of tangibles dimension of service quality.

Table 8: Statistical significance of mean differences for the item instruments of tangibles dimension of service quality

Dimensions	Item instruments	Actual Mean (P)	Expected Mean (E)	Gap (P - E) Mean	Z	P-value (2-tailed)
Tangibles	Visually appealing facilities	2.92	4.22	-1.30	-6.204	0.000*
	Neat appearance of employees	2.88	4.26	-1.38	-6.870	0.000*
	Modern-looking equipment	3.00	4.22	-1.22	-6.302	0.000*
	Visually appealing materials	2.90	4.36	-1.46	-6.891	0.000*

* Significant at 0.01 level

It is observed from Table 9 that the actual or experienced service's mean values were smaller than the expected service's mean values for all the dimensions of service quality according to the SERVQUAL model. The highest gap was observed in the assurance dimension, the second highest gap was found in case of tangibles dimension and the third highest gap was seen in the empathy dimension. The lowest or minimum service gap was noticed in the reliability dimension of service quality.

Table 9: Service gap for the dimension of service quality in superstores

Dimensions	Actual Mean (P)	Expected Mean (E)	Gap
Reliability	3.104	4.260	-1.156
Responsiveness	3.015	4.305	-1.290
Empathy	2.980	4.285	-1.305
Assurance	2.932	4.380	-1.448
Tangibles	2.925	4.265	-1.340

7. Discussion

The study explored significant gaps between the customers' expectation and actual perception regarding all the dimensions of service quality of the superstores according to the SERVQUAL model. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted on different industries such as private universities (Chowdhury, Iqbal & Miah 2010), advertisement firms (Khan 2010), tourism hotels (Tabassum, Rahman & Jahan 2012), luxurious hotels (Tabassum & Rahman 2011), Islamic banks (Abdullrahim 2010), airline services (Gilbert & Wong 2003), restaurants (Lee & Hing 1995), and patient meal services of hospitals (Hwang, Eves & Desombre, 2003).

According to the study results, significant service gap exists in the reliability dimension of service quality of the superstores in Bangladesh. Here reliability refers to the superstore's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Thus delivery of the promised services in an error-free manner is crucial for the customers in retail environment, because it can negatively affect the intention of repeat purchase from the store. The gap in responsiveness dimension indicates that the superstores did not have the willingness and ability to meet and adapt to customers' needs. In current competitive retail environment, it is important for the superstores to keep the customers informed about the services and delivering the services promptly according to the customers' requirements. Assurance is the degree of trust and confidence that the customer feels that the service provider is competent to supply the service. Mostly, this stems from the degree of confidence that the customer has in the service provider's staff. Thus courteous and knowledgeable staffs are imperative for the superstores' business excellence. As a gap exists in terms of the empathy dimension, it can be ascertained that the superstores are not enough sincere to provide individual attention and customer needs. This is particularly crucial for the superstores as the more they would recognize the customers' view points, the more they would be able to fulfill the customers' expectations. Lastly, a gap in tangibles dimension indicates that the superstores do not have enough modern complementary equipment. Also the stores lack in the visual aesthetics and in terms of employee appearance. This can specially impede the total service quality perception, as the customers assess service quality on the basis of tangible evidences as well.

The highest gap was observed in assurance dimension, indicating that the superstores' employees lack the ability to instill confidence in customers by making customers feel safe in their transactions. Moreover probably they also lack in courtesy and knowledge regarding the superstores services. The second highest gap was found in case of tangibles dimension, indicating that the superstores lack in terms of visually appealing facilities and materials, and modern looking equipments.

8. Managerial Implications

The study confirms significant gap in all the dimensions of service quality according to the SERVQUAL model in the superstores of Bangladesh. The study also suggests that SERVQUAL model is a suitable instrument for measuring the service quality in the retail industry of Bangladesh. Therefore, the superstore management can use this instrument for measuring service quality in Bangladesh. Moreover, because significant service gap exists in all the dimensions of service quality, the superstores should emphasize all the service quality dimensions including Reliability, Responsiveness,

Empathy, Assurance, and Tangibility in maintaining and improving the service quality that they provide.

9. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although there are notable contributions from this study especially for customer retention strategies, the results of this study need to be viewed and acknowledged in lights of its limitations. First, the sample size was considerably low. In future the sampling frame can be expanded to get the appropriate insight of the service gap in terms of superstore service quality. Moreover, the study considers only the superstores of Dhaka city. Therefore, future research should be conducted on a larger scale by considering a large sample size from all over the country to authenticate the differences between the customer expectation and perception about superstore services. This study utilized SERVQUAL model for service quality measurement, which was not accepted by all the researchers who worked on retail industry previously. Thus other measurement tools such as Dabholkar and colleagues' (1996) Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) can be adopted for future researches. In future, other variables i.e. customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, customer retention should be included and related with service quality to validate the importance of service quality in the retail industry of Bangladesh.

10. Conclusion

The study is an attempt to examine the service quality of Superstores using the SERVQUAL model and explore both the perception and expectation of customers to identify the service gap. A significant service gap (gap between the customers' perception of services and their expectations) has been found in all dimensions of the chosen model. Gap is found in terms of reliability of the service, thus the study indicates that the superstores in Bangladesh do not deliver services to the standards expected and promised. Zaimry, Bayyurt and Zaim (2010) mentioned the dimension reliability as one of the important factors that guarantee customer satisfaction, as it represents the customer getting what they feel they have paid for (Siddiqi 2010). Second, the employees of superstores do not give prompt services and they are not willing to help the customers according to the customers' expectations, which is indicating gap in responsiveness dimension of service quality. Responsiveness is similarly important as reliability dimension, as Mengi (2009) indicated that responsiveness has a positive relation with customer satisfaction. Third, a gap is also explored in assurance dimension, which means the superstores cannot instill confidence in the customers and the employees are not enough courteous according to their expectations. Kumar, Kee and Manshor (2009) and Siddiqi (2010) pointed out that assurance is one of determining factors for customer satisfaction. Similarly, gap is found in empathy dimension indicating that the superstores are not enough sincere to provide individual attention and customer needs. Previous researches posited that empathy is the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction (Ladhari 2009). Finally the study indicates that the superstores do not have enough modern complementary equipment, thus having gap in tangible dimension. Also the stores lack in the visual aesthetics and in terms of employee appearance. Lai (2004) and Siddiqi (2010) found that tangibility is positively related with customer satisfaction and retention. Among these five dimensions, the largest service gap exists in the assurance dimension. The importance of each dimension of service quality is already mentioned through literature

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review. So the superstore management should concentrate on each and every item under all the dimension of the SERVQUAL model in order to improve their target customers' perceptions of services quality.

Overall, this study provides a greater understanding of the variables that appear to be the most influential in structuring customer perceptions and expectations concerning service quality of Superstores in Bangladesh. It is hoped that this study will provide policy makers with greater insight concerning potential benefits of service quality strategies in retailing business sector of the country. As the businesses are getting more globalize, these advances are particularly significant because a high level of service quality is associated with several key Industry outcomes, including high market share (Buzzell & Gale 1987), improved profitability relative to competitors (Kearns & David 1992), enhanced customer loyalty, the realization of a competitive price premium, and an increased probability of purchase (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1996).

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