



Review of Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) System and SERVQUAL with some Empirical Researches

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Abstract : Customers became very vital in business during the marketing time of the 1950s when companies could produce what they can sell and not just selling what they can produce as it was during the production



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era. Since the beginning of the consumption era in marketing, (business.business-key.com) the focus on customers/consumers has increased more as the consumption era also shifts to post-consumption; where organizations are obliged to render more services in addition to what they provide as offers to their customers. What are the qualities of these services provided to customers? Are the customers satisfied with these services? Thus, this research originated from the fact that customer/consumer is the key to business. In fact, their satisfaction is the most important tool that helps to increase sales and generate profits in the business environment. Moreover, the importance of customer satisfaction and service quality has been proven relevant to help improve the overall performance of organizations.

Improving service quality is believed to improve profitability and enhance retail store performance. Such improvements however, require monitoring and continuous measurement of performance along service dimensions that determine standards of service quality. It goes without saying then that reliable and valid tools for measuring service quality are extremely important. Present study provides a detailed discussion of SERVQUAL and RSQS; instruments that have been widely used for measuring retail service quality. A brief discussion of the application of the two instruments in retail context is presented with an objective to determine whether RSQS and/or SERVQUAL provide an effective measure of retail service quality. Review of the empirical researches reveals that the both SERVQUAL and RSQS fail to serve as univocally reliable and valid measures of retail service quality.

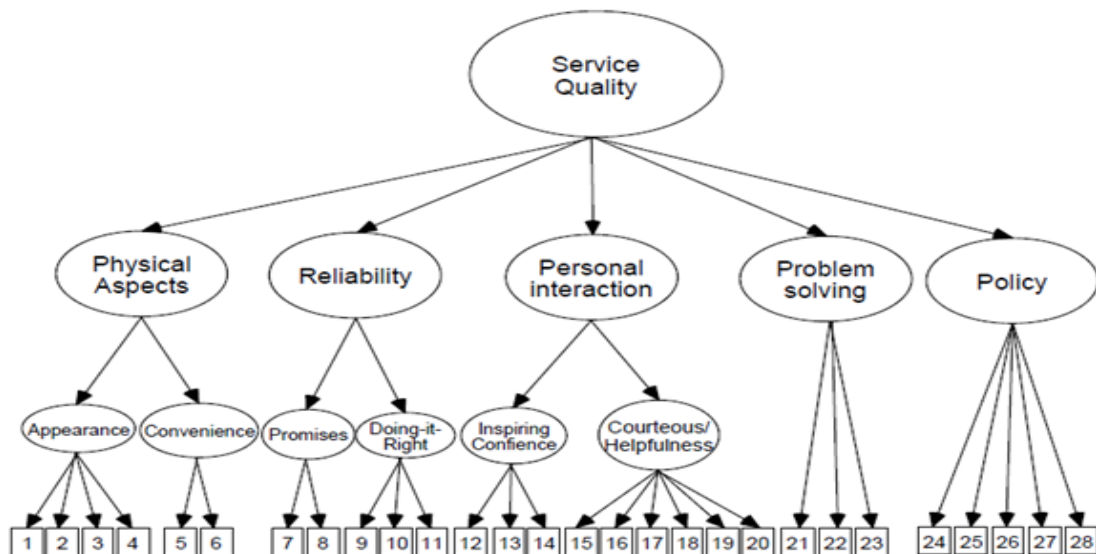
Keywords: Service Quality, Retail Service Quality, RSQS, Sport store, India, Gujrat

RSQS Scale : RSQS was put forward by Dabholkar et al. (1996) as a generalized scale for measuring the quality of retail services that could be adapted to specific retail settings. They



believed that their instrument would serve as a diagnostic tool for retailers to determine which service areas needed improvement. However, as is evident from the review of literature presented earlier, there are inherent limitations in the use of RSQS as a tool for measuring service quality across retail formats. There is not only a serious lack of agreement regarding the number of items that need to be used while assessing retail service quality; there are doubts even about the universality of the five dimensions of retail service quality as identified and proposed by Dabholkar et al. (1996). In the light of the many limitations that are inherent in the application and administration of RSQS developed by Dabholkar et al. (1996), it would be right to conclude that different retail settings are perceived as providing different sets of services to the customers. Hence, it would be appropriate to suggest that the RSQS be adapted, modified and validated in the context of the specific retail setting being studied. Researchers can take care of these problems by first identifying the dimensions most important to the customer while evaluating service quality of stores belonging to a specific retail category, identifying the sub-dimensions therein and, adding new items, deleting or rewording some of the old items and so on. Winsted (1999) suggested that service quality dimensions that may be prevalent in other cultures should also be pursued in future research. It is only when RSQS as an instrument for measuring service quality of retail stores .

Figure 1: The Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS)



Key: Items 1-28 as given in Appendix II. All dimension and sub-dimensions are correlated amongst each other -not depicted in diagram for sake of clarity.



Realizing the need for investigating the dimensions of service quality in retail stores and developing a scale to measure retail service quality, Dabholkar et al. (1996) conducted phenomenological interviews, exploratory depth interviews, and used qualitative study techniques for tracking the thought processes of customers during an actual shopping experience at a store. The authors combined the findings from these qualitative investigations with the existing literature and SERVQUAL, to form a basis for developing RSQS. Five new dimensions are concluded, which are Physical aspects, Reliability, Personal interaction, Problem solving and Policy. As an improvement over SERVQUAL the Physical aspects dimension as proposed in RSQS had a broader meaning as compared to the Tangibles dimension of SERVQUAL. The dimension included the appearance of the physical facilities as well as the convenience of store layout and public areas. Reliability dimension on the other hand is similar to the Reliability dimension of SERVQUAL and is concerned with the store's ability to keep promises and do things right. The Personal interaction dimension in RSQS was a combination of the SERVQUAL dimensions of Responsiveness and Assurance and measured customer perceptions of whether or not the store has courteous and helpful employees who inspire confidence and trust. Problem solving was a new dimension proposed by the authors that assesses the store's performance on the basis of its ability to handle potential problems. Problem solving dimension was separate from the personal interaction dimension as service recovery was recognized to be a critical part of good service. The new dimension of Policy represent all the aspects of service quality that are directly influenced by store policy, such as high-quality merchandise, convenient parking, convenient store hours, acceptance of major credit cards, and availability of a store credit card. Dabholkar et al. (1996) believed that retail service quality had a hierarchical factor structure, where overall service quality be viewed as a higher or second order-factor. RSQS included 28 items, 17 of which came from the existing SERVQUAL scale and the remaining 11 items from the literatures and qualitative research, 5 items of SERVQUAL were deemed inappropriate and dropped. Dabholkar et al. (1996) tested the RSQS with US department store customers. The scale was found to possess strong validity and reliability, the scale was suited for studying retail businesses that offer a mix of services and goods. The instrument could serve as a diagnostic tool that would allow retailers to determine service areas that were weak and needed attention.

The 5 Dimensions of SERVQUAL



After extensive research, Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry found five dimensions customers use when evaluating service quality. They named their survey instrument SERVQUAL.

In other words, if providers get these dimensions right, customers will hand over the keys to their loyalty. Because they'll have received service excellence. According to what's important to them.

The five SERVQUAL dimensions are:

- **Tangibles**-Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials
- **Reliability**-Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- **Responsiveness**-Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
- **Assurance**-Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
- **Empathy**-Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers

Empirical Researches using SERVQUAL

Carman (1990) was the first to apply SERVQUAL to tyre retailers (a retail setting, offering a mix of merchandise and services). He identified nine factors of service quality, using principal axis factor analysis followed by oblique rotation. On the basis of his findings he concluded that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL were not generic, and suggested that the instrument be adapted by adding new items or factors as pertinent to different situations.

Finn and Lamb (1991) tested SERVQUAL in different types of retail stores (department stores and discount stores). Their confirmatory factor analysis was unable to provide a good fit to the proposed five-factor structure of SERVQUAL for either of these commercial formats making them conclude that the instrument could not be used as a valid measure of service quality in retail companies without modifications, although they were unable to provide an acceptable alternative measure.

Guiry, Hutchinson and Weitz (1992) 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. The exploratory factor analysis carried out by them revealed seven dimensions- Personal service during interaction with employees, Merchandise assortment, Store transaction procedure reliability, Employee availability in the store before interaction, Tangibles,



Store service policy reliability and Price. The authors concluded that the number as well as the composition of the dimensions needed to be modified while studying service quality of retail stores.

Gagliano and Hathcote (1994) extracted four factors- Personal attention, Reliability, Tangibles and Convenience while investigating service quality in retail-clothing sector. Two of these- Personal attention and Convenience have no correspondence to SERVQUAL. The five determinants did not factor out as expected. The authors concluded that the original SERVQUAL scale was not an effective tool for measuring service quality in apparel specialty stores.

Vazquez, Rodriguez and Ruiz (1995), identified five dimensions of service quality- Product presentation and shopping convenience, Awareness of promotions, Quality of assortment and of personal interaction, Pricing policy, and Retailers recognition of prestige; using principal component factor analysis. A total of 24 items were identified of which 12 were from SERVQUAL while 12 new items were added by the authors.

Conclusion :

As is evident from the above discussion neither SERVQUAL nor RSQS provide a reliable and valid measure of retail service quality. There are problems regarding the factor structure and sub-dimensions of the two scales. Service quality researchers have suggested scale adaptation to take care of contextual variations both in terms of the industry setting (Carman, 1990; Babakus and Boller 1992; Dabholkar et al. 1996) and the country of study, given a difference in cultural and environmental factors (Malhotra et al. 1994; Furrer et al. 2000; Mehta et al. 2000; Kim and Jin 2002). Depending on the context, adaptation of the service quality scale may not be simple and the specific application should be examined in considerable detail (Brown et al. 1993). Continued refinement of the SERVQUAL and RSQS on the basis of qualitative research and an extensive review of literature would help in identifying items that need to be considered for inclusion or deletion in both scales. The modified scales could then be subjected to further testing by applying them across retail formats using cross-cultural samples. This would not only help researchers in developing a new, more reliable, culturally bounded and accurate measure of retail service quality, which can then be applied globally but would also help managers in making a more accurate assessment of service quality of retail stores across nations supporting



different cultures. Future research needs to proceed along the suggested guidelines if research in retail service quality is to be rendered meaningful.

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