Measuring the Quality of Customer Service through ICT use at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived service quality of ICT and its effects on customer satisfaction at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare. Measuring of service quality has been operationalized in the form of SERVQUAL.The study targeted all employees at the University. Respondents were randomly selected and the target population provided the sample size of 180.Out of 180 copies of questionnaires distributed only 104 responded. The largest gap is with tangibles at -1, 5000 and the lowest and hence closest to expectations is Assurance gap at -0, 9872. It is concluded that at the 0.05 level of significance, there exists enough evidence to conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between consumer service quality expectations and consumer quality perceptions.

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INTRODUCTION

When a customer's expectations are fulfilled or exceeded by a service provider then such a customer may be regarded as satisfied (Cranage, 2004). In this regard service quality is measured through comparing what the customer feels should be offered and what is availed (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1985). The difference between expected and actual service provided is called the gap (Zeithaml *et al.,* 1990).

A fundamental role of firms is to retain and build customer confidence by continuously enhancing customer satisfaction. To this end, the realisation has dawned that maintaining a competitive edge necessitates the abandonment of a reactive customer interface and its replacement with a more proactive approach that takes cognisance of a user-centred ICT networks. The University student and both academic and non-academic staff are increasingly becoming more computer literate and research oriented thereby leading to increasing transactions.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceived service quality of ICT and its effects on customer satisfaction at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare. Therefore the paper has the following objectives:

  (i)   To reveal the expectations of ICT users at the University.
  (ii) To determine the perceived quality of ICT delivered at the University.
  (iii) To investigate the gap between expectations and perceived service quality

The rest of this study is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature. Section 3 presents the methodology employed in the investigation. Section 4 presents the findings. Finally, section 5 concludes and makes recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Measuring of service quality has been operationalized in the form of SERVQUAL by Parasuraman *et al. (*1988). It consists of a two part instrument consisting of 22 questions. The first part measures expectations, that is, in terms of the performance of an excellent provider of the service being examined. Second part also consisting of 22 questions which measures perceptions in terms of the actual performance of the service provider.

SERVQUAL consists of five dimensions that customers utilise when evaluating service quality, notwithstanding the type of service. The dimensions are as follows:

- Tangibles- these include physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.
- Reliability-this is the dependability and accuracy of delivery of the promised service
- Responsiveness- the provision of prompt service and keenness to help customers
- Assurance- capacity to inspire trust and confidence and the knowledge and courtesy of employees.
- Empathy- personalised, caring and focus the service provider gives its customers.

Studies by Kettinger and Lee (1994); Pitt *et al.,* 1995 commend Servqual as an appropriate tool for measuring ICT service quality. In practice, it has proved itself for determining actions for raising service quality (Pitt *et al.*, 1995).

However, SERVQUAL has detractors. For instance, Buttle (1996) critically found that SERVQUAL has no basis in theory of established disciplines such as economics, statistics or psychological theory (Andersson, 1992). Further, he avers that

there is insufficient evidence to assert that consumers assess service quality in terms of an equation contrasting perceptions and expectations and determining a gap. The duo of Cronin and Taylor (1994) go so far as to dismiss SERVQUAL as just one among a variety of expectancy disconfirmation. Churchill and Surprenant (1982) question whether measuring a gap introduces any knowledge or value.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at the University of Zimbabwe which is based in Harare, Zimbabwe. The university comprises ten faculties and has a staff complement of 2000. The respondents were randomly selected and the target population provided the sample size of 180 i,e. about 18 from each faculties. It employed an explanatory research design. The study targeted all employees at the University both academic and non-academic.

The instrument of data collection was a questionnaire as per Parasuraman *et al.,*1988. The data was analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and paired sample T-test.

FINDINGS

Out of 180 copies of questionnaires distributed only 104 responded. Cronbach's alpha test reading indicated below in table 1 highlight that the research instrument and data were highly reliable and valid with an alpha score of 0.909.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0,909	49

Table 2 reports the expectations of the users of the ICT at the University. The expectations are recorded as Mean statistics. The highest being the expected tangibles at 4, 1290 and the lowest is expected reliability at 3, 8784. Implying that respondents were realistic enough not to expect the service to be reliable all the time.

Table 2: Expectations of ICT users at the University

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Expected Tangibles	104	4,1290	,09075	,92548	-1,648	,237	2,463	,469
Expected Reliability	104	3,8784	,07008	,71464	-,842	,237	1,327	,469
Expected Responsiveness	104	3,9535	,07544	,76938	-,949	,237	,930	,469
Expected Assurance	104	4,0401	,06445	,65729	-1,207	,237	2,924	,469
Expected Empathy	104	3,9438	,07053	,71928	-,812	,237	1,079	,469
Valid N (listwise)	104							

Table 3 highlights the perceptions of the users of ICT at the University. The highest mean statistic is perceived assurance at 3, 0529 and the lowest perceived tangibles at 2, 6290.

Table 3: Perceptions of ICT uses at the university

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Perceived Tangibles	104	2,6290	,09037	,92161	,164	,237	-,733	,469
Perceived Reliability	104	2,6731	,08546	,87153	,066	,237	-,880	,469
Perceived Responsiveness	104	2,8806	,08600	,87707	-,016	,237	-,834	,469
Perceived Assurance	104	3,0529	,07372	,75176	-,437	,237	-,348	,469
Perceived Empathy	104	2,9308	,07805	,79599	-,339	,237	-,189	,469
Valid N (listwise)	104							

Table 4 reports the gap and reports them as a mean statistic. With regard to all the five dimensions service quality falls short of customer expectations i.e. there is a gap. The largest gap is with tangibles at -1, 5000 and the lowest and hence closest to expectations is Assurance gap at -0, 9872.

Table 4: Report of the gap between Expectations and perceptions

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Tangibles Gap	104	-1,5000	,11125	1,13450	,059	,237	-,504	,469
Reliability Gap	104	-1,2053	,10526	1,07349	-,202	,237	-,406	,469
Responsiveness Gap	104	-1,0729	,12040	1,22781	,200	,237	,818	,469
Assurance Gap	104	-,9872	,10161	1,03627	-,523	,237	,108	,469
Empathy Gap	104	-1,0130	,10802	1,10154	-,077	,237	-,214	,469
Valid N (list wise)	104							

Table 5 reports the t-test results which indicate that the paired differences were all statistically significant at the 0.5 per cent level. The last column displays a result of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Because of this we can conclude that at the α= 0.05

level of significance, there exists enough evidence to conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between consumer service quality expectations and consumer quality perceptions.

Table 5: Paired Samples T- Test results

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Expected Tangibles - Perceived Tangibles	1,50000	1,13450	,11125	1,27937	1,72063	13,484	103	,000
Pair 2	Expected Reliability - Perceived Reliability	1,20529	1,07349	,10526	,99652	1,41405	11,450	103	,000
Pair 3	Expected Responsiveness - Perceived Responsiveness	1,07292	1,22781	,12040	,83414	1,31169	8,912	103	,000
Pair 4	Expected Assurance - Perceived Assurance	,98718	1,03627	,10161	,78565	1,18871	9,715	103	,000
Pair 5	Expected Empathy - Perceived Empathy	1,01298	1,10154	,10802	,79876	1,22720	9,378	103	,000

1. CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to investigate the perceived service quality of ICT and its effects on customer satisfaction at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare using the SERVQUAL model. This framework is made up of variables such as courtesy, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, communication, access, security and empathy to name a few. It can be concluded that for customers to be loyal, universities must provide appealing ICT service points in neat comfortable and convenient locations as well as being responsive to client requests. From the statistical results, it was confirmed that there was a relationship between customer expectations/perceptions and customer satisfaction. This result is consistent with prior research of (Parasuraman *et al.,* 1988 and Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). Furthermore, higher levels of customer satisfaction lead to increased loyalty, decreased price elasticity, protect current

market share, decrease cost of failure and of attracting new customers while building a credible favourable corporate image Anderson *et. al.,* 1994).

The findings of this study have implications of critical importance for administrators of universities particularly in respect of the quality of services that could be attained and provided as well as its significant influence on the customer's satisfaction.

In particular Managers need to take note of the tangibility dimension as it has the largest gap with assurance being the narrowest. This is of great importance when it is noted that university numbers are growing in Zimbabwe and opportunities outside the country are opening up. Therefore, in order to maintain its brand, the university must compete both locally and internationally. Furthermore, the university to be a truly international brand may wish to attract international

students for a more cosmopolitan cross-pollination of academic experience.

Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations. The findings of this study should be used cautiously in attempting to make generalisations into the whole education sector. The second limitation is that the study was based on a small sample and limited to available participants. Therefore reliability of some responses may be distorted. Another limitation which one cannot measure but can discern is the impact of the recent hyperinflationary episode and that of economic sanctions that have not spared the university as it receives the majority of its funding from the Government.

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