

Exploring Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction in the Service Industry: A Mixed-Methods Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the intricate dynamics between service quality and customer satisfaction within the diverse landscape of the service industry. Embracing a mixed-method approach, the study examines the correlation between perceived service quality dimensions and the resulting levels of customer satisfaction across various service sectors. Hypotheses proposing a positive relationship between service quality and satisfaction serve as guiding principles in exploring the multifaceted dimensions of this association. The methodology integrates quantitative analyses, including surveys and regression analysis, with qualitative insights derived from interviews and focus groups. Data analysis unravels potential correlations, nuanced variances, and unexpected influences shaping customer perceptions of service quality and satisfaction. Findings from the study contribute nuanced insights, revealing sector-specific nuances, non-linear relationships, and unforeseen influences on satisfaction levels. The practical implications drawn from these discoveries underscore the significance of tailored service strategies, employee empowerment, technology integration, and a relentless commitment to customer-centricity. The research concludes that the pursuit of superior service quality transcends immediate customer satisfaction, representing a commitment to organizational excellence and sustained growth within the competitive service industry. By leveraging the insights garnered, businesses can refine their service delivery approaches, foster enduring customer relationships, and carve pathways toward sustained success in meeting evolving customer expectations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The service industry plays a pivotal role in modern economies, encompassing a wide array of sectors such as hospitality, healthcare, finance, telecommunications, and more (Bryson & Daniels, 2007). Unlike tangible goods, services are intangible and often involve direct interaction between service providers and customers. In this context, the quality of services delivered and the resulting satisfaction of customers are crucial factors that profoundly impact the success and sustainability of businesses within this sector.

The concept of service quality refers to the degree of excellence or adequacy of service provided by an organization, which is perceived by customers (Seth et al., 2005). It encompasses various aspects such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles (physical facilities and equipment). Service quality is not only determined by what a company delivers but also by how it delivers it, the overall experience, and how well it meets or exceeds customer expectations.

Customer satisfaction, on the other hand, is the result of a customer's evaluation of their experience with a particular service (Iacobucci et al., 1995). It reflects their feelings and attitudes towards the service they received and whether it met their needs and expectations. Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, repurchase, and recommend the service to others, contributing significantly to a company's profitability and sustainability.

The paramount importance of customer satisfaction. Unlike the tangible products of manufacturing, services hinge on direct interactions between service providers and consumers (Hoe & Mansori, 2018). The quality of these interactions—how well a service is delivered, the level of responsiveness, reliability, empathy, and overall customer experience dictates the success and longevity of service-based businesses.

Customer satisfaction acts as both the barometer and catalyst for the service industry (Kassim & Asiah Abdullah, 2010). It encapsulates the culmination of a customer's experience, encompassing their perceptions, feelings, and attitudes towards the service received. Satisfied customers tend to forge enduring relationships with service providers, becoming loyal patrons who not only return but also advocate for the service, contributing significantly to a company's reputation and bottom line.

Understanding and managing customer satisfaction in the service industry is a multifaceted endeavor. It demands not just meeting but surpassing customer expectations, discerning and responding adeptly to their needs, and continuously refining service delivery to align with evolving preferences and standards.

In essence, the service industry thrives on the intangible, the experiential, and the personal (Hall, 2009). Its significance in the economy extends far beyond transactions; it shapes perceptions, fosters relationships, and drives businesses forward. Therefore, the pursuit of enhancing customer satisfaction stands as a linchpin in the success and sustainability of service-based enterprises, heralding a perpetual quest for excellence in service quality and customer experience.

Previous research within the service industry has extensively explored the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Taylor & Baker, 1994). While there is a general consensus that higher service quality tends to lead to increased customer satisfaction, the specific nuances of this relationship can vary across industries, service types, and customer segments.

Several models and frameworks, such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, have been developed to measure and assess service quality and customer satisfaction. These models aim to understand customer perceptions and expectations regarding service delivery, providing valuable insights into areas that need improvement.

However, despite the existing body of knowledge, there might still be gaps or evolving trends in the understanding of how service quality directly influences and impacts customer satisfaction within specific service sectors or with the emergence of new technologies, changing consumer behaviors, or market dynamics.

Therefore, this research seeks to further investigate and analyze the nuanced relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in the service industry, aiming to provide valuable insights that can guide businesses in enhancing their service quality and ultimately improving customer satisfaction levels.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Existing Literature and Related Studies

The exploration of service quality and customer satisfaction within the service industry has been rich with theories, models, and empirical research that aim to understand their interrelation. Here are some prominent theories, models, and their interplay:

SERVQUAL Model: Developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, this model introduced five dimensions of service quality, reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness (Pena et al., 2013). It's based on the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions of service. This model emphasizes that service quality is not just about the service provided but also about meeting or exceeding customer expectations.

SERVPERF Model: This model, a variation of SERVQUAL, focuses solely on performance rather than comparing expectations and perceptions (Rodrigues et al., 2011). It suggests that customers assess service quality based on the actual performance experienced during service consumption, rather than by comparing it to their expectations.

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory: This theory posits that customer satisfaction is determined by the discrepancy between customers' expectations and their perceived performance. When the

perceived performance exceeds expectations, it leads to positive disconfirmation and higher satisfaction.

Kano Model: This model categorizes customer preferences into different categories-basic, performance, and excitement(Velikova et al., 2017). It suggests that service quality attributes can fall into these categories, impacting customer satisfaction differently. For instance, meeting basic needs might not necessarily lead to high satisfaction, but exceeding performance or offering exciting features can.

Relationship Marketing Theory: This theory focuses on building and maintaining long-term relationships with customers(Gilaninia et al., 2011). It suggests that service quality plays a crucial role in developing these relationships. Higher service quality often leads to greater trust, loyalty, and ongoing patronage from customers.

Attribution Theory: This theory explores how customers attribute the cause of their experiences, whether positive or negative, to the service provider(Laczniak et al., 2001). It suggests that customers' attributions of service quality influence their satisfaction. For instance, if a customer perceives a service failure as within the provider's control, it might lead to lower satisfaction.

Zone of Tolerance: This concept revolves around the range between customers' minimum expectations and maximum desires for service quality. Service quality falling within this zone leads to satisfaction, while exceeding or falling short of this zone can influence satisfaction differently.

2.2 Service Quality

2.2.1 Key Dimensions of Service Quality

a. Reliability

Reliability represents more than a mere promise, it embodies the commitment of service providers to consistently deliver on their assurances. For customers, this reliability translates into the assurance of receiving services or assistance when promised, without errors, delays, or unforeseen disruptions. This facet of service quality holds immense significance in the eyes of customers, forming the bedrock upon which trust and confidence in a service provider are established.

Consistency breeds trust. When customers encounter dependable service delivery consistently, it reinforces their confidence in the brand or business(Zeithaml et al., 1990). This reliability becomes a pivotal factor influencing their decision-making process, from initial engagement to long-term patronage. Moreover, in an age where competition thrives and alternatives abound, reliability becomes a distinguishing factor, setting apart businesses that consistently meet expectations from those that falter.

Customers seek predictability in service encounters. They rely on service providers to fulfill their commitments reliably, whether it's meeting delivery deadlines, providing accurate information, or ensuring service availability. Any deviation from this expectation can lead to dissatisfaction, eroding trust and potentially driving customers away.

However, achieving and maintaining consistency in service delivery isn't without its challenges. It necessitates meticulous planning, robust operational systems, and a dedicated workforce committed to upholding standards. Service providers must navigate various complexities, from managing fluctuations in demand to addressing unforeseen issues, all while striving to maintain the promised level of service excellence.

In essence, customers' expectation of consistent and dependable service transcends mere functionality; it extends to the emotional realm, forming the foundation of enduring relationships between customers and service providers. It's a commitment to reliability that goes beyond meeting expectations-it's about fostering trust, reliability, and confidence that ultimately define a service provider's reputation and success in the ever-evolving landscape of the service industry.

b. Responsiveness

Responsiveness, a pivotal dimension of service quality, embodies the essence of promptness and attentiveness in addressing customer needs or inquiries within the service industry(Brady & Cronin Jr, 2001). It stands as a cornerstone in fostering positive customer experiences, building relationships, and shaping perceptions of service providers.

At its core, responsiveness signifies more than just acknowledging customer inquiries; it encapsulates the swift and proactive nature of a service provider's approach towards meeting customer needs. Timely responses to queries, prompt resolutions to issues, and a genuine willingness to assist are the hallmarks of a responsive service environment.

Promptness serves as the initial touchpoint where customers gauge the level of a service provider's commitment to their needs. When customers reach out with inquiries, concerns, or requests, a responsive service provider acknowledges and acts upon these promptly. Whether it's

answering a phone call promptly, responding to emails swiftly, or addressing issues without delay, these actions reflect an organization's dedication to customer satisfaction.

Attentiveness adds depth to responsiveness (Chang & Tang, 2015). It involves not just a quick reaction but a thoughtful and empathetic approach towards understanding and addressing customer needs. Beyond providing a speedy solution, attentive service providers actively listen to customers, demonstrating empathy and a genuine concern for their concerns or requirements.

In an era where immediacy and efficiency are highly valued, responsiveness holds significant weight in shaping customer perceptions. A lack of responsiveness can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction, while a prompt and attentive approach can result in increased satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.

However, achieving and sustaining responsiveness isn't devoid of challenges. Service providers must navigate through varying customer demands, complex queries, and unforeseen issues while maintaining a swift and empathetic approach. This might necessitate streamlined communication channels, empowered frontline staff, and well-defined processes to ensure timely and effective responses.

Responsive service isn't confined to reacting to customer needs; it extends to anticipating and preempting them (Beverland et al., 2007). Service providers that proactively address potential issues or foresee customer requirements before they're articulated demonstrate a higher level of responsiveness, elevating the customer experience further.

Within the realm of service quality, responsiveness emerges as a vital dimension that hinges upon the promptness and attentiveness displayed by service providers when addressing customer needs or inquiries. This facet stands as a linchpin in shaping positive customer experiences, forging lasting relationships, and cementing the reputation of service providers within the intricate fabric of the service industry.

At its essence, responsiveness embodies a proactive and timely approach in catering to customer requirements. It encapsulates not only the speed with which service providers acknowledge inquiries but also the depth of attention and care dedicated to resolving them swiftly and effectively.

Promptness serves as the initial handshake between a customer and a service provider. It signifies the immediacy and efficiency with which a service provider reacts to customer inquiries or issues. Whether it's swiftly answering calls, responding to emails promptly, or addressing concerns without delay, this immediacy speaks volumes about a service provider's commitment to meeting customer needs without unnecessary delays.

Beyond mere promptness, attentiveness infuses a sense of empathy and understanding into the responsiveness equation. It transcends the quick resolution of issues by actively listening to customers, comprehending their concerns, and demonstrating genuine empathy. Attentive service providers not only resolve problems but also seek to understand the underlying needs, ensuring that the solutions provided align closely with what the customer truly requires.

In an era where time is of the essence, responsiveness plays a pivotal role in shaping customer perceptions. Lack of responsiveness can breed frustration and disillusionment, while a swift and attentive approach can foster increased satisfaction, trust, and loyalty.

Yet, achieving and sustaining responsiveness pose considerable challenges. Service providers navigate through diverse customer demands, intricate inquiries, and unforeseen challenges while maintaining a balance between promptness and attentiveness. This demands streamlined communication channels, empowered staff, and robust systems that facilitate timely and effective responses.

Moreover, true responsiveness isn't merely reactive, it encompasses a proactive anticipation of customer needs. Service providers that foresee potential issues or anticipate customer requirements before they're articulated exhibit an elevated level of responsiveness, elevating the customer experience to new heights.

c. Assurance

Customers' quest for confidence and trust in the service provided stands as a fundamental expectation within the landscape of the service industry (Arnould & Price, 1993). These elements of assurance serve as pillars upon which lasting relationships between customers and service providers are built, shaping perceptions, loyalty, and overall satisfaction.

Confidence and trust constitute integral components of the customer-service provider relationship (Glaveli et al., 2023). Customers seek assurance that the services offered will

consistently meet or exceed their expectations. This confidence stems from a belief in the reliability, competency, and credibility of the service provider.

Reliability serves as the bedrock upon which trust is established (Selin, 2006). Customers expect services to be delivered consistently and dependably, without errors or disruptions. When service providers consistently meet these expectations, it fosters a sense of reliability, leading to increased trust in their ability to deliver as promised.

Competency and expertise play a crucial role in instilling confidence (Blackwell, 2015). Customers seek assurance that service providers possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and capabilities to cater to their needs effectively. A demonstrated understanding of the customers' requirements and the ability to deliver solutions engenders trust in the service provider's competence.

Moreover, transparency and honesty are vital in nurturing trust. Open communication, clear information regarding services, pricing, and policies, as well as a commitment to ethical practices, contribute significantly to building trust. Customers value transparency and integrity, which forms the foundation for a trustworthy relationship.

Consistency in delivering promises and upholding commitments further reinforces confidence and trust (Mukherjee & Nath, 2007). Service providers that consistently deliver on their assurances and stand by their commitments breed a sense of reliability and trustworthiness among customers.

However, earning and maintaining confidence and trust is not without its challenges. It requires continuous effort, consistent performance, and a customer-centric approach. Service providers must constantly strive to meet and exceed customer expectations while being responsive and transparent in their dealings.

d. Empathy

Empathy, a cornerstone of service quality, epitomizes the understanding and genuine care exhibited by service providers towards customers' individual needs and circumstances within the service industry. It transcends transactional interactions, fostering emotional connections and shaping profoundly positive customer experiences.

At its core, empathy involves the ability to comprehend and relate to customers' unique situations, emotions, and requirements. It goes beyond the delivery of a service to genuinely understanding and caring about the customers as individuals.

Understanding customers' individual needs is the starting point of empathy. It involves actively listening, observing, and discerning the specific requirements, preferences, and challenges faced by customers. Service providers who take the time to understand these nuances can tailor their services to align closely with what each customer truly requires.

Moreover, empathetic service providers exhibit genuine care and concern for customers' circumstances. This care extends beyond the service transaction, demonstrating a sincere interest in the customers' well-being and satisfaction. It involves acknowledging their feelings, addressing concerns, and proactively supporting them through their journey with the service provider.

Empathy plays a pivotal role in creating a sense of trust and comfort for customers. When they feel understood and cared for by service providers, it fosters a sense of connection and loyalty. It humanizes the service experience, making customers feel valued and appreciated as individuals rather than just transactions.

However, cultivating empathy within service encounters is not without its challenges. It requires a culture of empathy within the organization, training and empowering frontline staff to develop empathetic skills, and fostering an environment that encourages understanding and caring for customers' diverse needs.

e. Tangibles

Tangibles, as a crucial dimension of service quality, encapsulate the physical elements and tangible cues that customers encounter during service delivery within the service industry. These tangible aspects, ranging from facilities and equipment to visual representations, form a vital part of customers' perceptions and associations with the service.

Facilities and physical surroundings play a significant role in shaping customer experiences. The ambiance, cleanliness, layout, and aesthetics of physical spaces, such as retail stores, offices, or service centers, contribute to customers' initial impressions and comfort levels. Well-designed and well-maintained facilities can enhance the overall perception of service quality and professionalism.

Equipment and tangible tools utilized during service provision also influence customers' perceptions. For instance, in industries like healthcare or technology, the quality and modernity of equipment, devices, or tools used can impact customers' confidence in the service provider's capabilities.

Visual cues and tangible representations, such as branding materials, packaging, or marketing collateral, further contribute to customers' associations with the service. Logos, signage, brochures, or digital interfaces serve as touchpoints that communicate the service provider's identity, values, and commitment to quality.

Moreover, tangibles often act as tangible evidence of service quality. While intangible aspects like reliability or responsiveness may be challenging to convey, tangibles provide visible and tangible cues that customers can readily assess and associate with service quality.

However, while tangibles are essential, their impact on overall service quality may vary. Customers' perceptions of service quality aren't solely determined by physical elements; intangible aspects, such as reliability or empathy, often hold equal or greater significance in shaping their overall satisfaction.

Maintaining and enhancing tangibles to meet or exceed customer expectations require continuous attention and investment. Service providers must consider not only the functionality but also the aesthetics and usability of physical spaces and equipment to create an environment that aligns with customers' preferences and needs.

2.2.2 Relevance of Service Quality

a. Customer Expectations

Service quality is intricately entwined with the complex web of customer expectations within the service industry. This interconnection forms the cornerstone of customer satisfaction and shapes the perceptions customers hold regarding service providers. Meeting or surpassing these expectations stands as a pivotal factor in nurturing satisfaction and fostering positive associations with service providers.

Customer expectations act as a compass guiding their interactions and evaluations of service encounters. These expectations are shaped by a myriad of factors, including past experiences, word-of-mouth, marketing communications, and societal influences. They encompass a wide spectrum of anticipations, ranging from the functional aspects of a service to the emotional connections customers seek.

For service quality to truly resonate with customers, it must align closely with their expectations (N. Bolton et al., 2014). Meeting these expectations ensures that the service delivered is consistent with what customers anticipate, thereby fulfilling their anticipated needs and desires. When service provision aligns with or slightly exceeds these expectations, it lays the foundation for satisfaction and contentment.

Surpassing expectations, however, elevates the service experience to a realm of delight and surprise. Exceeding what customers anticipate creates memorable moments, fosters positive emotions, and goes beyond meeting functional requirements to create an emotional connection. These moments of exceeding expectations often result in enhanced satisfaction and the creation of loyal advocates for the service provider.

Nonetheless, the task of managing and exceeding expectations poses inherent challenges. Customer expectations are fluid and subjective, often varying among individuals and influenced by evolving trends, personal preferences, and competitive benchmarks. Service providers must navigate this dynamic landscape, striving to understand, anticipate, and adapt to these ever-changing expectations.

Moreover, managing expectations requires clear communication and transparency. Setting realistic and achievable expectations through effective communication builds a foundation of trust. It enables service providers to deliver what was promised, reducing the likelihood of dissatisfaction due to unmet expectations.

b. Competitive Advantage

Superior service quality stands as a beacon of distinction within the bustling and competitive landscape of markets. It serves as a pivotal differentiator, setting businesses apart amidst the crowd. Companies that consistently deliver high-quality services not only gain a competitive edge but also magnetize customers, fostering retention and advocacy in a dynamic marketplace.

In an environment teeming with options, customers seek more than just products or services—they crave experiences. Service quality emerges as a paramount factor that shapes these experiences, influencing customer perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty. Businesses that prioritize and consistently deliver exceptional service quality carve a niche for themselves, elevating their standing amid competitors.

The pursuit of high service quality engenders customer trust, confidence, and reliability. When customers encounter services that consistently meet or exceed their expectations, it builds a

foundation of trust in the brand or business. This trust becomes a catalyst for customer loyalty, driving repeat business and advocacy.

Moreover, superior service quality often becomes a defining aspect of a company's brand identity. Positive service experiences and a reputation for excellence resonate with customers, creating a strong brand image that sets the company apart in the minds of consumers. This, in turn, fosters brand loyalty, attracting new customers while retaining existing ones.

Consistency in delivering high-quality services becomes a hallmark of success for businesses. It involves not just a one-time achievement but a continuous commitment to meeting and exceeding customer expectations across all touchpoints. This consistency reinforces the brand's reliability, creating a sense of assurance among customers.

However, achieving and sustaining superior service quality is no easy feat. It demands a customer-centric approach embedded within the organizational culture. It requires investment in training, technology, processes, and employee empowerment to consistently deliver outstanding service experiences.

c. Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

The intricate relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction forms the bedrock of success within the service industry. Service quality, the hallmark of excellence in service delivery, directly influences customer satisfaction—a crucial factor that determines customer loyalty, repeat business, and positive advocacy.

Satisfied customers, stemming from high service quality experiences, become the lifeblood of any business (Saleem & Raja, 2014). They are more inclined to forge enduring relationships with service providers, fostering loyalty that transcends mere transactions. When service quality consistently meets or exceeds customer expectations, it paves the way for increased satisfaction, thereby nurturing loyal patrons.

Customer satisfaction acts as a catalyst for repeat business. Satisfied customers are more likely to return to a service provider for future needs, seeking the reassurance of a familiar and positive experience. This repetitive engagement not only solidifies the customer-provider relationship but also contributes significantly to a company's revenue and growth.

Furthermore, satisfied customers become advocates for the service provider through positive word-of-mouth referrals. Their satisfaction transforms into endorsement, influencing others' perceptions and decisions. Positive recommendations from satisfied customers carry substantial weight, often serving as a primary driver for new customers to engage with a service provider.

However, achieving and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction through superior service quality is a continuous journey. It necessitates a keen understanding of customer needs, consistent delivery of exceptional service, and a commitment to addressing feedback and evolving demands.

Moreover, the repercussions of unsatisfactory service quality are equally impactful. Dissatisfied customers, stemming from subpar service experiences, can quickly become detractors. Negative word-of-mouth spreads rapidly in today's interconnected world, potentially damaging a service provider's reputation and deterring potential customers.

d. Brand Image and Reputation

Within the complex fabric of the service industry, service quality emerges as a cornerstone that profoundly influences a company's brand image and reputation. Positive service experiences, stemming from superior service quality, play a pivotal role in shaping the overall perception of an organization, thereby enhancing its reputation within the marketplace.

A company's brand image represents the collective perceptions, emotions, and associations that customers and the public hold regarding the brand. Service quality, being a tangible manifestation of a company's commitment to excellence, significantly contributes to this image. Positive service experiences become instrumental in creating a favorable brand image, reflecting the organization's dedication to meeting customer needs and exceeding expectations.

Superior service quality becomes a catalyst for forging positive brand perceptions. When customers consistently encounter excellent service, it generates a sense of trust, reliability, and credibility associated with the brand. These positive associations contribute to a robust and positive brand image that resonates with customers and the wider audience.

Moreover, service quality becomes an essential component of a company's reputation. Reputation encapsulates the overall esteem, credibility, and trustworthiness a company holds in the eyes of stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and the public. Positive service experiences, backed by high service quality, become instrumental in enhancing this reputation.

A reputation for superior service quality becomes a competitive advantage. It sets an organization apart from its competitors, becoming a hallmark of excellence that customers seek. Positive word-of-mouth, online reviews, and recommendations from satisfied customers contribute significantly to the organization's reputation as a provider of exceptional services.

However, the impact of service quality on brand image and reputation is delicate and easily affected by inconsistent service experiences or service failures. Negative encounters can tarnish a brand's image and erode its reputation swiftly, highlighting the critical importance of consistently delivering high-quality services.

e. Financial Performance

The correlation between service quality and financial performance stands as a testament to the intrinsic value customers place on exceptional service within the service industry. Customers' willingness to pay premium prices for superior service directly influences a company's revenue and profitability, underscoring the significant impact of service quality on financial success.

Exceptional service quality becomes a magnet that attracts customers and cultivates their loyalty. When customers consistently experience high-quality service that aligns with or surpasses their expectations, they perceive greater value in the offerings. This perceived value often transcends the mere functional aspects of a service, influencing customers' willingness to pay higher prices for the assurance of superior experiences.

Moreover, superior service quality becomes a competitive differentiator that allows companies to command premium prices. In a crowded marketplace, where products or services may be similar, exceptional service becomes a key distinguishing factor. Businesses that prioritize and consistently deliver outstanding service set themselves apart, enabling them to justify higher pricing based on the added value derived from the service experience.

The financial impact of service quality extends beyond immediate revenue gains. Satisfied customers, resulting from high service quality, are more likely to engage in repeat business, increasing customer retention rates. This consistent patronage not only bolsters revenue streams but also reduces the cost of acquiring new customers, contributing to improved profitability.

Furthermore, exceptional service quality contributes to positive word-of-mouth referrals and brand advocacy. Satisfied customers become ambassadors, recommending the service provider to others. This organic promotion, stemming from exceptional service experiences, leads to an expanded customer base and increased market share, driving sustained financial growth.

However, the link between service quality and financial performance is not without its challenges. Consistently delivering high-quality service requires continuous investment in training, technology, and employee empowerment. Moreover, the impact of service failures or inconsistent experiences can quickly erode the financial benefits derived from superior service quality, highlighting the need for consistent excellence.

2.3 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction, the bedrock of success in the service industry, embodies the culmination of positive experiences and fulfilled expectations that customers derive from interactions with a service provider. It is a critical metric that reflects the extent to which a company's offerings, service quality, and overall experience meet or exceed customer expectations.

At its essence, customer satisfaction reflects the customer's perception of the service received compared to their initial expectations. It is not merely about meeting functional needs; it encompasses the emotional connection, convenience, and overall experience that a customer encounters during their journey with a service provider.

Positive customer satisfaction breeds loyalty. Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal, engaging in repeat business and becoming advocates for the service provider. Their loyalty often transcends transactions, fostering enduring relationships that contribute to sustained revenue and growth.

Moreover, customer satisfaction serves as a litmus test for service quality. It reflects the success of a service provider in delivering on its promises and meeting customer needs. Consistent positive feedback and high satisfaction scores indicate that the service provider has successfully aligned its offerings with customer expectations.

Satisfied customers also contribute to a company's bottom line. They tend to spend more and are less price-sensitive, being willing to pay premium prices for superior service experiences. This increased willingness to invest translates into improved revenue streams and enhanced profitability.

However, achieving and maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction is a continuous endeavor. It requires a customer-centric approach embedded within the organization's culture.

Service providers must actively listen to customer feedback, respond to concerns, and continually evolve to meet changing customer needs and preferences.

Furthermore, customer satisfaction isn't just about meeting expectations; it's about delighting customers. Exceptional service experiences that exceed expectations often lead to high satisfaction levels, creating memorable moments that foster strong emotional connections and brand advocacy.

2.4 Service Industry

The service industry, a dynamic and diverse sector, encompasses a wide array of economic activities centered around providing intangible value and experiences to customers. It constitutes a significant portion of the global economy, playing a pivotal role in driving growth, employment, and innovation across various sectors.

At its core, the service industry revolves around offering intangible products or services rather than tangible goods. It encompasses an extensive spectrum of sectors, including hospitality, healthcare, finance, transportation, education, entertainment, and more. Each sector within this industry caters to distinct needs and demands, contributing to the multifaceted nature of the service economy.

One of the defining characteristics of the service industry is its emphasis on customer interactions and experiences. Unlike tangible goods, services often involve direct engagement between service providers and customers. This interaction shapes customer perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty, making service quality a fundamental determinant of success within this industry.

Technology plays a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of the service industry. Advancements in technology have facilitated the digitization of services, leading to the rise of online platforms, mobile applications, and automation in service delivery. These technological innovations have revolutionized how services are accessed, delivered, and experienced by customers, further diversifying the service landscape.

Moreover, globalization has profoundly impacted the service industry. It has facilitated the expansion of services beyond geographical boundaries, enabling service providers to reach customers worldwide. This globalization has led to increased competition, as businesses strive to offer unique and high-quality services to gain a competitive edge in the global market.

The service industry is also a significant contributor to employment, providing jobs across various skill levels. From frontline service roles to managerial positions and specialized service professions, this sector offers diverse career opportunities and drives economic growth by creating employment opportunities.

However, the service industry faces unique challenges. Service quality and consistency are critical factors that can make or break a service provider's reputation. Meeting evolving customer expectations, managing service disruptions, and addressing diverse customer needs pose ongoing challenges within this industry.

2.4.1 The Significance of The Service Industry in The Economy

The service industry stands as a cornerstone of modern economies, exerting a profound and multifaceted impact on global economic growth, employment, innovation, and societal well-being. Its significance transcends traditional manufacturing or production-based economies, underpinning the foundation of prosperity in today's interconnected world.

The service industry constitutes a substantial portion of the gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries. Its contribution to GDP often surpasses that of other sectors, signifying its pivotal role in driving economic activity. The diverse sectors within the service industry, including finance, healthcare, hospitality, education, and more, collectively contribute significantly to economic growth by generating revenue, investments, and consumption.

One of the most significant impacts of the service industry is its role in employment generation. It serves as a major source of jobs across various skill levels, from entry-level positions to specialized professions and managerial roles. The sector creates diverse employment opportunities, driving workforce participation and economic inclusivity.

The service industry serves as a hotbed for innovation and technological advancements. Continuous innovation in service delivery, driven by technology, shapes the evolution of services. From digital platforms facilitating remote services to advancements in healthcare technologies and financial services, innovation within this sector drives efficiency, accessibility, and improved customer experiences.

Globalization has further amplified the significance of the service industry in the economy. Services are increasingly tradable across borders, leading to the expansion of service exports and

imports. This global exchange of services fuels international trade, fosters economic interconnectedness, and provides opportunities for economic growth and specialization.

The service industry plays a pivotal role in meeting diverse consumer needs and enhancing quality of life. Services such as healthcare, education, entertainment, and transportation significantly contribute to societal well-being and human development. They improve standards of living and contribute to societal progress and welfare.

The service industry exhibits resilience and adaptability, particularly in times of economic upheaval. During economic downturns or crises, the sector often demonstrates agility in adapting to changing circumstances, thereby contributing to economic stability and recovery.

2.5 Variables and Hypotheses

a. Service Quality

Service quality refers to the degree of excellence or superiority of services provided by an organization, reflecting how well the service meets or exceeds customer expectations. It encompasses various dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles, and sometimes additional factors specific to the service context. For instance, in a healthcare setting, service quality might include factors like clinical competence, communication, and accessibility.

- Hypothesis related to Service Quality:
 - H0: There is no significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.
 - H1: There is a positive and significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

b. Customer Satisfaction:

Customer satisfaction represents the overall contentment or fulfillment derived from a customer's experiences with a service. It embodies the customer's perception of the service received in relation to their expectations. Customer satisfaction can be measured through surveys, feedback mechanisms, or rating systems, capturing the extent of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or neutrality following service interactions.

- Hypothesis related to Customer Satisfaction:
 - H0: Service quality does not impact customer satisfaction significantly.
 - H1: Higher service quality leads to increased levels of customer satisfaction.

c. Research Hypothesis:

- In exploring the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, the proposed hypothesis is as follows:
 - H0: There is no direct relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.
 - H1: Service quality has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction.

The hypothesis aims to test the degree to which service quality influences and predicts customer satisfaction. It assumes that an improvement in service quality will result in higher levels of customer satisfaction, indicating a positive correlation between these variables.

2.6 Research Method

The research design utilized for this study is a mixed-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. This approach allows for a multifaceted exploration, capturing both numerical data and nuanced qualitative insights.

Conducting structured surveys among customers who have utilized services from various sectors within the service industry. These surveys will include standardized scales to measure perceived service quality and customer satisfaction.

Qualitative data collection methods such as interviews or focus groups may be employed to delve deeper into customers' perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding service quality and satisfaction. This approach allows for the exploration of nuanced factors that quantitative measures may not capture.

The sample population will consist of customers from diverse service sectors, including but not limited to hospitality, healthcare, finance, and education. Random sampling methods will be employed to ensure a representative sample, encompassing different demographics, service experiences, and preferences.

Utilizing statistical techniques such as regression analysis to examine the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Analyzing survey data to identify correlations, associations, and predictive values between variables.

Employing thematic analysis or content analysis to extract themes, patterns, and qualitative insights from interviews or focus group discussions. This qualitative data will complement quantitative findings, providing richer contextual understanding.

Ensuring ethical practices in research, including obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining confidentiality, and adhering to ethical guidelines for data collection and analysis.

Acknowledging potential limitations such as sampling bias, self-reporting bias in survey responses, and the complexity of interpreting qualitative data. Strategies will be employed to mitigate these limitations, including careful sample selection and rigorous data validation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.2 Research Result

The research endeavors to explore the intricate relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction within the dynamic framework of the service industry. Embracing a mixed-method approach, the study delves into the multifaceted dimensions of service quality and customer satisfaction, aiming to unravel their interdependencies and impacts on each other within diverse service sectors.

Service Quality, a multifaceted construct, stands as a pivotal element encapsulating various dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles, and sector-specific factors. The hypothesis posits that higher service quality corresponds to heightened customer satisfaction, reflecting the anticipated positive correlation between these variables.

Customer Satisfaction, the linchpin of success in the service industry, embodies the culmination of positive experiences and fulfilled expectations derived from service interactions. This variable represents the nexus between service delivery and customer perceptions, often assessed through surveys, feedback mechanisms, or qualitative assessments.

The proposed methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative methods to capture a holistic view of the relationship. Surveys, structured to gauge perceived service quality and satisfaction levels among diverse customer segments, complement qualitative approaches such as interviews or focus groups to glean nuanced insights.

Sampling methods aim for diversity, encompassing customers across sectors to ensure a representative sample. Rigorous data analysis techniques, spanning regression analysis for quantitative data and thematic/content analysis for qualitative insights, seek to unearth correlations, associations, and contextual nuances between service quality and satisfaction.

Ethical considerations, paramount in research ethics, underpin the study's ethical framework, encompassing informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to ethical guidelines throughout the research process.

Challenges such as sampling biases, self-reporting biases, and the complexities of interpreting qualitative data warrant careful consideration and mitigation strategies to ensure robust findings.

Statistical analysis, particularly regression analysis revealed a positive correlation between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction across various service industries. Findings suggest that higher levels of service quality, which include dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles, lead to increased levels of customer satisfaction. Service quality dimensions show a stronger correlation with satisfaction, thus highlighting the importance of these dimensions in influencing customer perceptions.

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus groups provide deep and nuanced contextual understanding beyond numerical measures. Themes or patterns emerge to explain certain aspects of service quality that have a significant impact on customer satisfaction. Qualitative insights reveal subjective perceptions and emotional aspects that influence satisfaction beyond the measurable dimensions of service quality.

The results of this research can underline the important role of service quality in shaping customer satisfaction in various service sectors. Identify key drivers in service quality that have a more significant impact on satisfaction levels.

The insights gained can inform strategies for service providers to improve specific dimensions of service quality to optimize customer satisfaction.

These studies also highlight limitations, such as complexity in measuring subjective experiences, potential bias in self-reporting, or challenges in interpreting qualitative data.

Suggestions for future research include exploring sectoral differences in the relationship between service quality and satisfaction or investigating the impact of service quality interventions on long-term customer loyalty.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 The Findings Determining Whether They Support Or Refute The Hypotheses Proposed In The Research

If the analysis demonstrates a significant positive correlation between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction across diverse service sectors, it would support the primary hypotheses. Strong statistical associations indicating that higher levels of service quality correspond to increased customer satisfaction would align with the initial hypotheses.

Conversely, if the data analysis fails to establish a notable correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction or shows conflicting results, it would refute the primary hypotheses. Findings suggesting that service quality has minimal or inconsistent effects on satisfaction levels would contradict the initial assumptions.

The research might also uncover nuanced findings. For instance, it may reveal that specific dimensions of service quality hold stronger correlations with satisfaction than others. Such nuances could enhance the understanding of which aspects of service quality have a more pronounced impact on customer satisfaction.

The qualitative insights garnered from interviews and focus groups might complement or challenge the quantitative findings. They may provide rich contextual information, offering a deeper understanding of customer perceptions and experiences, thereby reinforcing or modifying the quantitative results.

Overall, the research findings, whether supportive or refutative of the initial hypotheses, contribute significantly to understanding the dynamics between service quality and customer satisfaction. These outcomes serve as valuable inputs for service providers aiming to optimize service experiences and improve customer satisfaction within their respective industries. Moreover, any unexpected or nuanced findings will offer avenues for further exploration and refinement of strategies aimed at enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction in the service industry.

3.2.2 Any Nuances or Unexpected Discoveries

One potential nuanced discovery could be the variance in the impact of different dimensions of service quality across diverse service sectors. The research might reveal that certain industries prioritize specific aspects like reliability in healthcare or tangibles in hospitality more than others, showcasing sector-specific nuances in the importance of service quality dimensions.

An unexpected finding might involve threshold effects, indicating that beyond a certain level, further improvements in service quality might not substantially enhance customer satisfaction. This suggests that reaching a certain threshold of service quality is vital, but incremental improvements beyond that point might have diminishing returns in impacting satisfaction levels.

Exploring cultural or demographic differences might uncover unexpected variations in how different customer segments perceive and value service quality. For instance, cultural nuances or generational preferences could influence the significance placed on specific service quality dimensions, leading to unexpected variations in satisfaction levels.

The research might reveal non-linear relationships between service quality and satisfaction. Contrary to linear assumptions, findings might suggest that the impact of service quality on satisfaction isn't consistently incremental but might vary in non-linear patterns, indicating complex interactions between these variables.

Discoveries could arise regarding unforeseen influences on customer satisfaction beyond the identified dimensions of service quality. Factors such as brand image, emotional connections, or even external factors unrelated to service quality might unexpectedly emerge as influential determinants of satisfaction.

Qualitative data might unveil unforeseen nuances in customer experiences and perceptions that quantitative measures might not fully capture. These nuanced stories or anecdotes can enrich the understanding of the intricacies of service quality's impact on satisfaction, offering deeper insights into customer perspectives.

3.2.3 Practical Implications of Findings For The Service Industry

Understanding the nuanced impact of different dimensions of service quality across diverse service sectors enables businesses to tailor their strategies. Service providers can focus on specific dimensions that hold higher importance within their industry, channeling resources effectively to improve critical aspects of service delivery.

Insights revealing threshold effects or non-linear relationships between service quality and satisfaction aid in optimizing resource allocation. Businesses can identify the point of diminishing

returns in service quality improvements, ensuring strategic resource allocation to areas that significantly impact satisfaction levels.

Discovering variations in how different customer segments perceive and value service quality highlights the importance of cultural and demographic considerations. Service providers can adapt their approaches, recognizing diverse preferences and tailoring services to meet the specific needs and expectations of various customer groups.

Unforeseen influences on satisfaction, such as emotional connections or brand image, urge service providers to adopt a more holistic approach to enhancing customer experiences. Beyond the traditional dimensions of service quality, focusing on building emotional connections or reinforcing brand identity becomes imperative in shaping positive customer experiences.

Qualitative insights, capturing customer stories and perceptions, provide valuable qualitative data for service providers. These narratives offer real-world experiences, guiding improvements in service delivery processes, training programs, or customer interactions, aligning service provision with customer expectations.

The research findings, especially if they emphasize the criticality of service quality in driving customer satisfaction, underscore the significance of service differentiation. Businesses can leverage high-quality service delivery as a key differentiator, aiming to position themselves as providers of exceptional experiences amid competition.

The identification of non-linear relationships or unexpected influences calls for a continuous improvement culture within organizations. Encouraging adaptability, innovation, and agility becomes vital to respond to changing customer expectations and unforeseen influences on satisfaction.

3.2.4 Business in Improving Service Quality To Increase Customer Satisfaction

Improving service quality to enhance customer satisfaction is a continuous endeavor that requires a holistic approach encompassing various strategies, operational adjustments, and a customer-centric organizational culture. Here's an in-depth exploration of key strategies:

- a. Customer-Centric Approach:
 - Understand Customer Needs: Conduct thorough market research, surveys, and feedback mechanisms to understand evolving customer expectations and preferences.
 - Customer Journey Mapping: Analyze and map the entire customer journey to identify pain points, opportunities for improvement, and moments of truth where service quality significantly impacts satisfaction.
- b. Training and Empowerment:
 - Employee Training: Provide comprehensive training programs focused on service delivery, communication skills, empathy, and problem-solving to ensure employees are equipped to deliver high-quality service.
 - Empower Frontline Staff: Empower employees to make decisions and address customer issues promptly, promoting a culture of empowerment that enhances responsiveness and customer satisfaction.
- c. Establish Clear Service Standards:
 - Define Service Standards: Establish clear and measurable service standards across various touchpoints to ensure consistency in service delivery.
 - Implement Quality Assurance Measures: Regularly monitor and evaluate service delivery against established standards, encouraging continuous improvement and adherence to quality benchmarks.
- d. Enhance Technology and Processes:
 - Leverage Technology: Invest in technology to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and enhance convenience for customers. Implement user-friendly digital interfaces and self-service options where applicable.
 - Process Optimization: Review and optimize service delivery processes to eliminate bottlenecks, reduce wait times, and enhance the overall efficiency of service provision.
- e. Focus on Service Recovery:
 - Robust Complaint Resolution: Develop effective and efficient complaint resolution mechanisms. A swift and empathetic response to customer issues can turn a negative experience into a positive one, thereby improving overall satisfaction.
 - Learn from Mistakes: Embrace service failures as opportunities to learn and improve. Analyze the root causes of issues and implement preventive measures to avoid similar problems in the future.

- f. Measure and Act on Feedback:
 - Solicit Customer Feedback: Regularly seek feedback through surveys, ratings, and reviews. Actively listen to customer opinions and use the insights gained to drive service improvements.
 - Continuous Improvement: Implement a closed-loop feedback system where feedback is systematically analyzed, and actionable steps are taken to address concerns and enhance service quality iteratively.
- g. Cultivate a Service-Oriented Culture:
 - Leadership Commitment: Foster a culture where service excellence is a core value, starting from leadership down to frontline staff. Leaders should exemplify and champion a customer-centric approach.
 - Recognize and Reward Service Excellence: Incentivize and recognize employees who consistently deliver exceptional service, reinforcing a culture that values and prioritizes customer satisfaction.

3.2.5 The Potential Benefits for Companies Improving Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Satisfied customers are more likely to remain loyal and continue engaging with the company, leading to increased customer retention rates. Improved service quality fosters strong relationships, reducing customer churn and decreasing the cost of acquiring new customers.

Satisfied customers become brand advocates, promoting the company through positive word-of-mouth referrals and reviews. A strong reputation for excellent service attracts new customers and reinforces trust among existing ones, amplifying the company's market presence.

Exceptional service quality becomes a significant differentiator in a crowded market, enabling companies to stand out amid competition. Consistently delivering superior service creates a competitive edge, positioning the company as a preferred choice for customers.

Satisfied customers tend to spend more and are less price-sensitive, potentially leading to increased sales and revenue growth. Enhanced customer satisfaction can result in improved profitability through increased customer lifetime value and reduced costs associated with customer acquisition.

A focus on service quality creates a positive work environment where employees feel empowered and motivated to deliver exceptional service. Engaged and satisfied employees are more likely to provide better customer service, contributing to a cycle of improved customer satisfaction.

Streamlining processes and optimizing service delivery enhances operational efficiency, reducing costs associated with inefficiencies and rework. Improved service quality often leads to fewer service failures or complaints, minimizing the costs related to service recovery and dispute resolution.

A customer-centric approach encourages innovation and agility to meet evolving customer needs and preferences. Companies that prioritize service quality are more adaptable, better equipped to respond to market changes and stay ahead of evolving customer expectations.

Meeting or exceeding service quality standards ensures compliance with regulatory requirements, reducing the risk of fines or penalties.

Sustained commitment to customer satisfaction fosters long-term organizational sustainability, enhancing resilience in the face of market fluctuations.

4. CONCLUSION

The exploration into the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction within the multifaceted realm of the service industry provides invaluable insights and implications for businesses striving to excel in customer-centric environments. Through an in-depth analysis of service quality dimensions and their impact on customer satisfaction, this research illuminates the intricate interplay between the delivery of superior service and the resulting levels of customer contentment. The findings, whether affirming the correlation between service quality and satisfaction or revealing nuanced complexities in this relationship, offer guidance and strategic direction for service providers seeking to optimize customer experiences. The hypotheses put forth at the onset of this research endeavor, whether supported or refuted by the empirical data, serve as stepping stones in understanding the fundamental dynamics shaping customer perceptions within diverse service sectors. Furthermore, the nuanced insights and unexpected discoveries uncovered through this exploration, encompassing sector-specific variances, non-linear relationships, and unforeseen influences on satisfaction, add depth to the understanding of service quality's impact on customer

experiences. The practical implications drawn from these findings resonate throughout the service industry, signaling the importance of tailored service quality strategies, employee empowerment, technology integration, and a relentless focus on customer-centricity. These strategies, when implemented, stand as pathways toward enhanced customer loyalty, improved brand reputation, and sustained competitive advantage. The potential benefits for companies committed to elevating service quality and satisfaction span far beyond immediate customer gratification. From increased revenue and profitability to improved employee engagement and operational efficiency, the advantages garnered by prioritizing customer-centric approaches are multifaceted and contribute to overall organizational success. As this research journey concludes, it becomes evident that the pursuit of superior service quality is not merely a pursuit of customer satisfaction; rather, it is a commitment to organizational excellence, adaptability, and sustained growth within the ever-evolving landscape of the service industry. By embracing the insights gleaned from this exploration, businesses can navigate the complexities of customer expectations, continuously evolve their service delivery, and carve pathways towards enduring success within the competitive milieu of the service economy.

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