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Applying the SERVQUAL Model in Postal Services : A Case Study of Mahebourg Mauritius Post Services Ltd.

Randhir Roopchund
HOD, Université des Mascareignes, Mauritius
Shobha Boojhawon
University of Technology, Mauritius

Abstract:
Service quality has become a key marketing tool for achieving competitive differentiation and fostering customer satisfaction and loyalty. Across industries and sectors, firms seek to distinguish themselves and retain customers by excellence in service performance. Service quality has been acknowledged as a significant contributing aspect to the aptitude of a company to hold on to clients. The research seeks to apply the SERVQUAL model identifying the different gaps in the Mauritian Postal service which has modernized itself completely over the last decade. A survey was carried out with users of the Mahebourg Postal office to analyse the gaps and differences in service quality. Some recommendations were developed to improve the overall service quality.

Keywords : SERVQUAL, Postal Services and Quality Improvement

1. Introduction

Service quality is regarded as a vital means for an organization's struggle to distinguish itself from its rivals (Ladhari, 2008). According to Douglas & Connor, (2003), Parasuraman et al., (1985), and Ladhari, (2008), the intangible aspects of a service (inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability) are the key factors controlling service quality perceived by a buyer. As Lewis and Booms (1983) have set it, "service quality is an assessment of how well the service level distributed equals customer expectations. Distributing quality service refers to proving to customer expectations on a reliable source.

Service quality is a theory that has stirred huge concern and debate in the research literature because of the problems in both labeling it and calculating it with no general agreement emerging on either (Wisniewski, 2001). There are several meanings as to what is meant by service quality. One that is usually applied labels service quality as the degree to which a service meets customers' requirements or expectations (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990; Dotchin and Oakland, 1994; Asubonteng et al, 1996; Wisniewski and Donnelly, 1996). Service quality can therefore be described as the differentiation between customer expectations of service and perceived service. If expectations are bigger than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and thus customer dissatisfaction arises (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). On the other hand, service quality changes ultimately and relates to the consumers' developed approach toward a service. There is no particular meaning of service quality although it is distinguished from satisfaction by its focus on expectations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Characteristics of Service

Services have a number of distinctive features differentiating them from goods. Johns (1999) disagree that services are mainly explained as intangible and their output analyzed as an activity rather than a tangible item, but also declares that some service outputs have some considerable tangible components like physical facilities, tools and employees. Gummesson (1994) put forwards that, a service design which compromise of a service, service system and the service delivery process includes consumers, personnel, equipment, the physical environment, and the consumption goods. The physical features are essential for elevated quality service delivery.

Bateson (1985) summarizes four distinct features of a service to be intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability. Unlike a good where tangible cues exist to permit customers to estimate the quality of the good, the quality of the service is determined by restrictions that mainly come under the field of occurrence and credibility properties and are as such complicated to gauge and assess (Parasuraman et al 1985; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003).

2.2. Service Quality Dimensions

Several researchers have the same opinion that service quality can be decomposed into two main dimensions (Grönroos, 1983; Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982). The primary dimension is related with what the service distributes and is referred to by PZB

(Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) as "outcome quality" and by Grönroos (1984) as "technical quality". The second dimension is related with how the service is distributed: the method that the consumer went all the way through to obtain to the result of the service. PZB (1985) refer to this as "process quality" whilst Grönroos (1984) calls it "functional quality".

PZB (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) and PZ (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, 2006) confirmed these variations, they often confusingly relate "service quality" when they imply "service process quality." Hence to evade any 2 of 16 more confusion a characteristic will be made between "service process" and "service outcome". Each time the term service is applied, it should be considered as the total service which is an amalgamation of process and result. Similarly, service quality s hall be employed to demote to the total of process quality and outcome quality.

Parasuraman and Zeithaml describe service quality as "the level and way of difference between customers' service perceptions and expectations" (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, 2006). Consequently if the perception is bigger than expectation, then the service is said to be of much higher value. In the same way, when expectation is higher than perception, the service is said to be of lower value. Realizing that there was not sufficient literature to create a precise understanding of service quality and its determinants, PZB (1985) carried out an examining research to officially define service quality. Their investigation was made up of discussions with managements from four types of service businesses. One of the outcomes of this analysis was the recognition of ten factors of service process quality which PZB (1985) scheduled them as the following:

- RELIABILITY entails stability of performance and loyalty.
- RESPONSIVENESS refers to the readiness or promptness of workers to offer service.
- COMPETENCE involves ownership of the compulsory abilities and facts to execute the service.
- ACCESS means accessibility and ease of understanding.
- COURTESY concerns courtesy, value, kindness, and easiness of contact personnel.
- COMMUNICATION implies keeping clients up to date in words they can comprehend and listening to them. It may well mean that the business has to fiddle with its language for diverse customers.
- CREDIBILITY refers to reliability, trustworthiness, integrity. It engages having the client's finest happiness at heart.
- SECURITY is the liberty from threat, danger, or uncertainty
- UNDERSTANDING/KNOWING THE CUSTOMER means to make an attempt to comprehend the customer's wants.
- TANGIBLES comprise the physical facts of the service.

In an afterwards research, PZB (1988) found some common characteristics amongst the dimensions and summarized the listing into five dimensions. This latest list engaged tangibles, reliability, and responsiveness while competency, courtesy, integrity, and security were united into a new dimension called assurance. Admittance, communication, and accepting the customer, in contrast, were positioned under a general dimension called empathy. Hence the dimensions are now identified as the following:

- ASSURANCE - awareness and politeness of workers and their capabilities to motivate expectation and assurance.
- EMPATHY - concerned, individualized interest the organization offers its clients.
- RELIABILITY - aptitude to carry out the promised service without fail and correctly.
- RESPONSIVENESS - readiness to assist clients and give rapid service.
- TANGIBLES - Appearance of physical amenities, tools, staff, and contact supplies.

In their 1988 revision, PZB state that these five dimensions are standard and reliable across diverse form of services by shaping that there was "constant factor arrangement…across five autonomous models." But, basing this conclusion on a small sample raises doubts on its validity. Buttle (1996) found severe concerns with the amount of dimensions with their reliability in different situations. Carman (1990) further declares that the 4 of 16 dimensions may have been over-generalized and proposes that various things of the ten dimensions that were no longer unambiguously settled in the five dimensions be retained until further feature investigation explains that they actually are not distinctive. Peter et al. (1993) also put forward that the common characteristics among responsiveness, assurance, and empathy was understated by PZB in their unique research. Woo and Ennew (2005), in the meantime, found that in industry services markets, the elements were totally different. Consequently, at its best, the five elements should only be judged as a starting point rather than a device that can be instantly applied in the field.

2.3 Importance of Service Quality
Service quality has been accounted as having unambiguous connection to overheads (Crosby, 1979), productivity (Buzzell and Gale, 1987; Rust and Zahorik, 1993; Zahorik and Rust, 1992), customer satisfaction (Boltan and Drew, 1991; Boulding e al, 1993), retention of customer (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990), behavioural intention, and constructive word-of-mouth. Quality is the main vital buying decision cause that persuades the customer's purchasing decisions. In the same way, it has planned profit of adding to market- share and returns on savings (Anderson and Zeithaml, 1984; Philips, Chang and Buzzell, 1983) as well as in lessening production expenditures and developing output (Garvin, 1983).Service quality by its very character is an indefinable, indistinguishable and intangible theory. Customers do not effortlessly articulate their needs; as there are problems in setting the limits and calculating the concept.

Service marketers have practiced it for the past few years that rivalry can be well dealt with by distinguishing throughout feature. Importance of service lies in customer service management. Customer service is examined as a component of marketing mix in services marketing. It is also viewed as logistic purpose of being included within the customer service activity (Londe et al, 1988); and as aptness and dependability of delivering services to clients in agreement with their expectations (Londe Zinser, 1976). Since services have inseparability and intangibility qualities, customer service in service organizations is generally more significant than in manufacturing organizations.

Rivalry and technological up gradation have led in anxiety on customer service which have made customers further complicated in their wants and are more and more demanding superior standards of service. As a result importance in controlling the services through customer service is significantly high. It necessitates positioning customer service purposes in terms of relative importance of customer service factors. In other words, while taking into consideration levels of performance in positioning customer service objectives, service businesses need to bear in mind the value of service quality variables such as dependability, awareness, guarantee, understanding and tangibles (Payne, 1995). Christopher and Ballantyne (1991) reported that it is the relationship marketing that brings forward quality, customer service, and marketing jointly. With this, the achievement of quality has turn out to be a fundamental alarm between the marketers. Moreover Brown and Swartz (1989) reports that the constant delivery of better service providers to situate themselves more successfully in the market place.

2.4. Service Failure

Service failure occurs when the service was not delivered as expected by the customers. In effect, then, service failure arises from the customer's perception of a service experience and not from what the organization believes it has provided. Failures arise for several reasons:

- The service may be out of stock when guaranteed.
- The service may be delivered late or too slowly.
- The result may be false or badly implemented.
- Service staff may be rude or uncaring.

All these types of failures may bring about negative feelings and responses from the customers. When left unresolved, they can result in a decline in customer confidence, dissatisfied and lost customers as well as negative word of mouth. Moreover, it can be challenging for the firm through consumer rights organizations or legal channels (Bitner, Booms and Tetreault, 1990; Keavney, 1995). Service failures have been classified according to staff behaviours when failures take place, relating to: the core service; request for personalized service; and unanticipated employee performance (Reid and Bojanic, 2001).

On the other hand, service failures are nevertheless predictable and arise in both the development and the result of service delivery. They comprise circumstances when the service fails to live up to the consumer's beliefs (Michael, 2001).

2.5. Customer Satisfaction

Consumer satisfaction has a vital function in organizations, not only because it has direct pressure on the performance of the business (Wong, 2000; Fornell, 1992), but because it is extremely connected with the competitive advantages of the establishment and businesses in the marketplace (Greenland, Coshall, & Combe, 2006).

Literature institutes that customer satisfaction is a means to long-lasting business achievement (Zeithami et al., 1996).To keep and achieve market shares, businesses need to do better than rivals by supplying high value goods or services to guarantee happiness of consumers (Reichheld, 1996; Gronroos, 2000; Tsoukatos, 2008). Levesque et al explains customer satisfaction as the upcoming purpose of clients towards the service provider, which is somewhat connected to the approach (Levesque et al, 1996) whereas Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) contradicted by defining satisfaction as an overall client approach towards a service provider, or an expressive response to the distinction between what customers expect and what they get, regarding the achievement of some want, aim or need.

A small number of scholarly researches, to date have been carried out to classify quality elements and complete features of services and their associations with customer satisfaction (Zeithaml et. Al., 2002; Yang & Fang 2004). One of the more generally used tools for measuring customer satisfaction is SERVQUAL extended by Zeithaml et. Al., (1988). Researchers have concentrated more on the close relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Bitner et al., 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

2.6. Customer Retention/Loyalty

The terms customer retention and customer loyalty are similar (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Gremler and Brown (1996) describe service loyalty as "the point to which a consumer exhibits repeat buying actions from a service supplier, encouraging attitudinal character toward the supplier and all set to use same source when a requirement for the services takes place. According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2001), customer retention is "the way of operating to persuade consumers with the goal of developing long-lasting interaction with them. However on the other hand, Zineldin (2000) labels withholding as a commitment to keep on doing commerce or barter with a particular firm on an ongoing source.

Clarke (2001) furthermore elaborated where he states that long-term customer retention in cut-throat markets necessitates the supplier going further than necessary satisfaction to creating fidelity in order to guard against opponent assault. Day (1994) contends that the recognition and fulfillment of consumer wants leads to improved customer retention. This will facilitate the supplier to plan schemes and strategies.

2.7. Service Quality Models

A number of approaches have been recognized in the research for assessing service quality. Among the approaches or models are: expectancy-disconfirmation model, performance-only model, technical and functional dichotomy model, service quality against service satisfaction model and attribute importance model.

The expectancy-disconfirmation approach pays attention on recognizing customer expectation versus what they really practised. It contrasts the service performance with the expectations of the consumers, which is measured after the service encounters (Oliver, 1980). The performance-only model measures service quality by questioning from the clients about their intensity of satisfaction

with the different characteristics that follows a service encounter (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Cronin & Taylor, 1994). The technical and functional dichotomy model categorizes two service aspects that lead to customer satisfaction: technical quality of the good which is based on product features such as stability, safety, physical qualities; and functional quality which is related with the relations between service source and the client such as politeness, speediness of delivery and cooperation (Gronroos, 1984). Consumers usually do not have sufficient information on the technical features of a service; that is why they rely more on functional quality to shape awareness of service quality (Donabedian, 1980). The service quality versus service satisfaction approach principally pay attention on two service factors that are interconnected; the transition-specific evaluation which assess specific characteristics of quality and the general evaluation which assess quality as a whole.

This model associates perceived quality at the moment of the service encounter or instantaneously after it and general satisfaction with the service. As far as the attribute importance approach is concerned; it focuses on the relative weight of the importance the customer places on characteristics originated to be related with service satisfaction (Gilbert et al., 2004).

Cronin and Taylor (1992) expanded SERVPERF (service performance) which ignores the anticipation and calculated service quality perceptions by assessing the consumer's overall feeling to the service.

On the other hand, SERVQUAL (service quality) model is among the most recognized and practical model in different industries for measuring service quality; developed by Parasuraman et al. The approach initially presented a list of ten elements of service quality: access, communication, ability, politeness, reliability, dependability, awareness, safety, considerate and tangibles. But, additional research combined simultaneous variables and summarized the elements into five combined dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy as the tools for assessing service quality (Parasuramanet al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1990). The SERVQUAL approach measures customer anticipation and perceptions of service quality by capturing the gap between anticipation and understanding.

2.8. The GAP and the SERVQUAL Model

SERVQUAL or the gap analysis was expanded by Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman which is most frequently applied to assess service and quality. SERVQUAL is the multi- item dimension built up to access consumer perspective of service quality in a service and retail businesses (Parasuraman et. al, 1988)

In the SERVQUAL model there are five different gaps which illustrate the flaws of the firm in accomplishing consumer requirements. Gap analysis is applied to classify and improve gaps between the required level of the consumers and the actual level of performance offered by the companies.

- Gap 1: Market Information Gap

  The foremost gap is regarding the differentiation between actual consumers' anticipation and the initiative of the administration team about consumers' expectations. The causes for the gaps could be short of marketing orientation. The companies are not capable to offer their clients an apparent view of the services they are going to supply. It could be also insufficient data from the organization to the consumers. Another reason is the structure of the companies which comprises of a complicated hierarchy.

  To be able to lessen the first gap of the model, the firms should improve the research performances so that they can examine and identify the customers' requirements and desires. In the bigger companies such as The Mauritius Post Ltd, where there are additional level of management, the administration should be certain that there are sufficient chances for upward communication.

- Gap 2: Service Standards Gap

  This gap is concerned with the bad service quality standards delivered by the companies. It simply describes the variation of quality conditions with provider's perspective of the quality expectation of the clients. The cause for this gap is the inadequate commitment to the service quality. The forecasting in the companies might be poor as well as it might lack objectives. This difficulty is as well related with the primary gap of the approach. It might also be likely that the management has enough data about consumers' expectations, but the forecasting might go wrong. The management of the firms should good get in touch with the service supplier when creating policies so that the strategies that they create can be easily executed.

- Gap 3: Service Performance Gap

  This gap is regarding the indecisive responsibility and role disagreement. It also refers that the quality services are not met by recruiting inexperienced or unskilled staff in the company. In fact, the people employed should be well qualified and extremely capable for the positions.

  Another reason might be insufficient team work which in turn affects the service of the company. The development can be done by modifying the control systems to be further standardized, by guiding and train the employees and excellent team work. In many cases, even the qualifications and thoughts of the personnel create conflicts. This happens as there are some persons who cannot become accustomed to the needs of the systems, and thus it is essential to improve in the enlisting measures itself.

- Gap 4: Internal Communication Gap

  This gap in the approach demonstrates the unpredictability of the pledges of the offered service to the clients. A gap may arise if the market and manufacturing are not handled in an appropriate manner. For the most part, consumers are subjective by what they listen to and what they perceive about the business. The company like The Mauritius Post Ltd is one of the major facility service businesses delivering a broad variety of services. As a result, the individuals will go for it relatively than opting for other companies hoping to get the quality service. However some organizations cannot accomplish all the wants of the customers. This might be one more cause for expanding the gaps. For the development,

there must be execution of outer marketing communication campaigns with service manufacture and service delivery. Over promising must also be kept away from in order to thin the gap. If this gap is not taken into deliberation, then it can lead to bad consumer perception.

- Gap 5: Customer Gap
The last gap gives you an idea about the distinction between the consumers' expectation and their perspectives of the offered service. Clients look forward to certain type of services from certain businesses. Clients' expectations are subjective by individual wants, word of mouth reference and knowledge of previous services. This gap in the organizations can get bad influence on the image of the firm.
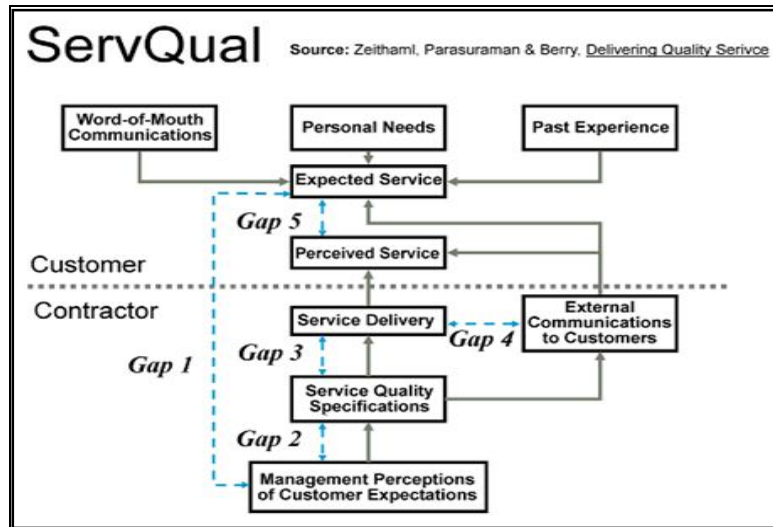
Source :Zeithamil and Parasuramen (2000)

2.9. Customer's Interpretation of the GAP SCORE
Parasuramen et al. (1985) argue that perceived service quality is the degree and direction of discrepancy in consumer's perception and expectation.

2.10. Measuring Service Quality using SERVQUAL Model
A selection of features or factors has been recognized in the research for assessing service quality. For example, Sachev and Verma (2004) calculate service quality in terms of consumer perspective, consumer expectation, customer satisfaction, and consumer approach. In spite of various approaches for assessing service quality, Nyeck et al. (2002) declare that the SERVQUAL approach stays as the most absolute challenge to conceptualize and evaluate service quality. The approach is widespread and extensively utilised to calculate service quality in the literature. Thus, this research implements the SERVQUAL aspect to calculate service quality at The Mauritius Post Ltd.
The SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy are the source for service quality assessment (Parasuramanet al., 1988; Zeithamlet al., 1990).

2.11. Advantages of SERVQUAL MODEL
According to Nyeck, et al. (2002), SERVQUAL remains the most complete attempt to conceptualise and measure service quality. Below are some of the advantages of the SERVQUAL Model:

- A particular advantage of SERVQUAL is that it is a tested instrument which can be used comparatively for benchmarking purposes (Brysland and Curry, 2001). In other words, it enables comparison to competitors on common aspects.
- Another benefit is that the researchers have the ability to examine numerous service industries for example: SERVQUAL can be used in healthcare, banking, financial services and education.
- In addition to the above, it also enables assessing service quality from the customer's perspective while tracking customer expectations and perceptions over time, together with the discrepancies between them. Thus, it helps in identifying problems according to the different dimensions.

2.12. Problems in Measuring Service Quality
Undoubtedly, the SERVQUAL tool has been widely implemented by numerous academic associates and consultants globally to assess service quality. Nevertheless, despite of its widespread utilisation, several academic, functional, theoretical, and experimental disapproval of the measurement tool have been acknowledged and stated (Buttle, 1996; Van Dyke et al., 1997, 1999; Ladhari, 2008). Numerous scholars (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Brown et. al, 1993) have identified the sum of diverse score (expectation of service quality minus perception of service quality) in the SERVQUAL evaluation which have resulted in

psychometric dilemma and consumers exaggerating their expectations because of previous awful incident with the companies (Clow and Vorhies, 1993).

2.13. Service Quality in Postal Organizations
Quality in the postal companies takes several forms; it can be viewed from the delivery speed, dependability of the service offered, physical circumstances and application of the dispatch item when received by the customer, regularity of gatherings and pickups, time depleted in queues, working hours or client participation and civility depending how the consumer sees it (Ngunyen, 2008).
A research carried out by the Universal Postal Union (UPU, 2004) named Post 2004 publicized that the earth communication market saw merely 20% of the margin on physical mail as opposed to 75% on fax and phone and 5% for electronic mail throughout the period of 1995: UPU (2004) additionally concluded that the level to which customary postal services bears was still open for discussion and supplementary study. It has been settled when determining National Postal Organization's surroundings that existing postal models are institutional and are incompatible with the existing surroundings consequently resulting to incomplete performance; these pitiable performances also obstruct monetary competence, efficiency and quality all over the country (UPU, 2004; Tim Walsh, 2002).
Ngunyen (2008) observed that setting up postal services as managerially driven organization brought forwards the scheme that sacrificed competence for effectiveness since low efficiency lead to poor performances economically, therefore forcing the government to lower service quality to lowest levels and thus harming its responsibility. Beko and Jagric (2011) further pointed out that the cost and superiority characterized by suitability, dependability and flexibility have turn out to be more and more emphasized growing rivalry between mail service suppliers due to latest forms of communication coming forward into the postal environment with attractive prospects as opposed to conventional mail services that are supplied by national post operators. Ngunyen (2008) further highlights under his technical solutions negotiations that UPU (2004) suggested that technological reformation should be integrated as one of the uppermost on the programme of any postal companies that plans to develop its services by means of business repositioning as well as other approaches; such as technology.

3. Research Methodology
The size of the sample is a standout amongst the most noteworthy components in discovering the study result. Generally, the bigger the specimen measure, the higher the chance is that come about will be dependable. Notwithstanding, because of assets restrictions, especially time obligations, just a piece of the population will be overviewed. Mauritius has 96 branches of Post Offices arranged at diverse parts of the island. For this motivation behind this study, the Mahebourg Post Office is surveyed where 2400 clients visit the Post Office month to month. Thus, for the SERVQUAL score to be more solid, it was more fitting to tackle normal 100 clients which are 30% of the populace. Henceforth the sample size for the study is 100 clients.

4. Analysis

4.1. SERVQUAL Dimensions Analysis
The gap model, more specifically, the customer gap will be used throughout this study. This section will analyse the different service quality dimensions individually.
For each of the attributes listed in the table below, the perceptions and expectations of customers have been measured and the actual customer (P-E) gap has been calculated. The results have been summarised through the mean value of each of the attributes.
Table 1: Dimension One: Tangibility

Dimension One : Tangibility			
Attributes	**Mean Expectation (E)**	**Mean Perception (P)**	**Gap (P-E)**
Ability to give you access to information, products and service catalogues.	4.10	3.02	-1.08
Ability to have convenient working hours to meet customers' requirements.	4.18	3.10	-1.08
Appearance and uniforms of employees.	3.87	3.09	-0.78
Visual attractiveness of pamphlets, brochures, office and equipment.	3.85	3.04	-0.81
Average score of dimension	4	3.06	-0.94

Table 4.1: Tangibility Dimension (P-E) Gap

From table 4.1, it is noticed that for all four statements, the mean expectations scores range from 3.85 to 4.18. The mean expectations values for visual attractiveness of pamphlets, brochures, office and equipment scored the lowest with 3.85 as compared to the ability to have convenient working hours to meet customers' requirements with the highest mean expectations scores of 4.18. The mean dimensional scores for expectations are 4.

It is distinguished that the mean perceptions scores ranges from 3.02 to 3.10. The mean perceptions values for the ability to give access to information, products and service catalogues scored the lowest with 3.02 as compared to the ability to have convenient working hours to meet customers' requirements which has the highest mean perceptions scores at 3.10. The mean dimensional scores for perceptions are 3.06.

Furthermore the difference between the mean perceptions scores and the mean expectations scores of the tangibles statement is an indication of the gap for each statement.

From the gap analysis above, the overall P-E gap for tangibility dimension is -0.94 units. Coincidentally, there is two attributes with the highest gap; the ability to have convenient working hours to meet customers' requirements and the ability to give access to information, products and service catalogues with -1.08 units. Related to business hour, this can be explained because most of the customers are employed and thus this might be a problem for them as the Post Office closes down at 16h00. As far as giving customers access to information, products and service catalogues, this might be due to insufficient knowledge from management and staffs to advice customers or help them in transactions. The second highest gap relates to visual attractiveness of pamphlets, brochures, office and equipment with -0.81. As postulated by Brady and Cronin (2001), the physical environment quality plays an important role in determining good service quality and it influence the perceptions of customers. Therefore, MPL should pay much attention to this attribute.

4.2. Dimension Two: Reliability
The attributes of the reliability were analyzed and the results obtained after calculating the mean value of each attribute are summarized in table 4.2 below.

Dimension Two : Reliability			
Attributes	**Mean Expectation (E)**	**Mean Perception (P)**	**Gap (P-E)**
Ability for the Post office's employees to deliver services in time.	4.31	3.18	-1.13
Dependability and consistency of the Post Office in solving customer's complaints.	4.32	3.41	-0.9
Employees are always willing to help customers.	4.36	3.24	-1.12
Employees are never too busy to respond to customers request such as old age pensioners when they can go and collect their pension.	4.31	3.01	-1.3
Ability of the staff in performing services right the first time and every time.	4.26	3.14	-1.12
Average score of dimension	4.31	3.2	-1.11

Table 4.2: Reliability Dimension (P-E) Gap

As evident in table 4.2, the reliability scores show that the mean expectation scores range from 4.31 to 4.36. The lowest value for mean expectations scores is the ability of the staff in performing services right the first time and every time and the highest is the willingness of the employees to help customers. The average score of dimension for expectation is 4.31. Therefore this indicates that the customers are expected to get good service prior to their visit and they perceive to have received good service after the encounter.

However the difference between the mean perceptions scores and the mean expectations of the reliability statements shows a negative gap. It is noted that the overall P-E gap for the reliability dimension is -1.11 units. While investigating further into the details attributes of the reliability dimension P-E gap, it is noted that the highest gaps are related to the ability for the Post office's employees to deliver services in time with -1.13.Customers have high expectations in delivering services as promised. Thus, it is important for the Mahebourg Post office to put adequate effort in keeping their promises about service delivery. Additionally, Post Offices should also ensure that postal services are delivered in time.

4.3. Dimension Three: Responsiveness
Results from the survey after the attributes of the responsiveness dimension were assessed have been summarized in the table below:

Dimension Three: Responsiveness			
Attributes	Mean Expectation (E)	Mean Perception (P)	Gap (P-E)
Ability to tell customers exactly when services will be performed.	4.45	2.96	-1.49
Ability to give prompt customer services and attend customer needs/ problems.	4.17	3.04	-1.13
Ability of the staff to communicate clearly to customers.	4.33	3.22	-1.11
Records of customers are kept accurately.	4.13	3.25	-0.88
Average score of dimension	4.3	3.12	-1.2

Table 4.3: Responsiveness Dimension (P-E) Gap

The mean expectations scores for the statements on responsiveness range from 4.13 to 4.45. The lowest value of 4.13 relates to the records of customers while the highest value indicates the ability to tell customers exactly when services will be performed. The mean dimensional scores for expectation are 4.3 which is a positive sign.

Likewise the mean perceptions scores denote that responsiveness values range from 2.96 to 3.25. The lowest value, 2.96 indicates the ability to tell customers exactly when services will be performed and the highest value relates to the accuracy of customers' records.

The responsiveness dimension has scored an overall P-E gap of -1.2. Enquiring further into the individual attributes, it can be noted that the highest gap relates to the ability to tell customers exactly when services will be performed (-1.49). This may be due to a lack of planning from the management and staffs. On the other hand, the P-E gap regarding the ability to communicate clearly to customers is -1.11 units. This is mainly because employees may not possess the required skills to help and communicate clearly to customers. Therefore, appropriate attention has to be given to these aspects.

4.4. Dimension Four: Assurance
The fourth dimension is assurance and represents statements 14 to 17 in the SERVQUAL questionnaire. The results are indicated in the Table 4.4

Dimension Four: Assurance			
Attributes	Mean Expectation (E)	Mean Perception (P)	Gap (P-E)
Honesty and trustworthiness of staff in resolving customer's complaints/ problems	4.24	3.14	-1.1
Behaviour of staff in instilling confidence in customers.	3.97	3.30	-0.67
Competence, knowledge and skills of staffs in answering customer's questions.	4.20	3.39	-0.81
Customers feel safe in all transaction they do.	4.27	3.20	-1.07
Average score of dimension	4.17	3.3	-0.91

Table 4.4: Assurance Dimension (P-E) Gap

The mean expectations scores for assurance range from 3.97 to 4.27. The lowest value 3.97 means that the behaviour of staff instils confidence in customers. While the highest value 4.27, signifies that customers feel safe in their transactions. The dimensional scores for expectations show a satisfactory indication by assuring customers' expectations, with a score of 4.17.
On the other hand, the mean perceptions scores range from 3.14 to 3.39. The highest value; 3.39 relates to the competence, knowledge and skills of staffs in answering customer's questions. And the lowest value that is 3.14 is related to honesty and trustworthiness of staff in resolving customer's complaints/ problems.

It is noted that the overall P-E gap for assurance dimension is -0.91 units. The highest gap in this dimension is related to the honesty and trustworthiness of employees in resolving customer's complaints (-1.1). It seems that customers believe that the employees are not honest and trustworthy in resolving their complaints. The second highest gap in this dimension is related to the customers' security when doing transaction. This means that many customers do not feel safe when doing a transaction at the post office, followed by the competence, knowledge and skills of staffs in answering customer's questions with -0.81 units. This discrepancy can be due to lack of knowledge on the products of the company and inadequate research on the general procedures of the company. Therefore, it is important for the post office to find ways to eliminate these discrepancies in order to provide good quality service to customers.

4.5. Dimension Five: Empathy

The fifth dimension is empathy and is associated with statements 18 to 22. The mean perceptions scores, the mean expectations scores and the SERVQUAL scores are shown in the table below.

Dimension Five: Empathy			
Attributes	**Mean Expectation (E)**	**Mean Perception (P)**	**Gap (P-E)**
Staff giving individual customer attention.	4.24	3.34	-0.9
Staff making efforts to understand customer needs.	4.39	3.27	-1.12
Have the best interest of customers at heart.	4.09	3.05	-1.04
Services are offered at times that are convenient to all customers.	4.20	2.93	-1.27
Staff apologises for inconvenience caused to customers.	4.50	2.95	-1.55
Average score of dimension	4.3	3.1	-1.2

Table 4.5: Empathy Dimension (P-E) Gap

For the empathy scores, the mean expectations values lie between 4.50 to 4.09. The highest mean symbolizes where staff apologizes for inconvenience caused to customers and the lowest value is related to having the best interest of customers at heart. The mean dimensional score is 4.3 and implies that customers' expectations are focusing on the empathy dimension. In other words, the customers desire caring, individualized attention from the post office.

Furthermore, the mean perceptions range from 2.93 to 3.34. The lowest value 2.93 is related to services that are offered at times which are convenient to all customers and the highest value is related to the staff giving individual customer attention. As such, the mean dimensional scores for perceptions are 3.1.

It can be acknowledged that the overall P-E gap for empathy dimension is -1.2 units. The mean dimensional scores denote a negative aspect on the empathy dimension. We further note that customers tend to place high expectation on ability of employees to apologize to them for any inconvenience caused (-1.55). The SERVQUAL values are negative which means empathy is not being considered at all.

4.6. SERVQUAL Dimensions GAP Analysis

One of the main objectives of the study was to identify areas of concern for Management with respect to the quality of service provided by the Mahebourg Post Office and at the same time identify room for possible improvements. Figure 4.4 summarizes the gap score P-E for the five SERVQUAL dimensions that were evaluated.
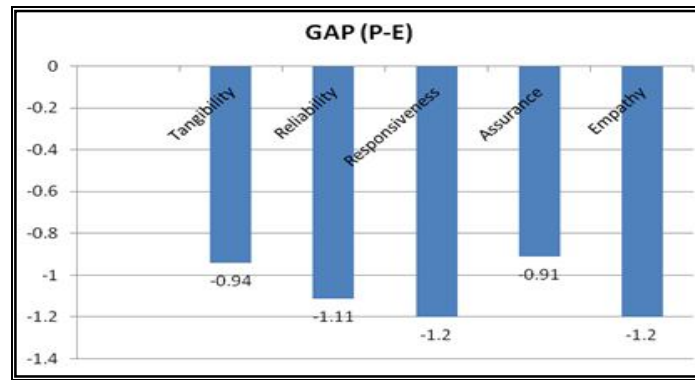
Figure 4.4: The Average P-E Gap Score of the five SERVQUAL dimension

The findings indicate that empathy dimension and the responsiveness dimension has the same value and they have the greatest service gap of -1.2 units. That is, most of the time employees fail to understand the needs of customers and to apologize for inconvenience caused to customers as well as unable to communicate clearly to the customers such as the ability of telling the customers when the services will be performed. The second greatest service gap is the reliability dimension with -1.11 units. The smallest service gap is the assurance dimension. Therefore, it can be argued that customers are quite dissatisfied with the overall aspects of the services offered by the Mahebourg Post Office since the P-E gap for all the five dimensions are more than 0.5 units. However, it is inaccurate to draw conclusions from the above figure directly since the SERVQUAL scores do not take into consideration the importance of each service dimension.

4.7. Importance of SERVQUAL Dimensions
To determine the importance of each of the SERVQUAL dimensions, respondents were requested to divide 100 points among the SERVQUAL dimensions (Appendix D) namely: Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. The mean score for each of the dimensions were calculated as shown in the table below:

Dimensions	Importance Weight
Tangibility	22.9
Reliability	32.85
Responsiveness	23.10
Assurance	11.80
Empathy	8.95

Table 4.6: Relative importance of dimensions

The results show that the reliability dimension with a mean score is considered as the most important dimension with a mean score of 32.85 followed by the responsiveness dimension with a mean score of 23.10. The least important dimension was the empathy with a mean score of 8.95. However, again it is inappropriate to draw conclusions from the table above as the weighted SERVQUAL scores need to be calculated first as shown in table 4.6.

Dimensions	SERVQUAL Score (P-E)	Importance weight	Weighted SERVQUAL Score	Rank
Tangibility	-0.94	22.9	-21.53	3
Reliability	-1.11	32.85	-36.46	1
Responsiveness	-1.2	23.10	-27.72	2
Assurance	-0.91	11.80	-10.73	4
Empathy	-1.2	8.95	-10.74	5

Table 4.7: Weighted SERVQUAL score

Now, the five dimensions can be ranked in terms of importance to customers. The reliability was ranked first and is therefore considered as the most important to customers. Customers expect the post office to perform their promised tasks in a reliable and consistent manner all the time. Therefore, the postal organization must emphasize on keeping their promises about service delivery and employees must show a sincere interest in solving customers' problems. Recalling from the literature review, according to Berry and Parasuramen (1991), reliability has frequently appeared as the most critical dimension when measuring significance of the five dimensions. However, according to this analysis, reliability was ranked first.

5. Relationship to Overall Reliability Dimension

Correlations				
			Are you satisfied with the level of service quality delivered by your Post Office?	How would you rate the overall perceived service for reliability
Spearman's rho	Are you satisfied with the level of service quality delivered by your Post Office?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.069
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.497
		N	100	100
	How would you rate the overall perceived service for reliability	Correlation Coefficient	.069	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.497	.
		N	100	100

Table 4.8: Correlations between overall perceived service for reliability and overall satisfaction

- H_0: There is no correlation between perception of reliability dimension and overall satisfaction
- H_1: There is a correlation between perception of reliability dimension and overall satisfaction

Out of the five SERVQUAL dimensions, customers ranked the reliability dimension as being the highest importance to them. Following this, the relationship between the perceptions of customers on the reliability dimension to the overall satisfaction level was investigated.

The Spearman Rank Order Correlation was used. The Spearman's rho coefficient takes value between -1 and +1 and it determines the direction and strength of a relationship. From the table above, the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient is +0.069, which indicates a positive correlation between the two variables. In other words, the better is the perception of the reliability dimension; the more satisfied customers are with the service. Therefore since there is a positive value between these two variables, H_0 is rejected and hence H_1 is accepted.

6. Conclusion

The responsiveness dimension was ranked the second most important dimension. Customers expect the postal organization willing to help them and to provide prompt service. Thus, postal organizations are expected to be very responsive towards their customers and to be prompt in addressing their requests, queries and complaints. On the other hand, the assurance and empathy dimension are ranked as the least important with a slight difference in their weighted score. But despites they are ranked as the least important, postal organization should provide special care to these features so as to provide better quality of service to customers.

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