

SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN ETHIOPIAN LEATHER INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

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Citation:

Sharma, R., Kumar Gupta, S., & Taddesse, S. (2023). Service quality and customer satisfaction in Ethiopian leather industry development institute. *Economics, Finance and Management Review*, (2), 120–129. <https://doi.org/10.36690/2674-5208-2023-2-120-129>

Received: May 08, 2023

Approved: June 28, 2023

Published: June 30, 2023



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Abstract. This study's objective is to assess the level of customer satisfaction and product quality in the consultation and project office of Ethiopian Leather Industry Development Institute. Importance of customer satisfaction cannot be undermined for any organisation. The processes and practices of Corporate governance should assess the service gaps and should aim to fulfil the same. The SERVQUAL instrument is used in conjunction with the gap model of service quality to carry out this research. The five SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy were used to gauge the extent of customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality. A sample of 240 respondents was selected using a non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique. According to the findings of the study all the five dimensions of service quality have shown a negative gap score. This indicates that customers of Ethiopian leather industry development institute consultancy and project office are dissatisfied with the service provided to them hence; there perceptions are below their expectations. The dimension with the lowest negative gap score is assurance followed by tangibles and responsiveness. The findings of the gap analysis also indicate that tangibility and responsiveness are the two dimensions with the highest negative gap scores which makes these two dimensions the largest contributors to customer's dissatisfaction. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions and service quality the results shows that all the five dimensions of service quality have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction where tangibility, empathy and responsiveness have a moderate and positive correlation with satisfaction while assurance and reliability have a weak positive correlation with customer satisfaction. Generally, only tangibility and responsiveness dimensions of service quality have shown statistically significant impact on customer satisfaction. Accordingly, Ethiopian leather industry development institute consultancy and project office needs to give more emphasis and due attention to tangibility and responsiveness dimensions of service quality to improve the level of customer satisfaction.

Keywords: service quality, customer satisfaction, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy.

JEL Classification: L67, L91

Formulas: 0; **fig.:** 1; **tabl.:** 1; **bibl.:** 23

Introduction. Lack of knowledge prevents many companies from improving work effectiveness. Many research found that it fails to meet consumer criteria for product quality and on-time delivery. Thus, this study paper will improve quality service for the consultation and project office of leather industry development institute using scheduling approaches to satisfy clients and boost confidence. Quality service is how people or machines conduct their jobs and the results. Satisfied customers rate an offering's performance.

This research evaluates service quality and customer satisfaction using Ethiopian leather industry development institute consultancy and project team as a case study. This office has delayed service, insufficient floor space, insufficient seating, poor customer service, and a packed environment. Thus, investigating these problems will help achieve the goal and tell the target authority.

In the US, EU, and Japan, services employ more people than all other sectors combined. 60–70% of GDP comes from public and private services. International trade is 25% services. Banking, insurance, communications, transportation, and entertainment make up about 60% of the GDP of industrialised nations. In five years, service occupations will account for all net job growth in various nations (Kotler et al., n.d.).

Any firm wants happy customers. Businesses may not understand customers' thoughts. Thus, most consumer-focused enterprises have found this position challenging. Leather institutions are affected also. Services are changing rapidly (Abdullah et al., 2011). Technology, government regulation, and client sophistication are forcing service organisations to rethink their business models.

Literature review. Hoffman and Bateson (Hoffman & Bateson, 2016) describe service as deeds, efforts, or performances. These scholars also argue that products and services are often blurred. It's hard to find a pure goods or service without service components. Service demands client interaction but does not transfer ownership and usually has some intangibility (McDonald & Payne, 2006). Customers can relax with if services meet their utilitarian ideals (Sharma, Mohan, & Gupta, 2022).

Definition of quality. Product and service quality is often mentioned. Its definition varies by person and organisation. To attain a consensus, many quality definitions have been offered. Quality, according to Lovelock and Lauren (Lovelock & Wright, 2016), is how well a service meets consumer needs. Juran (Juran & Bingham, 1974) defined quality as "fitness for use." Parasuraman et al. (Anantharathan Parasuraman et al., 1985) say customers evaluate service quality by comparing what they want or expect to what they get or feel they get. Thus, quality is matching or exceeding customer wants and expectations.

Definition of service quality. A general definition of service quality has been given as customer appraisal of the service. According to many practitioners, the quality of a service is determined by how different a customer's expectations are from how they actually perceive the service (Munusamy et al., 2010). For instance, Parasuraman et al. (Anantharathan Parasuraman et al., 1985) defined services as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs; this judgement involved a comparison of customers' expectations with their perceptions of actual service

performance; and he (Czepiel, 1990) defined service quality as customers' perceptions of actual service performance.

According to the literature, customers assess service quality by contrasting the service provider's actual performance, or perception, with the expectation they had when they first received the service (Grönroos, 1982). Customers rank service quality as "low" if performance (perception) falls short of their expectations and as "high" if performance exceeds their expectations (Oliver, 1980), making customer expectation and perception the two key components of service quality (Grönroos, 1984).

There are numerous service quality models; the following are a few of them:

Gronroos Service Quality Model. Gronroos (Grönroos, 1984) created the first service quality model, which used qualitative methods to quantify perceived service quality. The approach used three dimensions of service quality: technical quality, functional quality, and corporate image.

a) Technical quality: - It refers to the genuine outcome of the service after it has been evaluated, and it is about consumer evaluation of the service.

b) Functional quality: - The way the service was delivered is what functionality quality is all about. The quality of processes and procedures in manufacturing and providing customer service is referred to as functional or process quality. This aspect of quality is usually seen mentally and focuses on the interaction between the service provider and the service user. Customers frequently evaluate process quality when performing a service, keeping in mind that the process of producing and consuming services usually occurs at the same time.

c) Corporate image: - This factor is linked to the customer's impressions of the service provider. The quality of output, service fee, external relational activities, physical status, branch decoration and cleanliness, competency, and personnel manners all contribute to the company's image. "If the corporate image is good in the mind of a particular consumer, the problems this customer has with the result or process will be ignored to a considerable extent using the mental image," Gronroos argues. If difficulties occur on a regular basis, the favourable company image is harmed, and the corporate image becomes negative."

The GAP model. The disparities between Expectation and Performance along the quality criteria determine service quality (Anantharathan Parasuraman et al., 1985). Based on gap analysis, they created a service quality model. The following are the numerous gaps depicted in the model:

Gap 1 Consumer Expectation Management GAP

There are differences between executive perceptions and consumer expectations. In other words, service firm executives may not always know what futures connote high quality to consumers, what features a service must have in order to meet consumers' needs, and what and how much performance on those features is required to give high quality service.

Gap 2 Management perception – Service Quality Specification gap

It denotes a lack of appropriate service quality design and standards, which results from a lack of management commitment to satisfying customer expectations. The main reasons for the increase in gap 2 are poor service design, lack of customer-

driven requirements, improper physical evidence, and services gape (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Gap 3 Service quality specification – Service Delivery gaps

The third gap in the company is that it is not meeting service design and standards. It's the distinction between developing customer-driven service standards and real service delivery by firm employees. Employee retention is critical even in social enterprises (Jogi et al., 2020) It could be caused by a lack of teamwork, bad personnel selection, insufficient training, or an improper job design. As a result, the corporation must devise methods for training or controlling people, as well as motivating them to achieve company objectives (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Gap 4 Service delivery – External communication gap

Advertising via the media and other forms of communication by a company can influence consumer expectations. If consumer perceptions of service quality are influenced by expectations, businesses must be careful not to promise more in communication than they can deliver in reality. When you promise more than you can provide, it raises early expectations but lowers quality perceptions when you don't deliver. Consumer expectations for service, as well as consumer perceptions of given service, can be influenced by external communications.

Gap-5 Expected Service – Perceived Service gap

The magnitude and direction of the gap between expected and perceived service determines the quality that a consumer perceives in a service.

SERVPERF model. SERVPERF was developed by Cronin and Taylor (Cronin Jr & Taylor, 1992) as a performance-based measure of service quality. SERVPERF is made up of the 22 perception components from the SERVQUAL scale, however it does not take into account expectations. To put it another way, SERVPERF is different from SERVQUAL in that it does not evaluate gap scores because the expectancies element of the pairings is not included. While expectations can have a distinct effect on consumers' perceptions of service quality, using performance-minus-expectations as a basis for measuring service quality is ineffective (Cronin Jr & Taylor, 1992).

Customer expectation, perception and satisfaction:

Customer expectation. Customer expectations are views about a service that serve as benchmarks against which service performance is measured (Zeithaml et al., 2006); they are what customers believe a service provider should supply rather than what is already available (A Parasuraman et al., 1988). Expectations are shaped by a multitude of factors, including the customer's individual wants and desires (Scheuing & Edvardsson, 1994), promises (staff, advertising, and other communications), implicit service promises (such as price and tangibles linked with the service), word-of-mouth communication (with other customers, friends, family, and experts), and past experience with that service (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Customer Perception of Service Quality. Customer perceived service quality, as mentioned in (Zhilin et al., 2004), can be characterised as a general assessment or attitude referring to the excellence of a service relative to competing alternative (A Parasuraman et al., 1988). To measure perceived service quality, consumers'

expectations are contrasted to their opinions of the services received from suppliers (A Parasuraman et al., 1988). It is said that the secret to creating a positive perception of service quality is to meet or exceed what clients expect from a service. As a result, if the supplier's actual service falls short of expectations, a gap must be filled using strategies that change either expectations or perceptions, or both (A Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Customer Satisfaction. According to Zhilin, Minjoon, and Robin (Zhilin et al., 2004), customer satisfaction is defined as a person's emotional state of happiness or unhappiness as a result of comparing a product's perceived performance (or outcome) to the person's expectations as stated on the website. Customer satisfaction has long been recognised as a crucial success factor in today's cutthroat corporate environment because it affects market share and client retention. According to a study (Zhilin et al., 2004), "satisfied customers are less influenced by competition, have lower price sensitivity, and stay loyal for longer."

Relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. In the literature, the relationship between customer happiness and service quality has gotten a lot of attention, according to (Bolton & Drew, 1994). "Service quality is a global evaluation, or attitude, connected to the superiority of the service, whereas satisfaction is related to a specific transaction," he defined service quality and customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is defined as a "post-consumer experience that compares perceived quality to desired quality, whereas service quality refers to a comprehensive assessment of a company's service delivery system" (A Parasuraman et al., 1988). The main distinction between service quality and customer satisfaction is that quality refers to the managerial delivery of the service, whereas satisfaction refers to the consumers' experiences with it.

Based on the above literature review the following conceptual framework is developed (Fig.1).

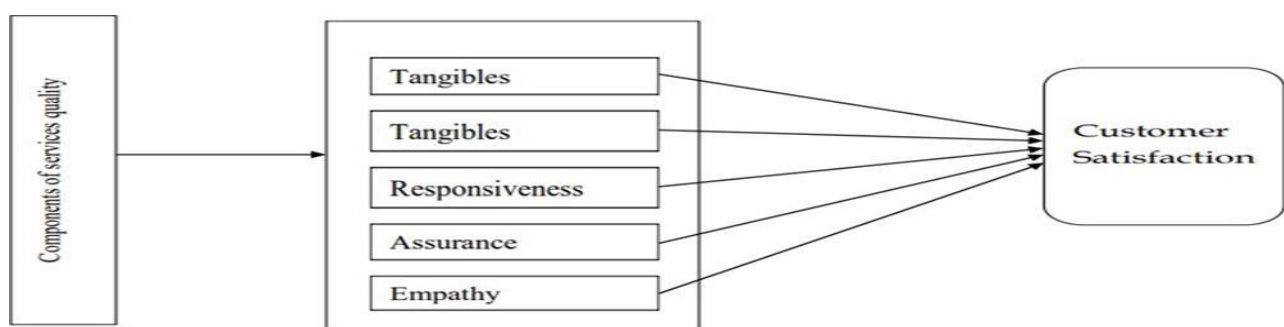


Fig.1. Conceptual frame work of the study

Source: developed by authors

Aims. This study's objective is to assess the level of customer satisfaction and product quality in the consultation and project office of Ethiopian Leather Industry Development Institute.

Methodology. This study used a quantitative research approach to investigate and quantify the association between service quality and customer satisfaction in the Ethiopian leather industry development institute consultant and project office.

A sample size of 240 respondents was chosen based on the available time, resources, and willingness of the company's management. A convenience sampling method was used to select the respondents.

A self-administered structured questionnaire containing the five service quality dimensions and satisfaction questions were prepared and distributed to the sample of customers chosen for this study. The questions were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The statistical package for social science (SPSS) version was used to analyse and interpret the data obtained from the surveys. The inferential Cronbach's Alpha tests were used to ensure that the items are reliable. The link and influence between the dependent variables (customer satisfaction) and independent variables (reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibility) were also investigated using Pearson correlation and multiple linear regressions analysis.

Two hundred (200) questionnaires were issued to the authority's educated exterior clients and private individuals in order to collect data. This demonstrates that a nearly 100 percent response rate was achieved, indicating that a considerable response rate was achieved, allowing the analysis to proceed smoothly. The minimum and maximum responses are 1 and 5 respectively for all the variables used in the descriptive statistics section, the mean value represents the average of all customer response on certain dimensions while, standard deviation shows how diverse the responses of the respondents are meaning if the standard deviation shows smaller number it indicates that the response of the respondents shows close opinions and when the standard deviation is high it indicates the response of the respondents shows high variation.

Results. The average mean for the perception of tangibility dimension of service quality indicates that the customers of Ethiopian leather industry development institute consultancy and project office believes that the tangibles aspects of the service provided by the section are satisfactory but when we see their expectation of the tangibles of this section it was high which is (3.97) but their perception shows that the average mean for tangibles is (2.7) which indicates that even if their perception of service quality with respect to tangible dimension are around neutral their expectations are higher than their perception and when customers' expectations are not meet customers are dissatisfied.

The researcher employed bivariate correlation with Spearman correlation coefficient to determine the existence and level of relationship. Spearman correlation coefficient, which ranges from -1.0 to +1.0, reflects the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables (Field, 2005). The correlation study was conducted using Spearman correlation coefficient (r) to determine the amount and direction of the correlations between the parameters of service quality and customer satisfaction. It was also used to rank the variables having the most significant links to customer happiness. The correlation efficiency (r) is classified as

follows: 0.1–0.29 is weak, 0.3–0.49 is moderate, and >0.5 is strong (Field, 2005). A two-tailed test's bivariate correlation confirms the Spearman of statistically significant data analysis. p0.05 difference at the probability level, given a 95 percent confidence interval on statistical results correlation analysis.

As a result, responsiveness has a moderate association with customer satisfaction (r=0.307) and empathy has a moderate positive relationship with customer satisfaction (r=0.386). The remaining characteristics, Assurance, Tangibility, have week correlation and Reliability has negative correlation, with customer satisfaction (r=0.085), (r=0.227), and (r= -0.123), respectively. That is, majority service quality measures have a lower correlation effect on customer satisfaction levels, while the magnitude of the effect varies.

Table 1. Correlation between variables

Correlations			Tangibility	Reliability	Responsivene Ss	Assurance	Empathy	Customer Satisfaction
Spearman's Rho	Tangability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.138	.289**	.168*	.235**	.227**
		Sig. (2-Tailed)		0.052	0.000	0.018	0.001	0.001
		N	240	240	240	240	240	240
	Reliability	Correlation Coefficient	0.138	1.000	.168*	0.078	-0.038	-0.123
		Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.052		0.018	0.274	0.593	0.083
		N	240	240	240	240	240	240
	Responsiviness	Correlation Coefficient	.289**	.168*	1.000	.155*	.305**	.307**
		Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.000	0.018		0.028	0.000	0.000
		N	240	240	240	240	240	240
	Assurance	Correlation Coefficient	.168*	0.078	.155*	1.000	.239**	0.085
		Sig. (2-Tailed)	0.018	0.274	0.028		0.001	0.231

Source: developed by authors

The results indicate that about 44.9% ($R^2=0.449$) of the variance in the overall satisfaction is explained by the SERVQUAL dimensions. In addition, the results demonstrate that there is positive and statistically significant ($p<0.05$, $F=29.824$) relationship between the SERVQUAL dimensions and overall customer satisfaction. Therefore, SERVQUAL dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) collectively are significant to the institute customer satisfaction. Thus the finding supports hypothesis one (H6), that there is positive relationship between overall SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction.

As shown on above table the SERVQUAL dimensions separately have different significant levels. This indicates that they have different relationship with service quality when we look at them one by one there is a positive and statistically significant ($p< 0.05$, $\beta= 0.455$) relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction which supports H.6 and also there is a positive and

statistically significant ($p< 0.05$, $\beta= 0.338$) relationship among reliability and customer satisfaction and also there is positive relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction ($P< 0.05$, $\beta = 0.275$) The remaining dimensions (tangible,

and assurance) do not have significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction since they have p-value (> 0.05).

According to the office management, who has been with the office for the past three years, the development and introduction of new institute services is/are more likely to be difficult due to the Ethiopian service industry's lately growing severe rivalry. This could be used as a signal to develop the institute in order to meet the changing market demands of current and new consumers.

Customers are frequently encouraged to communicate their opinions, criticisms, and complaints through various channels such as personal discussion, suggestion boxes, telephone, and e-mail. The authority management will be able to have sound indicators when something goes wrong in terms of customer service in order to take prompt action. However, both the manager and the assistant manager advised the researcher that, to their knowledge, no market research had been undertaken. They confirmed that the prospective outcomes may contribute to the institute success based on the quality of the outputs and management's acceptance of the same in respect to this specific study project.

Interpersonal relationships can influence emotions of customers in both positive (Sharma & Arora, 2019) and negative ways (Sharma et al., 2023). Personal authority, Customer Service officers lead, Customer Officer, have varied service years and hold different roles in the office, have diverse perspectives on service marketing. The personal authority, for example, considered service marketing to be based on customer interest. The customer service officer saw service marketing as if it were a tangible product. Others stated that knowing you're with regard to service failures experience of the employees, all respondents except one confirmed that they were being encountering services failures in accordance with the customers' reaction. The response given by one employee stating that no service failure was being experienced seems far from the reality on the ground. This may negate A client is crucial when it comes to service marketing. This could indicate that the office staff have a limited understanding of services marketing and its functions.

The complains were positive and negative criticisms and the positive one should be considered as stepping stone to construct the overall success of the bank, Hence, it seems that they do have healthy attitude towards the instrumental roles of customer complains

With regard to handling of customers' complaints, all of the respondents asserted that it was found crucial to handle complaints of customers so as to be efficient and effective in the service industry. Moreover, the respondents said that service quality and customer satisfaction have positive relationships. This may infer that the employees are bothered to render quality services so as to satisfy their existing customers.

Discussion. First and foremost, the target institute management should take appropriate steps to close the knowledge gap caused by the key functions of services and relationship marketing. Meanwhile, the target office management should recognize the importance of the SERVQUAL Model, so that whatever promises are made to external customers, the institute should keep them. They have moment of

truth encounters with external clients because they are on the frontlines. To put it another way, if management does not treat its people well internally by creating a pleasant working atmosphere and providing enough benefits, it will fail.

Additionally, short-term, medium-term, and/or long-term capacity building trainings on Service Quality Dimensions and their instrumental implications should be critically arranged for all the office employees, particularly frontline employees, in order to fill the demanding gaps and cope with the emerging intense and extensive authority competitions.

In addition, research should be undertaken at least once every budget year in order to close the service gap that has been identified between internal and external customers. Furthermore, the authority management should value retaining existing customers rather than focusing on attracting new prospects at this time, because doing the latter while ignoring the former is tantamount to committing gradual death. Such issues can be addressed by doing timely and relevant research.

Finally, more studies should be planned and carried out in order to detect and address any problems that may arise during service delivery.

Conclusions. The study's main goal was to use the SERVQUAL model to assess the level of service excellence and client satisfaction in the consultation and project office of the Ethiopian Leather Industry Development Institute. The study's conclusions demonstrate a favourable correlation between customer satisfaction and the total sum of the five SERVQUAL aspects.

The study's results also demonstrate a favourable association between the responsiveness and empathy aspects of service quality and customer happiness. But in the gap analysis, these two dimensions had the largest negative gap. This shows that even though these two factors are the most crucial for ensuring customer happiness, the consultation and project office consistently falls short of what customers want in these areas.

According to the study's findings, the consultancy and project office's ability to provide a dependable service—that is, one that is delivered on time and done correctly the first time—is one of the key elements that greatly contributes to customers' satisfaction. Additionally, receiving services with empathy is crucial, as is receiving respect and similar treatment. The findings also show that there is no association between customer satisfaction and any of the two SERVQUAL categories, tangibles or assurance. This research led to the conclusion that customers place greater value on the reliability and empathy parts of the service than they do on the facility's physical look, the employees' skills, and their educational backgrounds. The study's conclusions also show a strong and positive correlation between customer happiness and overall service quality. This ultimately means that providing high-quality services will result in satisfied clients.

The study is limited by several factors. Firstly, the study is limited in terms of office selection, the service offering, and coverage area; it only examined one office service quality and satisfaction of customers of Ethiopian leather industry consultancy and project office. This in general indicates that the scope of the study is

narrow in terms of the study area. Moreover, the sample size of respondents used in the study is small. Thus, it is recommended that future studies should be conducted to cover a wider sample area.

Author contributions. The authors contributed equally.

Disclosure statement. The authors do not have any conflict of interest.

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