

Measuring Customers Perceptions of Service Quality (Servqual) Towards Eat Me Restaurant, Silom, Bangkok, Thailand

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Abstract: This study aims to measuring customer perceptions of service quality towards EAT ME restaurant by conducting a GAP analysis to access the GAP between customer expectations and perceptions. EAT ME restaurant is located in the metropolitan City of Bangkok and a veteran of the Bangkok dining scene, Eat Me still feels fresh and exciting, the restaurant has a cool, laid-back vibe, attracting a young international crowd who like to party. Set over two floors with a sleek, muted color scheme, the restaurant houses a bar and a bamboo-shrouded veranda, which is irresistibly romantic at night when illuminated by flickering candlelight. Friendly staff and fabulous cocktails (the fig and ginger martini is a favorite) are further reasons to visit – and help explain why Eat Me is much-loved as a late-night dining destination. This research is to find out the expectation levels of services at EAT ME restaurant in customer’s mind. Also, to identify the problem areas regarding service quality issues at EAT ME restaurant.

The SERVQUAL instrument itself is discussed, and a demonstration of how it can be used by EAT ME restaurant in assessing quality service is included. The managerial implications of using SERVQUAL as an assessment tool include meeting and managing customer expectations, managing the physical design of the product, educating service customers, developing a total quality management program, achieving continuous quality through automation, and engaging in periodic review of the procedures, personnel, and property of the operation. With the assessment knowledge generated by such a review, Eat ME restaurant may then begin to manage their strengths and weaknesses productively.

The survey research via questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. The target population of this research was customers who prior experience with EAT ME Restaurant, Central Town of Bangkok that was the location for studying in this research and the sample size for this study is 278.

In this research, the five SERVQUAL dimensions – reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy, and responsiveness were used to measure customer expectations and perceptions on the service quality of EAT ME restaurant. From this study, the restaurant’s service performance failed to meet customer expectations in all five dimensions.

Keywords: Service quality (SERVQUAL), Customer perceptions, Restaurant.

1. INTRODUCTION

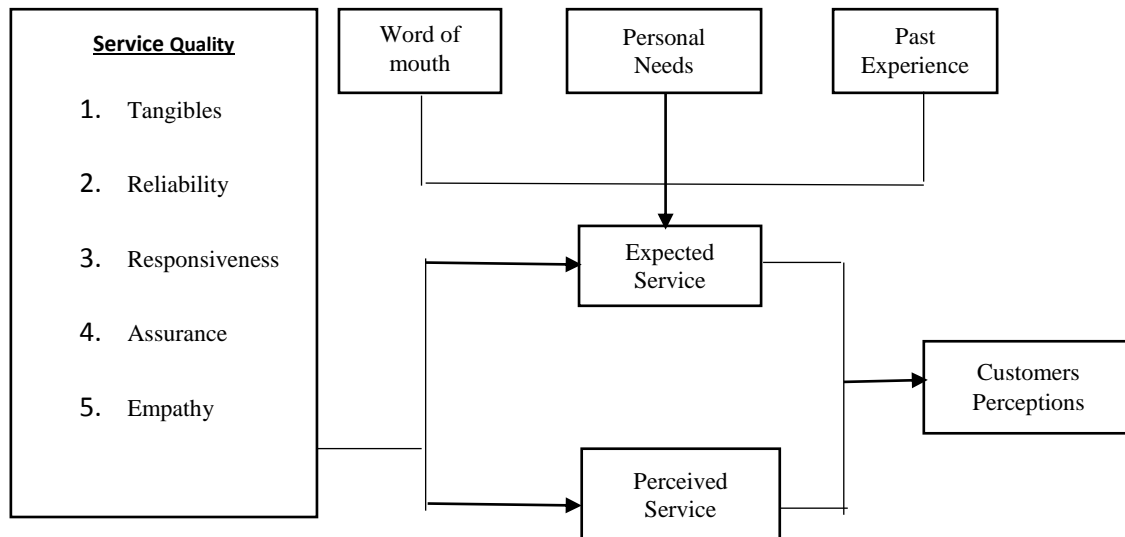
First we have to know that restaurant is a place where people can go to release tension after work with friends or to relax with family. People increase in dining out since their life is in a hurry so they do not have time for cooking. As the result, there are many restaurants such as Thai, Chinese, Italian, Vietnam, and Japanese restaurants opened in a variety of places such as stand-alone, hotels, and department stores to meet customer preferences.

EAT ME restaurant as independent operator that targets family and working people in areas of Bangkok by offering a variety of menu, it's menu fuses influences from around the world, dishes are characterized by daring flavor combinations, which showcase a kaleidoscope of international ingredients in starters such as Alaskan scallops with avocado, yuzu and pancetta, while a chicken salad is elevated to new heights by the addition of red papaya, toasted coconut and betel leaf (EAT ME/media/background-information), with reasonable price to customers, and realizes in the importance service quality to meet customers’ expectations. The restaurant have 12,000 people per month, or 400 people per day.

The purpose of this project is to examine the applicability of a previously established instrument for measuring service quality (SERVQUAL) in assessing customer perceptions of service quality towards EAT ME restaurant.

This research studies the customer perceptions towards service quality of EAT ME restaurant in view of an interesting case study that can use the results obtained for a service development and improvement in the future.

1.1 Conceptual Framework:



Source: (Gronroos 1982, and Lehtinen 1982) A conceptual model of Service Quality and its implication for future research (SERVQUAL)

Figure 1.6 Conceptual framework of this study

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review of service quality. This chapter begins with definition of services, customer expectations and customer perception of service. Next, a discussion about the service quality in terms of definition and measurements is made, and also the main dimensions of services in restaurants.

2.1 Customer Expectations of Service:

Customer expectations are beliefs of an individual about service performance before they receives the actual service delivery (Zeithaml et al., 2006, P. 81). In evaluating service quality, it is a comparison of customer's expectation with the actual performance of service, and the different between customer expectations and perceptions of service is the "customer gap" in which a firm needs to close that gap (Bateson, 1995, P. 559; Zeithaml et al., 2006, P. 33).

2.2 Customer Perceptions of Service:

Perception is an individual's attitudes after they have received services (Reid & Bojanic, 2001, P. 73). Customers perceive a service in both terms of the quality of service and satisfaction, and perceptions of customers always relate to their expectations and experiences (Zeithaml et al., 2006, P. 106).

2.3 Service Quality Measurement:

The research of Parsu Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml, and Leonard Berry began in 1983 to identify the service quality measurement that customer perceive as being important by developed a critical tool known as "SERVQUAL" for measuring and comparing customers' perceptions of service quality with their expectations for a firm to better understand their customers' mind (as cited Bateson, 1995, P. 562; as cited in Palmer & Cole, 1995, P. 152; as cited in Zeithaml et al., 2006, P. 116-117).

SERVQUAL measurement of service quality in the research of Parasuraman et al. (1988) was used in measuring service quality in hotels (Wilkins, 2007), and it was widely used in a variety of service industries (as cited Bateson, 1995, P. 562; as cited in Palmer & Cole, 1995, P. 152; as cited in Zeithaml et al., 2006, P. 116-117). Therefore, in this study uses the SERVQUAL dimensions to measure customer perceptions towards service quality.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research design is the plan to be followed to answer the problems or objectives of the research by selecting a basic research method (McDaniel & Gates, 2004). There are main three types of research designs: “Exploratory research” is informal research that does not have a formal set of objectives, sample plan, or questionnaire, to gain background of information, define terms and clarify problems, and help in designing the descriptive or causal research study; “Descriptive research” is used to describe answers to questions of who, what, where, when and how in order to measure a marketing phenomenon, for example use a survey method that is the most common research technique in gathering primary data from a sample of people through a questionnaire; “Causal research” is an understanding a phenomenon in terms of conditional statements, for example, use experiments to find out cause-and-effect relationships among variables (McDaniel & Gates, 2004).

3.1 Research Methods:

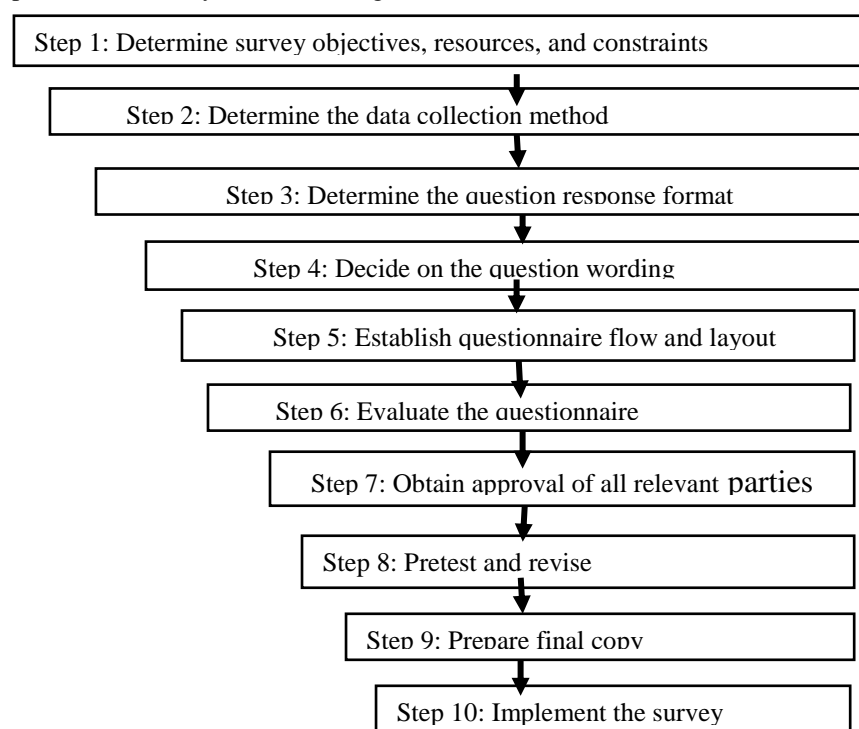
A research design is chosen based on objectives of a research (McDaniel & Gates, 2004). There are three basic research methods: “Survey method” is often descriptive in nature by using an interviewer to interact with respondents to obtain facts, opinions, and attitudes; “Observation method” is a descriptive research that monitors actions of respondents without direct interaction; “Experiments” use to measure causality by changing one or more variables and observe the effect of the changes (McDaniel & Gates, 2004). The methods are qualitative and quantitative method.

This study was based on **Quantitative** approach to gather primary data. There are many types of quantitative research; however, this study used the survey research via questionnaire to collect the data about attitudes of current customer at EAT ME restaurant.

3.2 Survey design and development:

After the research design and the sampling plan have been created, the next process is collecting data. There are many research techniques involves many methods of data gathering such as by personal and telephone interviewing, mail survey and self-administered questionnaire that filled out by respondents with no interviewer present (McDaniel & Gates, 2004).

The survey will be designed after specified the research problems and questions in the research, and designing and developing the survey must be related to the goals of the research (Czaja & Blair, 2005). Figure 3.3. shows the questionnaire design process: the first step begins with determine survey objectives, resources, and constraints; determine the data collection method; determine the question response format; decide on the question wording; establish questionnaire flow and layout; evaluate the questionnaire; obtain approval of all relevant parties; pretest and revise; prepare final copy; and implement the survey at the final stage.



Source: McDaniel & Gates, (2004, P. 241)

Figure: 3.3. Questionnaire Design Process

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Data results from Demographic Characteristics:

Table 4.1.2 shows the data results that present the participants' information collected from the survey.

Table 4.1.2. Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	120	43.17
	Female	158	56.83
	Total	278	100.00
Age	Under 25	85	30.58
	26 - 39	118	42.45
	40 - 49	51	18.35
	More than 50	24	8.63
	Total	278	100.00
Occupation	Student	53	19.06
	Employee of private company	118	42.45
	Government Employee	28	10.07
	Entrepreneur	61	21.94
	Others	18	6.47
	Total	278	100.00
Income per month (Baht)	Below 15,000	77	27.70
	15,001-30,000	98	35.25
	30,001-50,000	62	22.30
	More than 50,000	41	14.75
	Total	278	100.00

Source: Survey in October, 2015

4.2. Comparison between Expectation and Perception Scores – GAP5:

GAP 5 or customer gap is the different customers' expectations and customers' perception of service (Bateson, 1995, P. 559). Based on Parasuraman (1988) to measure the gap between the mean of five perception dimensions scores and five expectations dimensions scores, the SERVQUAL score formula was calculated on $(P - E = SQ)$. Table 4.1.5 presents the Gap between expectation and perception scores on each dimension.

Table 4.1.5 Gap between Expectation and Perception Scores

Dimensions	Expectation Scores	Perception Scores	Paired Differences	Rank
Reliability	6.00	4.82	-1.18	1
Assurance	5.65	4.66	-0.99	4
Tangible	5.60	4.80	-0.80	5
Empathy	5.71	4.65	-1.06	3
Responsiveness	5.79	4.64	-1.15	2

Source: Survey in October, 2015

According to discussion in Chapter 2, determining customer expectations and perceptions is essential to delivering service quality to meet their requirements. From data analysis in Chapter 4 and from topic 4.2.2 the results showed that EAT ME restaurant failed to meet their customers' expectations in all five dimensions.

Referred to the Gap model in Chapter 2, the restaurant was unable to close Gap 5 or customer gap. The following is discussion in main problems during operation of EAT ME restaurant.

Reliability was the highest expectation score (from topic 4.2.2. in Chapter 4) and it was the highest perception score (from topic 4.2.6. in Chapter 4). However, from topic 4.2.9 in Chapter 4, reliability was the highest gap score. For

restaurant services, it implied that customers expected in a very high level of service on reliability, and they perceived high level of reliability service dimension from the restaurant. Customers wanted to get the service right at the first time and they wanted the restaurant to show sincere interest in solving their problems. Therefore, reliability was the main problem of EAT ME restaurant. According to topic 4.2.10 in Chapter 4, reliability was viewed as the most important dimension, so the restaurant must emphasize on improving this dimension as the first priority.

Responsiveness is the second highest expectation score (from topic 4.2.2. in Chapter 4). In contrast, it is the lowest perception scores (from topic 4.2.8 in Chapter 4). From topic 4.2.9 in Chapter 4, responsiveness is the second highest gap score among five dimensions. It implied that EAT ME restaurant did not provide prompt service to customers. The restaurant did not response to their request immediately, and did not inform them when service will be performed, and lack of willingness to help them. Therefore, responsiveness was the main problem of EAT ME restaurant According to topic 4.2.10 in Chapter 4, responsiveness was viewed as the second important dimension that customers expected to get from the restaurant's employees. Thus, the restaurant need to improve this dimension to show that they aware of good relationship with customers.

Empathy is the third highest gap among five dimensions (from topic 4.2.9 in Chapter 4). For restaurant services, customers want individual attention and personalized service. Similar to Reliability and Responsiveness dimension, empathy is also need improvement. Although the gap is smaller when compared to reliability and responsiveness dimension, EAT ME restaurant should consider and improve in Empathy for better service offer.

Assurance dimension is the second lowest gap among five dimensions (from topic 4.2.9 in Chapter 4). However, the result showed that customers thought that this dimension is important for services. Also, they expected the performance of EAT ME buffet restaurant in high level of the restaurant's staff that is courtesy and has skills and knowledge to perform services. Therefore, the restaurant should focus on assurance and trust as well.

Tangible is the lowest expectation score (from topic 4.2.4. in Chapter 4). On the contrary, it is the second highest perception score (from topic 4.2.6. in Chapter 4). Regarding to topic 4.2.9 in Chapter 4, tangible is the lowest gap among five dimensions. It implied that EAT ME restaurant match the customer expectation most when compared to all five dimensions. It can be said that the restaurant has good facilities and equipment. An appearance of the restaurant's employee in neat and clean is necessary in the sanitary restaurant to establish a feeling of confidence and credibility for the customers (Zeithaml, 2006); from topic 4.2.9 showed the negative gap in tangible. Therefore, tangible dimension is also important in improving service quality of the restaurant.

The result of this study is similar to Parasuraman and Zeithaml as mentioned in Chapter 2. The researcher found that reliability was the most important dimension viewed by customers in evaluating service quality then followed by responsiveness and tangible was low level in influence on overall service quality. Therefore, the restaurant must emphasize on improving Reliability as top priority since it was the biggest gap and perceived by customers that it was the most important as well. Although tangible is the least important among five dimensions, the restaurant remain to combine tangible with another dimension to create a service quality strategy for the restaurant.

As discussed in Chapter 2, from topic 2.6, the service quality has a lot of benefits, such as encouraging repeat patronage and loyalty, promoting positive word of mouth, lowering costs of attracting new customers, gaining market share, and creating sustainable advantage. Also, EAT ME restaurant aimed to gain more market share, as well as planed to expand more branches. However, the results showed that the restaurant failed to meet their customers' expectations. Therefore, the restaurant must strive for success in exceeding or meeting customer expectations and have to continuously improve their service quality to satisfy their customers by focusing on reliability and responsiveness that are the most important to customers to maximize its effectiveness in their services.

5. CONCLUTIONS

Service quality is an important key for business success because it provides a lot of benefits. From this study, the customers of EAT ME restaurant did not perceive the services delivered from the restaurant as they expected. The restaurant needs to be aware of reliability dimension as top priority and must emphasize on responsiveness. In addition, the restaurant should train their employees, monitor their marketing communication, and conduct customer relationship program to close the gap and to secure long-term relationship.

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