

# Historical Evolution from Measuring Service Quality to Library User Experience: A Conceptual Review of Related Concepts

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## Abstract

*Experience reflects customers' overall assessment of value rather than in relation to expectations, highlighting the importance of these perceptual attributes. These attributes reflect customers' higher-order objectives leading to purchasing behavior better than technical aspects of service do, the latter subject to frequent changes due to technology and competition. Therefore perceptual attributes are more stable as the focus of evaluation of experience SERVQUAL focuses largely upon customers' assessment of the service process and human interactions Individual components of a service encounter may be assessed as 'good quality', but that does not automatically mean that the overall experience is judged high quality, nor does measuring the components of service quality ensure that customers achieve their desired outcomes.*

**Key words:** Service Quality, SERVQUAL, Library User Experience, Library Service

## Introduction

Service quality was originally conceptualized as a gap between expectations and the consumer's overall assessment of the service encounter (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). This concept led to the popular management adage of needing to 'delight' customers by always exceeding their expectations. Service quality's most popular measure is SERVQUAL, a 22-item scale whose dimensions are: reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. When implementing the measure, researchers focus on a particular service episode and ask customers to assess the dimensions versus their prior expectations using a five-point Likert scale (Morrison Coulthard 2004). SERVQUAL has been challenged conceptually, methodologically and with respect to the validity of its dimensions. Research subsequent to Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) has failed to validate SERVQUAL's dimensions (Buttle 1996), thus questioning its generalizability.

The authors believe that SERVQUAL reflects the quality management origins of service quality, a manufacturing-like atomization of complex service systems and subsequent optimization of each component; it is highly contestable if this corresponds with how customers assess their overall experiences. Lemke *et al.* (2010) describe this argument as a debate between those who believe in the embedded value of a service offer versus those who believe that value is created by customers in use: co-creation.

SERVQUAL's dimensions are too limited (Sureshchandar *et al.* 2002) to capture customer experience fully, and marketing scholars suggest a broader and more holistic conceptualization, and therefore measure, of experience (Verhoef *et al.* 2009; Gentile Spiller and Noci (2007) suggest that 'customer experience ... is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual)'. While such wide reaching conceptualizations are consistent with experience, they may be too broad to defy practical measurement and risk conceptualizing customer experience as the 'theory of everything'. The existing experience research considers specific, normally high-involvement, and contexts given its personal and contextual nature (Sharma & Patterson 2000; Chandon *et al.* 2005). This intuitively appealing approach to experience makes it difficult to create a universal measure similar to SERVQUAL, customer satisfaction or Net Promoter Score. As most of the academic literature to date is of a conceptual nature, scholars have not fully addressed the issue of generalizability.

Responding to this challenge, (Lemke *et al.*, 2010) develop a conceptual framework for customer experience from a cross-industry study using repertory grid analysis. They find that experience is generated from three types of encounter: (1) communication, (2) service delivery and (3) usage. Service delivery is assessed on the basis of product, service and experience quality. The three encounters are moderated by the context of the experience – that is, involvement, complexity, relationships and the hedonic nature of the experience. Customers take a longitudinal perspective when assessing their experiences and will believe that they have had experience with a company even before they have bought something; this arises from advertising, promotion and word-of-mouth. Therefore, market researchers need to measure customer experience before and after the service encounter(s), and account for both direct and indirect contacts and peer influences (Berry *et al.* 2002; Payne *et al.* 2008).

### **A rapid evolution from product to service to experience**

Marketing practice and research have undergone a series of large-scale transformations over the past 25 years, shifting focus from (1) creating fast moving consumer product brands to (2) building customer relationships through service marketing, and now to (3) creating compelling customer experiences. The authors propose that marketing research has not kept up with these changes (Gordon 2006), generating a mismatch between what marketers are now trying to achieve and what market research measures.

Vargo and Lusch (2004) propose that marketing has evolved from bringing goods 'to market' through a stage of market and consumer targeting ('marketing to') and is now focused on 'market with': co-creating value collaboratively with customers over an extended time frame. Co-creation unites the focal

company's network of relationships with customers' capabilities, enabling customers to achieve higher-order goals or objectives. These higher-order goals are termed value-in-use, which is defined as 'a customer's functional outcome, purpose or objective that is directly served through the product/service consumption' (Macdonald *et al.* 2009, p. 3). Company offers are therefore constructed as product-service-systems, bundles of products and services that fulfill an ever greater part of the customer's needs than can be addressed by product or service offers alone (Baines *et al.* 2007).

The authors assert that this rapid evolution of marketing 'paradigms' mirrors a real-world occurrence of marketplace competition, moving from products to services to a post-product, post-service phenomenon that is still evolving and not yet fully formed. However, that the most popular expression of this emerging marketplace reality is *customer experience* (Klaus & Maklan 2007; Gambetti & Graffigna 2010; Lemke *et al.* 2010). The term *experience economy* possibly originates with Pine and Gilmore (Gilmore & Pine II 1997, 2002), who make the overt claim that experience represents a move beyond products and service. Their work, echoed by many at that time, focused the discussion of experience upon immersive environments such as Starbucks, American Girl Dolls (Pine & Gilmore 2004), Harley-Davidson outings (Schouten & McAlexander 1995) or white river rafting (Arnould & Price 1993).

### User Experience in Libraries

In the ever-more competitive world of information and document delivery channels, libraries need to focus sharply on customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers are returning customers. This has sharpened the quality of the interaction between library staff and the user or customer, although customer service is only one component in the total customer experience. Customer satisfaction depends on the total customer experience, from the moment the customer seeks to park the car or make a connection through the telephone network to the moment the customer leaves the library with the appropriate information, document or leisure experience. The total customer experience will probably be different for each customer. Compared with some other service outlets, such as restaurants, hotels or banks, there is potential for much greater diversity in libraries, because the customer may seek a wider variety of different services or products from a library (Jennifer, 1994).

The customer's experience is pervasive. If the customer does not experience for the evaluation of that customer's experience. Some aspect of a library's service, stock or functions, that aspect is redundant. Since users access libraries in order to fulfill different needs, it can be difficult to identify a set of criteria which are appropriate in every case. (Tucker, 1991) offers a list of useful criteria which contribute to customer experience in which he asserts that businesses must outperform their competitors in order to achieve competitive advantage. Here we list these criteria and comment briefly on their application in turn to libraries:

**(1) Speed of service delivery.** For libraries, the emphasis is on access time. This will depend on the access channel, whether it is by telephone, personal visit or computer network. For personal visits, access time will depend to some extent on location, and also on access to services and documents within the library.

For documents or information not available in a specific library, the speed of inter-library loan and access to external databases will be important.

**(2) Convenience.** Convenience is often closely associated with speed of delivery and, as with speed of delivery; location may be a significant factor in convenience. Convenience is also reflected in how well the service matches the requirements of the user, and will be influenced by opening times, range of services available from one service point and the extent to which specifically tailored services are offered for speed groups of users.

**(3) Age waves are concerned with responding to demographic changes.**

Age is possibly less relevant in other types of library and information environments.

**(4) Choice.** Customers appreciate options – different products at different prices. Library managers possibly tend to be a little too wary about choice, and there is always the genuine concern that by offering choice the library service is not undermining the feasibility of another service or product. Taking a wider perspective, the libraria needs to recognize that the library may be only one document and information delivery channel open to the user, and so must seek to differentiate in marketing terms this service from others.

**(5) Lifestyle.** The lifestyles of customers are important in assessing which products or services they might appreciate. Is time precious or is a leisurely experience paramount? Where do customers spend their time? What are their priorities? These are just some of the questions which might be considered.

**(6) Discounting.** Discounting is common practice in the wider marketplace as a means of attracting new custom. Many library services are not particularly price-sensitive, since prices are low anyway and some services are free. Those parts of the information industry which offer products that are more expensive, such as the online hosts and CD-ROM producers, often have pricing structures that embrace assorted discounts for selected groups. As the marketplace in general becomes more competitive and pricing becomes an even more pressing issue, discounting is likely to need to be considered more widely.

**(7) Value adding.** Again, the sector of the information industry concerned with electronic products has developed a number of value-added products in recent years, including electronic mail and current awareness services. The definition of value-added service depends on the initial service. How can an academic library add value to its basic reference and lending services? What would tailor these services more appropriately to the student group?

**(8) Customer service.** Customer service focuses on the interactions between users and staff. Staff needs to be pleasant and helpful and to be empowered to respond positively to the range of requests they might receive.

**(9) Technology.** All businesses need to embrace the opportunities technology offers to improve the basic product or service. The library and information industry has been a leader in this process, and it is important that it retains this position, while also responding flexibly to the challenges technology poses to the very existence of some sectors of the industry.

**(10) Quality.** Quality is sufficiently important for the previous section to have singled it out for separate treatment. These ten factors embrace a multitude of facets of the customer experience. They impinge on a number of aspects of the marketing strategy of the organization, in the sense that they have an impact on the services offered as well as on the customer's experience of those services. Indeed, customer experience and marketing strategy are closely intertwined.

**Table 1.1 Factors that Influence Total Customer Experience**

<b>Environmental factors</b>	<b>Type of library</b>
Quietness	Public – Local branch
Cleanliness	– Mobile
Decorative condition	– Central reference
Warmth	Academic – College
Light	– School
Accessibility of stock	– University
Seating and workspace	Special – Professional body
	– Government library
	– Business and industry
<b>Pricing/charging strategies</b>	<b>Size of visit group</b>
Which services are “free”	Family
Charging strategies	Student group
	Work group
<b>Stock/information services</b>	Alone
Subject range	
Age/currency	
Condition	
Display	<b>Interaction with library staff</b>
Availability	(e.g.: use of special facilities)
Media range	Photocopier
	Toilets
<b>Type of use</b>	Coffee area
Multiple	OPAC
Leisure	Study carrels
Information acquisition	CD-ROM
Study time	Microcomputers

Document borrowing  
Reference  
Photocopying  
Browsing  
Database searching

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Change machines

**Source:** Rowley, J. (1994)

### **Service Quality Measurement of Academic Library**

The academic libraries are attached to their parent organizations and providing support for research and educational learning to its community. There are various methods of studying service quality and user satisfaction that has emerged in LIS (Library and Information Science). One such method is SERVQUAL, used widely in the field of marketing and later applied in other fields (Roslah and Zainab, 2007). It is a five-dimensional construct in the 22-item Likert Scale survey. The model focused on reducing the gap between customer expectations and the actual service provided. The survey instrument was based on the Gaps Model of Service Quality.

By applying this instrument, the libraries gain insights into customer's conceptualization of what a service should deliver and how well that service meets idealized expectations (Calvert and Hernon, 1996; Nitecki and Hernon, 2000 and Miller, 2008). (Edgar, 2006) stated that SERVQUAL may work in industrial settings, but not libraries. Various studies have proved that the five SERVQUAL dimensions are not recoverable in the library context, and additional dimensions of quality not measured by SERVQUAL are necessary (Nadiri and Mayboudi, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Nonetheless, this encouraged researchers to rediscover much earlier scholarship arguing that people buy goods and services as a means to fulfill deeper emotional, sensory and hedonic aspirations. With this lens, what matters to customers is how they experience the extended process of acquiring, integrating and deploying that is necessary for them to achieve their aspirations and higher-order goal – that is, value-in-use. Vargo and Lusch (2004) contrast this with traditional Goods Dominant Logic that sees value arising from economic exchange – that is, value is measured by the price paid (price premium to competitors). While many scholars and practitioners acknowledge that experience should be the new focus of managerial attention, they are less unified on both its precise definition and its measure. This creates a dilemma for market researchers. While acknowledging that organizations are increasingly competing on the basis of customer experience, the concept is defined imprecisely and, as yet, there are no widely agreed measures of it. The authors maintain that market research limited conceptualization of experience does not help organizations assess how customers evaluate their organizations' offers. Customer experience blurs traditional distinctions between products and services because of its focus on customers' value-in-use, which arises from combinations of products and services.

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