Examining SERVQUAL Dimensions' Effect on Customer Satisfaction: The Knowledge Gained from a Vietnamese Fashion Retailers

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A B S T R A C T

Even with the growth of e-commerce, conventional fashion retailers appear to be an unavoidable component of developing strategies for customer service, attracting new business, and improving consumer satisfaction with items. However, it is still unclear what makes tourists feel satisfied with clothing retailers. Through a survey methodology employing 1500 questionnaires (1212 valid responses), the research investigated the effects of the five distinct SERVQUAL factors on customer satisfaction with a particular focus on Vietnamese fashion businesses. The findings showed that the five SERVQUAL characteristics—reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, empathy, knowledge—had a major impact on customer satisfaction. In addition, the study offers empirical data unique to the Vietnamese setting, which sets it apart from research done elsewhere. The influence of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction in Vietnamese fashion retailers is theoretically understood and reinforced by this.

Keywords: SERVQUAL, Customer Satisfaction, Fashion retailers, Vietnam

1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization and international economic integration, coupled with the relentless advancement of technology in the business realm, the competitive landscape among companies in the market is becoming increasingly intense. Amidst this dynamic environment, customers play a pivotal role in determining the survival of each company. Those companies that can effectively capture the attention and loyalty of customers will thrive and prosper. Customer-centric business strategies are emerging as a paramount factor for success. In the realm of business, customer collaboration, new customer acquisition, and customer retention have emerged as effective tools that deliver high business performance at low cost. Providing utmost customer satisfaction consistently remains a top priority for companies to strive towards. Furthermore, customer satisfaction not only fosters loyalty but also serves as the key to maintaining long-term relationships with the company. However, in a competitive environment, building customer loyalty does not guarantee their continued patronage. Customer relationships require ongoing nurturing. Therefore, fashion retailers must continuously engage in customer care and support.

The Vietnamese market values personalized customer service, where store staff remember preferences and offer tailored recommendations. However, as businesses scale, maintaining this level of personalization across multiple retailers becomes difficult. The rise of e-commerce creates a need for consistent customer care across online platforms and physical retailers. Vietnamese retailers might struggle to integrate these channels, leading to a disjointed customer experience. Especially, small Vietnamese fashion retailers may not have the resources to invest in robust customer relationship management (CRM) systems or hire dedicated customer service personnel. This can hinder their ability to effectively track customer interactions and resolve issues.

In light of this, researchers created a study utilizing a slightly modified SERVQUAL instrument to assess consumer satisfaction levels with fashion retailers that are now open in Vietnam. The influence of each SERVQUAL component on customer satisfaction was examined as part of the study. Researchers looked into how ready customers were to file complaints with fashion retailers and how satisfied they were with how the complaints were handled and addressed by the retailers.

2. Literature review

The SERVQUAL paradigm has been the cornerstone for the introduction of several instruments for gauging overall service quality for more than 20 years. As noted by Andersson (1992), Brown et al. (1993), Iacobucci et al. (1994), and Pantouvakis (2010), the model is not without detractors. One of the most thorough theoretical and operational SERVQUAL criticisms is provided by Buttle (1996). Some writers have developed models relating to the hotel industry, such as LODGSERV, which has 26 question items (Knutson et al., 1990), or HOLSERV, which has 27 question items (Wong et al., 1999), in response to this critique. They have also updated the original SERVQUAL. Possibly the most well-known substitute for SERVQUAL is SERVPERF,

which was suggested by Cronin and Taylor in 1992. The question of whether of the two models was more reliable for forecasting service quality sparked a lot of debate. In the end, Carrillat et al. (2007) concluded that both models were equally effective in predicting total service quality.

It appears that the SERVQUAL instrument, or a variation on it, has served as the foundation for the majority of research studies on the quality of service provided by travel agencies (Ryan and Cliff, 1997; Lam and Zhang, 1999; Johns et al., 2004). However, it's crucial to remember that the SERVQUAL tool is insufficient for assessing quality in many service industries (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Sachdev and Verma, 2004; Crick and Spencer, 2011). Ryan (1999), for example, provides an analysis of the SERVQUAL tool and its use in the tourist industry. In this vein, Babakus and Boller (1992) propose the necessity of sector-specific service quality metrics. A multidimensional and hierarchical model of service quality forms the basis of one of the suggested alternatives. In this model, quality—the factor of the highest order construct—is defined by three second-order dimensions: outcome, physical environment, and personal interaction. These dimensions are further defined by seven third-order dimensions: behavior, competence, problem-solving, equipment, ambient conditions, waiting time, and valence (Caro and Garcìa, 2008).

Author conducted a research using a modified SERVQUAL instrument in spite of criticisms of the SERVQUAL paradigm. Among the SERVQUAL-based models that were previously mentioned, we excluded the HOLSERV model because the eight modified items from the original SERVQUAL model (Wong et al., 1999) primarily addressed problems pertaining to an extended guest's stay in a hotel and did not accurately reflect the type of service encounter that took place within the travel agency. We believed that the LODGSERV model was similarly inappropriate for our investigation for the same reason. SERVPERF was avoided as it solely evaluated the performance of the service provider and did not assess consumer expectations. In particular, SERVPERF's diagnostic capacity to notify managers of the service process areas they needed to address to raise the overall perceived quality of service in the future was severely hindered by the inability to identify what customers' expectations were in the first place (Jain and Gupta, 2004).

Despite the fact that service quality has been the focus of several research projects over the past three decades, there are still significant differences in the definition of the word among scientists. In general, there are two distinct methods for evaluating service quality. The first method bases service quality on evaluating what customers actually perceive as the supplied service against what they expected to be provided (Gronroos 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985).According to Caro and Garcúa (2007), the second method recommends that customer perception be the only factor used in determining service excellence.s.

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework was developed as followed.

Figure 1: The research framework
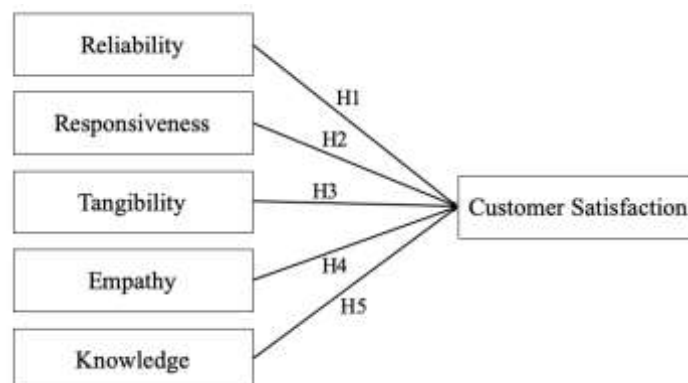
Hypothesis 1 (H1): Reliability significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Responsiveness significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Tangibility significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Empathy significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Knowledge significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction

3. Methodology

To conduct a comprehensive investigation into customer satisfaction with the quality of a company's products and services, a mixed-methods approach that integrates both qualitative and quantitative research methods is essential. Qualitative research methods encompass focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, allowing for a deeper understanding of customer perceptions and experiences. Quantitative research, on the other hand, utilizes collected data for statistical analysis, including: sample descriptive statistics, reliability assessment using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Furthermore, the research topic of "customer satisfaction" falls under the category of survey research, where customer responses gathered through questionnaires serve as the primary source of information. In survey research, the collected data tends to be more

objective due to the reduced influence of subjective biases from the researcher. Consequently, the process of data analysis and processing yields results with high reliability and generalizability, allowing for their application in subsequent studies involving larger sample sizes. The preliminary study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative component aimed to explore, refine, and supplement the observed variables used to measure the research concepts, ensuring that the constructed scale aligned with theory and was grounded in empirical evidence. Participants included the retailer's owners. On the customer side, the author randomly selected 10 customers to participate in telephone interviews, thereby recording their opinions on the company's services, product quality, and expectations. During the second phase of data collection, online questionnaires containing a research introduction were distributed to targeted participants via email or their online personal sites. The collected data will be analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Software (version 20.0). Initially, Cronbach's Alpha will be employed to assess the internal consistency of the measurement instruments for four key study variables. Subsequently, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) will be conducted to identify underlying latent factors within the data. Following this, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient will be used to determine the strength and direction of any relationships between independent and dependent variables. Finally, linear regression analysis will be conducted to test the research hypotheses.

3.1 Demographic information of respondents

About 1500 questionnaires were sent out and 1212 valid responses were collected for the further analysis. The Reliability is measured by the 5-item scale; Responsiveness is measured by the 4-item scale; Tangibility is measured by the 5-item scale; Empathy is measured by the 4-item scale; Knowledge is measured by the 3-item scale developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1998). Finally, the Customer Satisfaction is measured by 3-item scale developed by Fragata and Gallego (2009).

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents

	Frequency	Ratio (%)
Gender		
Female	886	73.10%
Male	326	26.90%
Other	0	0.00%
Age		
Under 30	412	33.99%
30 to 45	578	47.69%
Over 45 to 60	128	10.56%
Over 60	94	7.75%
Income		
Under 5 million VND/ month	238	19.63%
5 million to under 10 million VND/ month	398	32.84%
10 million to under 15 million VND/ month	340	28.05%
More than 15 million VND/ month	236	19.47%

It could be seen from the two above tables that most of the respondents are female and they count for about 73.10%. The age of respondents is quite low when people who are under 30 years old count for more than 30% and 47.69% is the figure recorded for 30-to-45- year-old respondents. Additionally, the income of this sample mostly accounted for under 5 million to under 10 million/ month (more than 51% repondents).

3.2 Descriptive Statistics

As being shown in the table 3, there are 24 items which will be studied by the responses collected from 1212 respondents. The average values of reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, empathy, knowledge and customer satisfaction are 3.90, 3.89, 3.43, 3.86, 3.64 and 3.46 respectively.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Abb.	Items	Mean	S.D.	Min	Max	N
REL1	"1.1. The retailer always introduced the service right from the beginning"	3.96	0.81	2.00	5.00	1212
REL2	"1.2. The retailer always delivers on time as promised"	3.86	0.83	1.00	5.00	1212

REL3	"1.3. The retailer always shows sincere interest in resolving your concerns and complaints"	3.91	0.93	1.00	5.00	1212
REL4	"1.4. The retailer clearly informs product quality and shipping process once an order has been placed"	3.96	0.89	1.00	5.00	1212
REL5	"1.5. The retailer delivers the correct product design and is careful in shipping and packaging"	3.79	0.99	1.00	5.00	1212
	Average	*3.90*	*0.89*	*1.20*	*5.00*	*1212*
RES1	"2.1. Sales staff are always very willing to help when you need it"	3.83	0.94	1.00	5.00	1212
RES2	"2.2. Sales staff always have a quick and professional service attitude on time"	3.75	0.93	1.00	5.00	1212
RES3	"2.3. Sales staff regularly update the status of your order"	4.00	0.90	1.00	5.00	1212
RES4	"2.4. Sales staff satisfactorily answer your questions"	3.99	0.93	1.00	5.00	1212
	Average	*3.89*	*0.92*	*1.00*	*5.00*	1212
TAN1	"3.1 Sales staff talk in a gentle, polite and friendly voice"	3.14	1.03	1.00	5.00	1212
TAN2	"3.2. Easy and convenient way to order and pay"	3.41	0.95	1.00	5.00	1212
TAN3	"3.3. The retailer has modern equipment and machinery"	3.49	0.90	1.00	5.00	1212
TAN4	"3.3. Product quality is good"	3.64	0.93	1.00	5.00	1212
TAN5	"3.3. Retail product designs are diverse and attractive"	3.51	0.94	1.00	5.00	1212
	Average	*3.43*	*0.95*	*1.00*	*5.00*	1212
EM1	"4.1. The retailer always cares about your personal demands"	2.72	1.16	1.00	5.00	1212
EM2	"4.2 The retailer always cares about your needs"	3.07	1.19	1.00	5.00	1212
EM3	"4.3. Retailers always have preferential policies for you"	2.82	1.25	1.00	5.00	1212
EM4	"4.4. Sales staff are always interested in asking about your needs and feelings so they can advise and take care of you in the best way."	2.84	1.20	1.00	5.00	1212
	Average	*3.86*	*1.20*	*1.00*	*5.00*	1212
KNO1	"5.1. Sales staff are knowledgeable of products, prices, offers etc"	3.60	0.80	2.00	5.00	1212
KNO2	"5.2. I get all the pertinent information from staff in the outlet"	3.67	0.87	1.00	5.00	1212
KNO3	"5.3. Staff here are aware of special promos and offer prices"	3.65	0.92	1.00	5.00	1212
	Average	*3.64*	*0.82*	*1.33*	*5.00*	1212
SAT1	The retailer's services create trust and satisfaction for you	3.67	0.87	1.00	5.00	1212
SAT2	In the future, you will continue to trust the retailer's products and services	3.07	1.19	1.00	5.00	1212
SAT3	You will invite friends and relatives to experience using the retailer's products and services	3.64	0.93	1.00	5.00	1212
	Average	*3.46*	*0.97*	*1.00*	*5.00*	1212

3.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation coefficients between the variables indicate the strength of association between the independent variable and the dependent variable and are measured using the absolute value of Pearson's value. The closer this value is to 1, the stronger the linear relationship between the two variables. According to the correlation matrix, there is a linear correlation between the dependent variable SAT and the independent variables REL, RES, KNO, EM, and TAN, as the significance level (Sig.) is less than 0.05. The correlation coefficient between the dependent variable SAT and the independent variable RES is the highest at 0.745, followed by REL, KNO, EM, and TAN.

Table 4: Pearson correlation statistic summary

Correlations

		SAT	REL	RES	KNO	EM	TAN
SAT	**Pearson Correlation**	1	.743**	.745**	.715**	.714**	.567**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212
REL	**Pearson Correlation**	.743**	1	.507**	.568**	.467**	.421**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212
RES	**Pearson Correlation**	.745**	.507**	1	.537**	.569**	.375**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212
KNO	**Pearson Correlation**	.715**	.568**	.537**	1	.548**	.357**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212
EM	**Pearson Correlation**	.714**	.467**	.569**	.548**	1	.327**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212
TAN	**Pearson Correlation**	.567**	.421**	.375**	.357**	.327**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212	1212

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.4 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

Following the assessment of correlation among variables, the authors conducted a regression analysis. To examine the model of factors influencing customer satisfaction with product and service experiences at fashion retailers, research employed multiple linear regression. The regression model's R-squared value of 85% indicates a strong fit between the model and the data. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.847 (or 84.7%) provides a more accurate reflection of the model's overall fit. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson (DW) statistic of 1.776 falls within the acceptable range ($0 < DW < 2$), suggesting the absence of first-order autocorrelation (Table 5).

Table 5: Model summary

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.922[a]	.850	.847	.34418	1.776

a. Predictors: (Constant), TAN, EM, REL, RES, KNO

b. Dependent Variable: SAT

Therefore, the multiple regression model satisfies the evaluation and goodness-of-fit criteria based on the research findings.

Table 6: ANOVA

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	138.535	5	27.707	233.899	.000[b]
	Residual	24.402	206	.118		
	Total	162.937	211			

a. Dependent Variable: SAT

b. Predictors: (Constant), TAN, EM, REL, RES, KNO

As observed in the ANOVA table, the significance level (Sig.) of 0.000 is less than the significance level (α) of 0.01. This indicates that the constructed regression model is statistically significant and can be generalized to the broader population.

Table 7: Coefficients in the regression equation

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.568	.114		-4.984	.000		
	REL	.279	.033	.296	8.341	.000	.579	1.727
	RES	.240	.031	.278	7.736	.000	.563	1.776
	KNO	.169	.032	.194	5.318	.000	.544	1.837
	EM	.229	.032	.250	7.067	.000	.582	1.719
	TAN	.186	.030	.188	6.135	.000	.778	1.285

a. Dependent Variable: SAT

The results of the regression analysis indicate that all independent variables with a t-test significance level (Sig.) less than 0.05 are retained in the model, suggesting no multicollinearity issues. Furthermore, examining the final regression table reveals that all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are less than 2. This implies that the multicollinearity among the independent variables is negligible, and the variables included in the model are acceptable. The standardized beta coefficients provide insights into the relative importance of each independent variable in influencing the dependent variable.

The normalized regression equation is: *SAT = 0.278 RES + 0.296 REL +0.194 KNO + 0.250 EM + 0.188 TAN*

Table 7: The results of multiple linear regression

Hypotheses	Results
Hypothesis 1 (H1): Reliability significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction	Positive
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Responsiveness significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction	Positive
Hypothesis 3 (H3): Tangibility significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction	Positive
Hypothesis 4 (H4): Empathy significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction	Positive
Hypothesis 5 (H5): Knowledge significantly positively impacts on Customer Satisfaction	Positive

4. Conclusion and Implications

While using a proposed research model, the primary goal of the conducted research is to examine how service quality dimensions affected travelers' satisfaction, the study itself is also pertinent to a wide range of service organizations that concentrate their efforts on fostering long-term relationships with clients. The study's findings indicate that four SERVQUAL dimensions—responsibility, empathy, tangibility, and reliability—are significant preconditions for satisfaction. This result is consistent with research findings of Jamal and Anastasiadou (2009). This study demonstrated the considerable

effect of knowledge, responsiveness, empathy, tangibility, and dependability on pleasure. Furthermore, our study's findings concurred with those of a study done in 1999 by Lam and Zhang. Their research demonstrates the substantial impact that each of the five SERVQUAL elements of travel companies has on client satisfaction. Their research indicates that responsiveness, certainty, and dependability are the key factors that lead to satisfaction, and our findings nearly align with their findings. Several additional research emphasize that a key element contributing to customer satisfaction is dependability (Chakraborty et al., 2007). By examining the findings of descriptive statistics, we may conclude that fashion retailers in Vietnam were unable to satisfy their clientele. Given that they are some of the most significant requirements for establishing enduring customer connections, it is obvious that management will need to give these matters special attention going forward. Customer orientation makes the assumption that company operations begin with comprehending and foreseeing the requirements and desires of customers and end with providing the anticipated value and satisfying consumers. Input from client feedback is crucial for developing and constructing effective marketing strategies.

Service firms must guarantee positive customer interactions and high standards of quality when providing services in order to foster strong relationships with their clients (Simon, 2007). Building enduring relationships with clients reshapes the notion of conventional business conduct in an attempt to align with the key tenets of contemporary marketing, which suggest that client loyalty and happiness are the primary drivers of company success. Thus, rather than marking the end of marketing efforts, the sale of goods and services can be seen as the start of establishing and cultivating a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship.

Service firms face difficulties in creating an effective customer satisfaction program when they fail to recognize the importance of client orientation. Achieving this goal requires active participation from top management and inter-functional collaboration of all sectors. In the absence of genuine backing from upper management, marketing officers are incapable of creating or executing a successful program focused on customer pleasure. In order to enhance a company's performance and strengthen its position in the market, management must be attentive to the needs and desires of its customers and participate in the analysis of market research findings. Retailers of clothing must have effective procedures for handling consumer complaints and analyzing them. As we have already mentioned, our research emphasizes how few consumers are genuinely prepared to file a formal complaint. This perspective is consistent with findings from earlier research projects. Some of them claim that in reality, almost 95% of unhappy consumers never file complaints. Rather, they stop purchasing a good or service. Nonetheless, the majority of these disgruntled clients begin disseminating unfavorable word-of-mouth information (Bhote, 1996; Mariçić, 2008). However, a further finding of our research indicates that Vietnamese consumers are not as inclined to spread good word of mouth about the products they used.

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