

Quality assessment of the postal service - the chosen problems

Ocena jakości usługi pocztowej - wybrane problemy

Kamila Kowalik¹

¹ Członek Koła Naukowego „Promotor Jakości”, Wydział Zarządzania, Politechnika Częstochowska, Al. Armii Krajowej 19B, 42-200 Częstochowa, Polska, kamilakowalik93@gmail.com

Abstract: The objective of the paper is to present the practical application of the Servqual method in quality assessment of the postal service. The first part of the article includes the theoretical framework of the indicated research method: assumptions, aims, usefulness of application, way of use and advantages. Afterwards, the Servqual method's practical application in assessment of quality of the postal service has been presented.

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie praktycznego zastosowania metody Servqual w ocenie jakości usługi pocztowej. Pierwsza część opracowania zawiera teoretyczny zarys wybranej metody badawczej: jej założenia, cele, użyteczność, zastosowanie oraz zalety. Następnie przedstawione zostało praktyczne wykorzystanie metody badawczej w zakresie oceny jakości usługi pocztowej.

Key words: service quality, the Servqual method, quality management

Słowa kluczowe: jakość usług, Servqual, zarządzanie jakością

1. Introduction

The contemporary economy is characterized by the development of the service sector, which, contributing to the increase of its attractiveness, also contributes to the increase of competition. Current competition in the service sector means requirement to use new tools of competitive struggle by service enterprises willing to stay on the market.

One of the determinants shaping the attractiveness of a service enterprise for the customer is quality. Until recently, it was referred to as the competitive struggle tool, currently it is the foundation of the stable functioning of the company [1].

In recent years, interest in researching the quality of service has been continuing at a high level due to attempts to adapt traditional methods and tools to new conditions and striving to develop a new, contemporary methodology [2,3].

The quality of postal services is an issue worth of interest. The postal service market has been dynamically changing. National trends coincide with the trends of global postal markets. In recent years, the number of traditional letters has been regularly decreasing with the simultaneous increase in the number of parcels and increase in the popularity of courier parcels [4].

After a period of stagnation, since 2017 an increase in the value of the domestic postal market has been observed. Currently, the national operator and alternative operators function on the postal market. Statistical data indicates 143 active entities including dozen international rapidly developing courier enterprises [5].

2. The Servqual method as a tool of quality management

Service quality has been treated as complex and comprehensive issue. Multidimensionality of service quality has caused the creation of many different definitions based on five main sets.

First of them, product-based perceives service quality as an amount of the attributes possessed by the service. The attributes of service are identified, described and measured individually by each customer. Service quality is the result of this assessment.

Value-based approach refers to the analysis between the benefits and cost of acquiring the service. Service quality, according to this approach, means the comparison of the number of profits to the acceptability of costs connected to the service delivery.

The next is demand-approach. Demand-based definitions are often perceived as the most valuable because of customer orientation. Service quality is treated as customers' need and expectations' fulfillment.

The philosophical definitions characterize service quality as the manifestation of perfection of service delivery.

The last one, process-approach assumes service quality depended on the level of conformance to standard [6].

Methodology of service quality measurement is extensive and includes a multitude of methods and tools. Worthy of special attention is the basis of many other methods- the Servqual, from the 1980s.

The Servqual method, elaborated by A. Parasuraman, V.A. Zeithaml and L.L. Beery, has been perceived as the most universal method of service quality measurement [7].

This method was created based on the quality gaps model which assumes identification of four internal and one external gaps that reduces the perceived service quality (fig. 1).

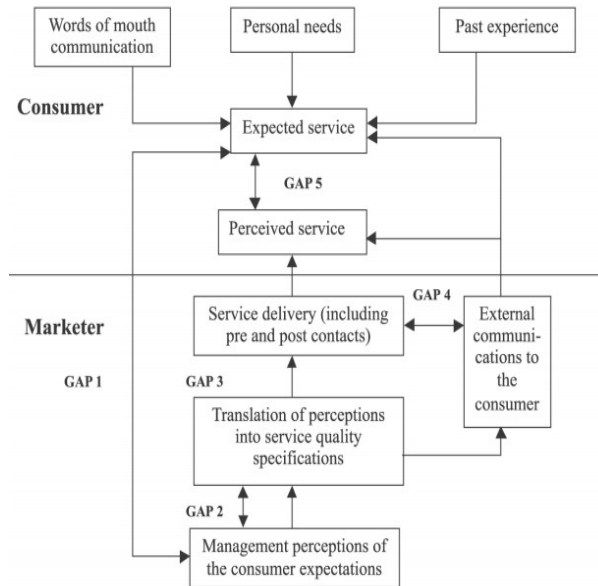


Fig. 1. Gap model [5]

The model distinguishes the following gaps [8]:

- gap 1- the difference between the expectations of customers and their reception by managers,
- gap 2- the difference between the assessment of expectations by the management and the transfer of these expectations to current standards,
- a gap 3- the difference between the standards and the actual level of service quality,
- gap 4- the difference between the level of service quality and contacts with the client,
- gap 5 - the difference between the perceived and expected level of service quality.

The Servqual’s assumptions refers to the fifth gap (fig 2).. This method compares customers’ expectations and their perception of the service quality attributes by expanded diagnosis that includes using specially prepared questionnaire [9].

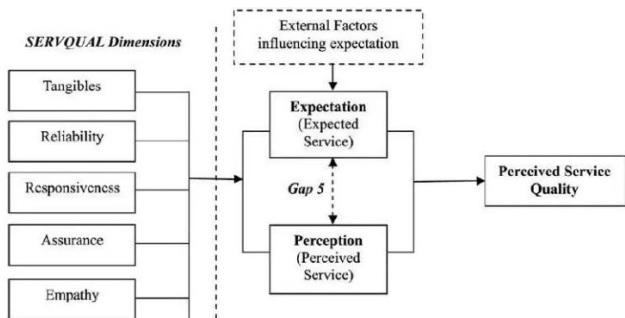


Fig. 2. The Servqual in gap model [10]

The construction of questionnaire is carried out by creating statements regarding each attribute in two aspects: “how is it” (perception) and “how should it be” (expectations). Particular statements should be assigned to one of quality dimensions [11]:

- tangibles (physical facilities),
- reliability (way of service perform: accuracy and sureness),
- responsiveness (willingness to help),
- assurance (staff’s knowledge and courtesy),
- empathy (individualized attention).

The respondents evaluate each statements using Likert scale. Nowadays the most often used is five point scale where 5 means “strongly agree” and 1 means “strongly disagree”. Afterwards, the validity of each dimension is evaluated [12].

The questionnaire analysis includes [13]:

- indication of the differences between the assessments of the actual service quality and expectations for each statement and each respondent separately,
- calculating the average difference of the statements,
- calculating the average difference of the dimensions,
- indication of the average difference for all respondents, which is an unweighed Servqual indicator,
- adjusted differences by weights, which results in a weighed Servqual indicator.

The obtained result belongs to one of three situations [14]:

- perceived performance > the expectations- service quality exceeds expectations,
- perceived performance = the expectations- service quality is satisfied,
- perceived performance < the expectations- service quality does not meet the expectations.

3. The Servqual method- practical application

The subject of the research is an enterprise providing postal services. The study consists in an attempt to assess the quality of the postal service with the Servqual method. The research group includes thirty respondents that electronically completed an anonymous Servqual sheet.

Quality attributes presented in the form of the equivalents of sentences are show in table 1.

Table 1. Quality attributes

Dimension	Symbol	Attribute
Tangibles	T1	attractiveness of institution
	T2	modernity of equipment
	T3	staff’s appearance
	T4	availability of materials
Reliability	R1	punctuality of service delivery
	R2	faultlessness of service delivery
	R3	staff’s help in problem-solving
	R4	compliance with the offer
Assurance	A1	staff’s competence
	A2	staff’s politeness
	A3	staff’s trust inspiration
	A4	ensuring the security
Responsiveness	RP1	efficiency of service delivery
	RP2	transmission of all the information
	RP3	immediate response to requests

Empathy	E1	individualized treatment
	E2	willingness to help
	E3	paying attention to customers
	E4	customers' needs understanding

The respondents assessed the presented attributes in two aspects: perception (how is it?) and expectation (how should it be?) and gave weights to each dimension (the sum of dimensional weights equals 1).

Partial results, showing the average of each quality attribute (gap scores), are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Gap score

Dimension	Attribute	Expectation score	Perception score	Gap score
Tangibles	T1	4,0	2,9	-1,1
	T2	3,6	3,03	-0,57
	T3	4,13	3,83	-0,3
	T4	4,03	4,0	-0,03
Reliability	R1	4,23	2,33	-1,9
	R2	4,57	3,83	-0,74
	R3	4,33	3,97	-0,36
	R4	4,7	3,77	-0,93
Assurance	A1	4,07	4,07	0
	A2	4,37	4,07	-0,3
	A3	3,13	3,33	0,2
	A4	3,06	2,83	-0,23
Responsive-ness	RP1	4,13	2,27	-1,86
	RP2	4,07	3,83	-0,24
	RP3	3,97	2,8	-1,17
Empathy	E1	4,0	4,0	0
	E2	4,2	4,3	0,1
	E3	3,8	2,67	-1,13
	E4	4,0	3,07	-0,93

According to the partial results, initial conclusions point to higher expectations from perception. Most of the average attribute results are negative numbers. Only four of them are non-negative (including two positive ones).

Table 3 presents final results of the Servqual method.

Table 3. Servqual score

Dimension	Average of dimension	Importance weight	Weighed score	Average
tangibles	-0,5	0,14	-0,07	-0,138
reliability	-0,98	0,38	-0,3724	
assurance	-0,08	0,18	-0,0144	
responsiveness	-1,09	0,21	-0,2289	
empathy	-0,49	0,09	-0,0441	

The presented data indicate an insufficient level of quality of the postal service in this study. The averages of each dimension are values below 0. The most important dimension of postal service quality, according to the respondents, is reliability, the least one-empathy. The correction of the indicator by weights contributed to the calculation of the weighed Servqual indicator, which assumed the value -0,138. In accordance with the principles of the Servqual method, negative value means too low quality. However, it should be noticed that relatively low absolute value of the indicator mean small differences between customers' expectation and perception. The introduction of improvement in some areas of quality may increase customers' assessment of perception.

9. Conclusion

Nowadays, the role of quality in the functioning of service enterprises is very important- quality is often treated as a basic tool of competitive struggle. Extensive literature, developed methodology, and ongoing research in this area enable enterprises to take all necessary actions to ensure its provision.

The Servqual method, being the most popular method of assessing the quality of services, is widely used in many industries.

The presented research results indicate an unsatisfactory quality of the postal service. They form the basis for further research that may contribute to the identification of critical quality factors and causes of poor quality and determining the quality attributes that require improvement actions in first place in order to obtain customer satisfaction.

References

- [1] Kowalik K., Klimecka-Tatar D., Model zarządzania jakością usług w kontekście satysfakcji klienta, Quality Production Improvement. Bezpieczeństwo, Jakość, Zarządzanie (red.) Ulewicz R., Ingaldi M., Częstochowa 2018.
- [2] Kowalik K., Klimecka-Tatar D., The process approach to service quality management, Production Engineering Archives, vol. 18, 2018, 31-34.
- [3] Ulewicz R., Effectiveness assessment of functioning of quality assurance system, Production Engineering Archives, vol. 1, 2013, 38-40.
- [4] Raport o stanie rynku pocztowego w 2017 roku, Urząd Komunikacji Elektronicznej, Warszawa 2018, s. 6-12.
- [5] Kawa A., Analiza rynku KEP w Polsce, Poznań 2017.
- [6] Kowalik K., Klimecka-Tatar D., Analysis and evaluation of service quality, quality improvement- case study, Quality Production Improvement. Production Engineering (red.) Ulewicz R., Ingaldi M., Częstochowa 2018.
- [7] Kardas E., The assessment of quality of products using selected quality instruments, Production Engineering Archives, vol. 10, 2016, 31-34.
- [8] Kowalik., Klimecka-Tatar D., Identification of main areas of customer service process improving in the cinema, Archiwum Wiedzy Inżynierskiej, Tom 2, Nr 1, 2017, 42-44.
- [9] Czubała A., Jonas A., Smoleń T., Wiktor J, Marketing usług, Wyd. Wolters Kluwer Polska, Kraków 2006.
- [10] <https://tiny.pl/tc4s2> [26.06.2019]
- [11] Kong S.M., Muthusamy K., Using service gaps to classify quality attributes, The TQM Journal 2011, vol. 23, no. 2, 145-163.
- [12] Antilla J., Jussila K., Organizational learning in developing the integrated quality management, Production Engineering Archives, vol. 18, 2018, 3-13.
- [13] Urbaniak A., Zastosowanie metody servqual do oceny jakości usług rekreacyjnych, Zeszyty Naukowe Uczelni Vistula 2013, nr 32, 29-38.
- [14] Rocha J., Pinto A., Batista M., Simpson J., Ambrosano G., The importance of the evaluation of expectations and perceptions to improve the dental service quality, International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance 2017, vol. 30, no. 6, 567-576.