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## ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN AHVAZ'S INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION BASED ON SERVQUAL MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this research was to investigate and determine the difference between the expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz's international exhibition performance, according to the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model. In this research, the descriptive correlation method was used. This study's statistical population were all the international exhibition customers in Ahwaz city who have come to the exhibition during 2015. In this research, using Cochran formula and simple random sampling method, 384 people were considered as sample size. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and paired t-test. The results of the study showed a significant level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , which according to all dimensions of the SERVQUAL model including: Tangible factors, reliability factors, response factors, trust factors, empathy factors; there is a significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction and all research hypothesis are confirmed.*

**Keywords:** Customer Satisfaction, Customer Expectation, SERVQUAL Model, Performance.

### INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the “customer service revolution” almost 20 years ago, a body of business research has focused on customer satisfaction and customer-focused organizations. (Zemke and Schaaf, 1989, p.31) Business consultants, corporations and others have worked to identify the characteristics of organizations that consistently please their customers, to develop tools for monitoring customer satisfaction, and to build continuous, quality improvement systems that respond to consumer feedback. (Customer Satisfaction: What the Research Tells Us, 2007, p.5) Today, manufacturing organizations or services consider customer satisfaction as an important factor to measure the quality of their work, and this trend is still on the rise. The importance of the customer and his satisfaction is something that goes back to world-class competition. As in the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, about 30% of the total scores is dedicated to customer satisfaction. In addition, comprehensive quality management has not been overlooked in this regard, it has certain concerns regarding meeting its customers' needs and expectations to the fullest extent possible (Jafari and Fahimi, 2000, p.53). In today's competitive world, companies need to pay more attention to customers and meet their needs (better than competitors) for competitive advantages. On the other hand, customers tend to buy products with different tendencies that should be considered in regulating marketing strategies. In a growing competition, companies are seeking to increase customer satisfaction. Blanchard and

Galloway argue that customer satisfaction is the result of a customer's perception of the value received in a transaction or relationship – where value equals perceived service quality relative to price and customer acquisition costs (Hallowell, 1996, p.28). This research intends to analyze the customer satisfaction analysis of Ahvaz's international exhibition performance. In order to achieve this paper first, we need to understand the main concepts.

### ***Customer satisfaction***

The definition of customer satisfaction has been widely debated as organizations increasingly attempt to measure it. Customer satisfaction can be experienced in a variety of situations and connected to both goods and services. It is a highly personal assessment that is greatly affected by customer expectations. Satisfaction also is based on the customer's experience of both contact with the organization (the “moment of truth” as it is called in business literature) and personal outcomes. Some researchers define a satisfied customer within the private sector as “one who receives significant added value” to his/her bottom line—a definition that may apply just as well to public services. (Mack Hanan and Peter Karp, 1988)

Customer satisfaction is a key factor in formation of customer's desires for future purchase (Mittal & Kamakura, 2001, p.31). Customer satisfaction is conceptualized as being transaction-specific meaning it is based on the customer's experience on a particular service encounter, (Cronin & Taylor, 1992, p.55) Satisfaction is a natural form of perception and response of the individual to receive what is anticipated and maybe an acquired state that often occurs in the social interactions of individuals towards each other (Mahdavi, 1996), Customer satisfaction is a popular term in marketing; it shows how successful the products or services the supplier provides meet the customer expectations. Businesses focus on customer satisfaction in order to determine how to improve their customer quantity and profits. Successful businesses focus on the customer's relationship with the organization. They work to make them happy and see them satisfied.

The satisfied customers will probably talk to others about their good experiences. This fact, especially in the Middle Eastern cultures, where the social life has been shaped in a way that social communication with other people enhances the society, is more important (Jamal & Naser, 2002, p.146).

### ***SERVQUAL Model***

One of the models of customer satisfaction is the SERVQUAL model, introduced in the early 80's by A. Parasuraman and colleagues. In this model, customer satisfaction is measured by the quality of services provided. There is a broad tendency among developed and developing countries to define the Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) for the micro (enterprise) level, national and international, and evaluate their industries and enterprises accordingly.

“Parasuraman et al. (1985) identified 97 attributes which were found to have an impact on service quality. These 97 attributes were the criteria that are important in assessing customer's expectations and perceptions on delivered service” (Kumar et al., 2009, p.214).

Customers' perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of their before-service expectations with their actual service experience. The service will be considered excellent, if perceptions exceed expectations; it will be regarded as good or adequate, if it only equals the expectations; the service will be classed as bad, poor or deficient, if it does not meet them (Vázquez et al., 2001, p.132).



Based on this perspective, Parasuraman et al. developed a scale for measuring service quality, which is mostly popular known as SERVQUAL. This scale operationalizes service quality by calculating the difference between expectations and perceptions, evaluating both in relation to the 22 items that represent five service quality dimensions known as ‘tangibles’, ‘reliability’, ‘responsiveness’, ‘assurance’ and ‘empathy’. (C.N. Krishna Naik, 2010, p.232)

Chingang Nde Daniel & Lukong Paul Berinyuy (2010) Defines those five dimensions as follow:

**Tangibility:** physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel

**Reliability:** ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately

**Responsiveness:** willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

**Assurance:** knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence

**Empathy:** caring individualized attention the firm provides to its customers

#### *Review of some accomplished studies*

Considering the importance of customer satisfaction in marketing, there have been many studies conducted relating to this subject. However, there have been few researches done in Iran.

Ziyar et al. (2013) investigated the factors affecting customer satisfaction of Banks in Isfahan using the SERVQUAL model. The method of this research is descriptive and is a cross-sectional survey. The findings of this research indicate that four dimensions of reliability, responsibility, assurance and empathy on customer satisfaction affect the quality of service of the national's banks in Isfahan province, but the physical and physical dimensions of the service have no effect on customer satisfaction on the quality of services.

Ghulavandi et al. (2013) studied the quality of educational services in Urmia University based on the SERVQUAL model. Findings indicate that there is a significant difference between perceived and susceptible factors, reliability, accountability, assurance, and empathy of students perceived and expected. Students' expectations are beyond their understanding of the status quo, and in none of the dimensions of service quality, their expectations have been met. Also, there was no significant difference between demographic variables except for educational levels in the sexes, faculty and colleges of students.

Mohammad Nia et al. (2009) investigated the quality of nursing care services using the SERVQUAL model in Tehran social security hospitals. The results of this study showed that the quality of nursing services in the hospitals was desirable. From the point of view of hospitalized patients, nurses play a major role in improving the quality of care and satisfaction of patients. Since the respondents receive the lowest score, it is suggested that training be provided to enhance organizational culture and responding effectively to patients in order to improve the quality of the activities in Different nursing groups.

G. Chi and Dogan (2009) conducted their research on the relationship between employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance (an empirical study). The purpose of this study is to test the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. Also, the effect of customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction on organizational performance of a hospital was tested. The result of this study was extracted from the collected data from relevant tests. The structural equation was extracted. The results confirmed the positive effect of employee satisfaction through customer satisfaction on organizational performance.

Liu and Jang (2009) investigated the factors affecting customer satisfaction and their behavioral desirability in a research conducted in the Chinese restaurants in the United States. In this study,

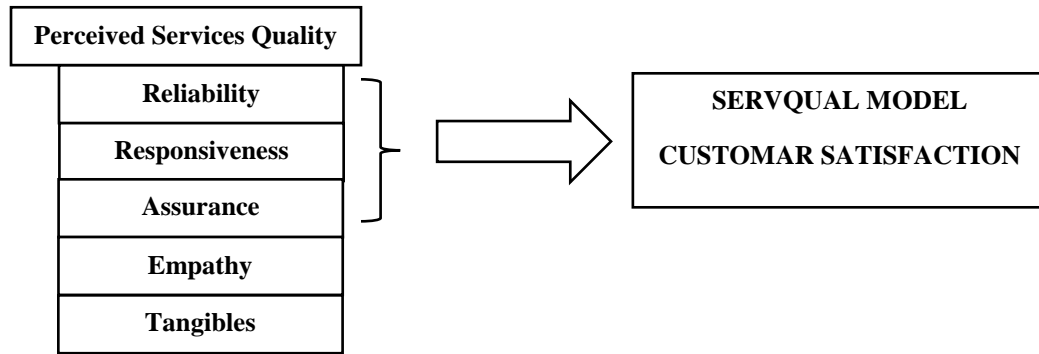


the US-based Chinese restaurants were analyzed using the demand-performance analysis approach, this study has identified which attributes of Chinese restaurants affect customer satisfaction and their behavioral desires (American customers). Performance Demand Analysis (IPA) showed that cleanliness of the environment and the consideration of services or orders are variables that appear to satisfy American customers in Chinese restaurants. As a result, these three factors, including cleanliness of the environment, taste and reliability of orders, have been factors that affect customer satisfaction and customer behavior.

### **Research Model**

The below conceptual model has been used based on Parasorman and et al. (2005) model in this article.

**Table 1: Conceptual Model of SERVQUAL**



According to the above-mentioned model the following main hypothesis are considered:

1. There is a significant difference between customer expectations and customer satisfaction in Ahvaz exhibition performance
2. Considering the reliability dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction.
3. considering the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction.
4. considering the Assurance dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction.
5. Considering the empathy dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between the customer expectations and satisfaction.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this article is to find answers for following questions:

1. Considering the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, Is there any significant difference between customers' expectation and satisfaction in Ahvaz Exhibition Performance?
2. Is there a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction, considering the reliability dimension of the SERVQUAL model?
3. Is there a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction, considering the assurance dimension of the SERVQUAL model?
4. Is there a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction, considering the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model?

5. Is there a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction, considering the empathy dimension of the SERVQUAL model?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research intends to describe and interpret the process and relationship between factors effecting customer satisfaction and expectations. This study is descriptive research based on obtaining data method. It is gathered according to the type of data and the method of implementation of the descriptive-correlative research. Also, in terms of time, cross-sectional work is done and a Likert scale questionnaire is used to measure the correlation between independent and dependent variables.

### *Statistical population and statistical sample*

In each statistical survey, the set of elements is called community. In other words, the community is the set of all possible observations that can be obtained by repeating a test. In general, a community is a set of individuals or units that have at least one common trait and the definition of the statistical society must be comprehensive and complete. The statistical population in this research is all customers of the international exhibition in Ahwaz city who have attended the exhibition during 2015. In this research, using Cochran formula and simple random sampling method, 384 people were considered as sample size.

### *Information gathering method*

A set of objective-oriented questionnaires that measure various respondents' perceptions, attitudes and responses using a variety of scales were used in this research. The SERVQUAL tool and questionnaire which is a multi-level tool used to measure customer perceptions of the service quality of organization or retailer, was used. SERVQUAL scale is one of the most well-known methods for measuring the quality of services provided by Parasuraman, Barry and Zitnell (1985).

### *Data Analysis Method*

In a research, descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution tables, percent frequency, cumulative frequency, and mean are used to survey and describe the public characteristics of respondents. Therefore, the aim of the descriptive statistics is to calculate the parameters of the society using a census of all elements of society. In inferential statistics or researcher, using the sample values of the statistics, then, by means of estimating or testing the statistical hypothesis, the statistics are generalized to the parameters of the society. Inferential statistics are used to analyze the data and test the hypotheses of the research. In this research, descriptive statistics such as tables, charts, mean, variance, and standard deviation are used for analyzing the data. Also, in the inferential statistics section of the research, inferential statistics Parametric test of t-pair samples.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### *Descriptive Statistics*

At first, descriptive statistics was used to examine the characteristics of statistical sample.



**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Results**

Characteristics		Quantity	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Age	Under 30 years	32	8.3	8.3	8.3
	31 to 40 years	129	33.6	33.6	41.9
	41 to 50 years	106	27.6	27.6	69.5
	Up to 50 years	117	30.5	30.5	100
Education	Diploma and below	48	12.5	12.5	12.5
	Associate Degree	27	7	7.5	19.5
	Bachelor Degree	189	49.2	49.2	68.8
	Master and Above	120	31.3	31.3	100
Marital Status	Single	231	60.2	60.2	60.2
	Married	151	39.8	39.8	100

**Inferential Statistics**

The statistical tests used to analyze the information obtained from a small group (sample) and its generalization to the target population are divided into "parametric" and "nonparametric" groups according to the variables' scale of measurements. Parametric tests focus on analyzing information at the distance and relative scale, with a minimum of statistical variables: mean and variance. While nonparametric tests, the analysis of information is carried out at the level of nominal and ranking scales, the statistical index of which is median and factual. In this study, because of the fact that the level of the variables studied has a gap level, the parametric test of t-pair samples has been used.

H1- Considering the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition performance.

H0- Considering the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, there is no significant difference between customer expectations and satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition performance.

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics of paired t-test**

Variable	Descriptive statistics of paired t-test			
	Quantity	Mean	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Satisfaction	384	32.31	2.241	0.1145
Expectation	384	27.971	8.351	0.426

In Table 3, it is noted that the number of respondents (sample size) was 384, and the average of their responses was 32.73 regarding satisfaction of respondents and 27.71 in relation to expectations.

**Table 4. Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples		
	Quantity	Correlation	Significance Level
Satisfaction Expectations	384	0.590	0.001

The table above shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables is equal to 0.590 and the level of significance is equal to 0.001, which indicates the significance of this coefficient.

**Table 5. T-test Value**

Variable	T-test Value
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	T	Freedom Degree	Significance Level	Mean	95% confidence interval for mean difference	
					lowest	Highest
Satisfaction Expectations	-57.948	383	0.001	-21.493	-22.222	-20.764

In Table 5, the significant level of t-test is equal to (0.001), and since it is smaller than the significant level (0.05), then the H<sub>0</sub> assumption can be ruled out and, as a result, the main hypothesis of the research is confirmed. Also, the size of T is 57.8 948.

H<sub>2</sub>- Considering the reliability dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction in the international exhibition performance.

H<sub>0</sub> Considering the reliability dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is no significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction in the international exhibition performance.

**Table 6. Descriptive statistics of paired t-test**

Variable	Descriptive statistics of paired t-test			
	Quantity	Mean	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Satisfaction	384	6.477	2.2441	0.1145
Expectation	384	5.660	2.384	0.121

In Table 6, it is noted that the number of respondents (sample size) was 384, and the average of their responses in response to customers' satisfaction was 6.747 and in relation to expectations equal to 5.660.



**Table 7. Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples		
	Quantity	Correlation	Significance Level
Satisfaction Expectations	384	0.515	0.001

The table above shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables is equal to 0.515 and the level of significance is equal to 0.001, which indicates the significance of this coefficient.

**Table 8. T-test Value**

Variable	T-test Value					
	T	Freedom Degree	Significance Level	Mean	95% confidence interval for mean difference	
					lowest	Highest
Satisfaction Expectations	7.009	383	0.001	0.817	0.587	1.046

In Table 8, the significant level of t-test is equal to (0.001), and since it is smaller than the significant level (0.05), then the H<sub>0</sub> assumption can be ruled out and, as a result, the main hypothesis of the research is confirmed. Also, the size of T is 7.009.

H<sub>3</sub>- According to the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition Performance.

H<sub>0</sub>: According to the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is no significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition Performance.

**Table 9. Descriptive statistics of paired t-test**

Variable	Descriptive statistics of paired t-test			
	Quantity	Mean	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Satisfaction	384	6.466	2.250	0.1148
Expectation	384	9.974	4.074	0.207

In Table 9, it is noted that the number of respondents (sample size) was 384, and the average of their responses regarding customers' satisfaction was 6.466 and in relation to expectations equal to 9.974.

**Table 10. Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples		
	Quantity	Correlation	Significance Level
Satisfaction Expectations	384	0.501	0.001

The table above shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables is equal to 0.501 and the level of significance is equal to 0.001, which indicates the significance of this coefficient.

**Table 11. T-test Value**

Variable	T-test Value					
	T	Freedom Degree	Significance Level	Mean	95% confidence interval for mean difference	
					Lowest	Highest
Satisfaction Expectations	7.009	383	0.001	0.817	0.587	1.046

In Table 11, the significant level of t-test is equal to (0.001), and since it is smaller than the significant level (0.05), then the  $H_0$  assumption can be ruled out and, as a result, the main hypothesis of the research is confirmed. Also, the size of T is 19.453.

H4- According to the assurance dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition Performance.

$H_0$ : According to the assurance dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is no significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition Performance.

**Table 12. Descriptive statistics of paired t-test**

Variable	Descriptive statistics of paired t-test			
	Quantity	Mean	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Satisfaction	384	6.466	2.241	0.1145
Expectation	384	1.471	0.797	0.040

In Table 12, it is noted that the number of respondents (sample size) was 384, and the average of their responses regarding customers' satisfaction was 6.466 and in relation to expectations equal to 1.471.

**Table 13. Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples		
	Quantity	Correlation	Significance Level
Satisfaction Expectations	384	0.394	0.001

The table above shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables is equal to 0.394 and the level of significance is equal to 0.001, which indicates the significance of this coefficient.

**Table 14. T-test Value**

Variable	T-test Value					
	T	Freedom Degree	Significance Level	Mean	95% confidence interval for mean difference	
					Lowest	Highest
Satisfaction Expectations	47.271	383	0.001	4.994	4.787	5.202

In Table 14, the significant level of t-test is equal to (0.001), and since it is smaller than the significant level (0.05), then the H<sub>0</sub> assumption can be ruled out and, as a result, the main hypothesis of the research is confirmed. Also, the size of T is 47.271.

H<sub>5</sub>- According to the empathy dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is a significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition Performance.

H<sub>0</sub>: According to the empathy dimension of the SERVQUAL model, there is no significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of Ahwaz Exhibition Performance.

**Table 15. Descriptive statistics of paired t-test**

Variable	Descriptive statistics of paired t-test			
	Quantity	Mean	Standard deviation	Average standard error
Satisfaction	384	6.466	2.250	0.1145
Expectation	384	1.533	0.826	0.042

In Table 15, it is noted that the number of respondents (sample size) was 384, and the average of their responses regarding customers' satisfaction was 6.466 and in relation to expectations equal to 1.533.

**Table 16. Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples**

Variable	Correlation Coefficient of Paired Samples		
	Quantity	Correlation	Significance Level
Satisfaction Expectations	384	0.298	0.001

The table above shows that the correlation coefficient between two variables is equal to 0.298 and the level of significance is equal to 0.001, which indicates the significance of this coefficient.

**Table 17. T-test Value**

Variable	T-test Value					
	T	Freedom Degree	Significance Level	Mean	95% confidence interval for mean difference	
					Lowest	Highest
Satisfaction Expectations	44.881	383	0.001	4.932	4.716	5.148

In Table 17, the significant level of t-test is equal to (0.001), and since it is smaller than the significant level (0.05), then the H<sub>0</sub> assumption can be ruled out and, as a result, the main hypothesis of the research is confirmed. Also, the size of T is 44.881.




**CONCLUSION**

Expectations are introduced as an effective tool in assessing the quality of services. Expectations are identified as desires of customers. The service is of a quality that meets the needs of customers and meets the expectations of customers, customer expectations are also related to what customers want and what they feel the service provider should provide them with. Therefore, quality is determined by the customer. The quality of service is judged by what the customer expects to receive from his services.

The aim of this research was to investigate and determine the difference between the expectations and satisfaction of customers regarding Ahvaz Exhibition performance in terms of the SERVQUAL model dimensions and the descriptive correlation method was used. Analysis of the data in the previous section showed that with respect to all dimensions of the SERVQUAL model including: tangible factors, reliability factors, response factors, trust factors, empathy; there is a significant difference between expectations and customer satisfaction of the international exhibition performance. Therefore, all the assumptions of the research were confirmed. According to research findings, customers' expectations were not met and they were not satisfied.

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