Two New Gaps for SERVQUAL

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Abstract

This paper proposes an update to enhance SERVQUAL's capabilities. Service logic stipulates that service is not a unilateral process, but co-created between provider and customer. This principle reveals an omission in SERVQUAL. It overlooks a customer-failure gap, *i.e.* a customer's deficient and flawed co-creation. To address this omission, we propose two additional SERVQUAL gaps. The logic is the theoretical and conceptual premise that service-value is the outcome of value co-creation between provider and customer. It is not a unilateral process. By definition, co-creation implies interactions between a provider and a customer; The responsibility, of the customer in the co-creation process, is not fully addressed as gaps. We propose two additional gaps to the SERVQUAL; this is a fresh idea. Our additional gaps close a major theoretical and practical gap in SERVQUAL.

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Introduction

This paper brings symmetry to the SERVQUAL Gap Model, by explicitly addressing an omitted gap*i.e.* customer co-creation failure remains under-detected. SERVQUAL is a widely used instrument to detect service quality-gaps It detects flaws between the customers' expectations and perceptions that correlate with service quality and tasks associated with satisfactory service delivery to consumers (Parasurman *et al.* 1985). The gaps are:

- Gap 1: Consumer expectation – management perception gap
- Gap 2: Management perception – service quality specification gap
- Gap 3: Service quality specifications – service delivery gap
- Gap 4: Service delivery – external communication gap
- Gap 5: Expected service – perceived service gap

Gap 5 is influenced by Gaps 1 through 4, which are within a provider's control. Also identified are 10 dimensions that correlate with consumers' evaluation of service quality. The ten dimensions were subsequently compressed into five: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, assessed by 22 items (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988), and its scale base was further refined by Parasuraman *et al.* (1994a). SERVQUAL is widely adopted in various industries (Ladhari 2009; Seth & Deshmukh 2005) to analyze service strategy, service delivery, and driving customer-driven service innovation (Parsuraman *et al.* 2010). Numbers are convincing, a Google search uncovers 62.8M entries for *SERVQUAL* (SERVQUAL 2021).

Service value co-creation is bidirectional; this is a mutual and reciprocal dependency. A unidirectional and one-sided responsibilities and obligations may not be an acute problem for commodity services; as in a shoe shine or haircut. But professional and B2B services co-creation are impossible without interactions for problem solving, process design, and implementation (*e.g.* Spreng *et al.* 2009; Woo & Ennew 2005; Završnik & Jerman 2006). Consider a bank's service to establish secure ATM transactions. The provider will define required new and novel procedures the bank must implement. If the bank implements them loosely and half-heartedly, the service will not satisfy anyone. The bank is responsible for poor service quality. This scenario is not unique, it exists in health care, business consulting, IT outsourcing, legal services, and so on, where a customer fails to implement its share of co-creation. SERQUAL has no gaps to detect these flaws.

Next section reviews of the literature. Then we discuss our proposal for an updated SERVQUAL. We specify two additional gaps that explicitly reveals customer's failure in value co-creation. We close with a summary and suggestions for follow on work.

Literature review

Conceptualizing service quality begins with Grönroos' (1984) technical and functional quality model. He hypothesized that service quality and satisfaction means that a provider has must match the perceived and the expected service for consumer satisfaction. *Parasuraman et al.* (1985) developed the notion of "gaps" between the consumer's expectations and perceptions as drivers of poor quality. SERVQUAL gap model was created to detect gaps and guide corrective action. The gap model has remained stable

(Parasuraman *et al.* 1991, 1994b; Zeithaml *et al.* 2010, Zeithaml & Bitner 2000). SERVQUAL is widely adopted in many of service industries (e.g. Brown and Swartz 1989; Buttle 1996; Dehghan 2013; Ghotbabadi et al. 2012; Ladhari 2009; Nyeck *et al.*; 2002; Seth & Deshmukh 2005). SERVQUAL has diffused internationally, to the UK, China, Cyprus, Korea, South Africa, Netherlands, and so on.

Notwithstanding SERVQUAL's extensive use and research, it is not without its critics (*e.g.* Ladhari 2009. The criticisms fall into two groups, theoretical and operational (Buttle 1996). Theoretical criticisms include paradigmatic objections, process orientations, and dimensionality issues. Operational criticisms include expectations, item composition, moments of truth, polarity, and scale points. Ladhari (2009) summarizes criticisms in the literature, *e.g.* measurement (scores, scale types), model reliability and validity, emphasis on process (rather than outcomes), hierarchy of service-quality constructs, cultural contexts. SERVQUAL's applicability to B2B service settings is also challenged. Woo & Ennew (2005) point out that service quality research is dominated by consumers services applications. Alternative measures have been proposed for B2B service quality; *e.g.* Gounaris' (2005) five-dimensional INDSERV instrument, Woo's & Ennew's (2005) six-dimensional model for professional services' quality, Janita's & Miranda's (2013) key dimensions in the e-marketplace. Notwithstanding critics, SERVQUAL has served scholars and practitioners very well.

Updated Gap Model

Figure 1 shows SERVQUAL with two additional Gaps, 6 and 7, to detect customers' failure to fulfill their responsibilities. Table 1 is a summary of all seven gaps. We concentrate on Gaps 6 and 7. The other gaps are well known and their discussion is omitted.

The architecture of Figure 1 is nearly identical to SERVQUAL (Parasumaran, 1984). Gaps 1 to 5 are identical to SERVQUAL. As in the original model, customer perceived service quality shortfall is identified as Gap 5. Service logic stipulates that service value is co-created Grönroos 2008, Grönroos & Gummerus 2014), that value co-creation antecedents to Gap 5 are the inputs $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$ and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ as shown in Figure 1. The input $\boldsymbol{\alpha}$ is the client value co-creation and $\boldsymbol{\beta}$ is the provider value co-creation. The non-complementarity of unilateral co-creation is Gap 7, "value co-creation fails" in Table 1.

What are the conceptual factors that contribute to Gap 7? SERVQUAL's original specification identified Gap 4 $\boldsymbol{\delta}$ in Figure 1) and explained it as "provider promises do not match delivery" (Table 1) (Parasumaran *et al.* 1988). However, to remain consistent with the value co-creation premise of service logic, factor $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$ (Figure 1) must be explicitly specified. This is Gap 6, identified as "client promises do not match delivery" in Table 1.

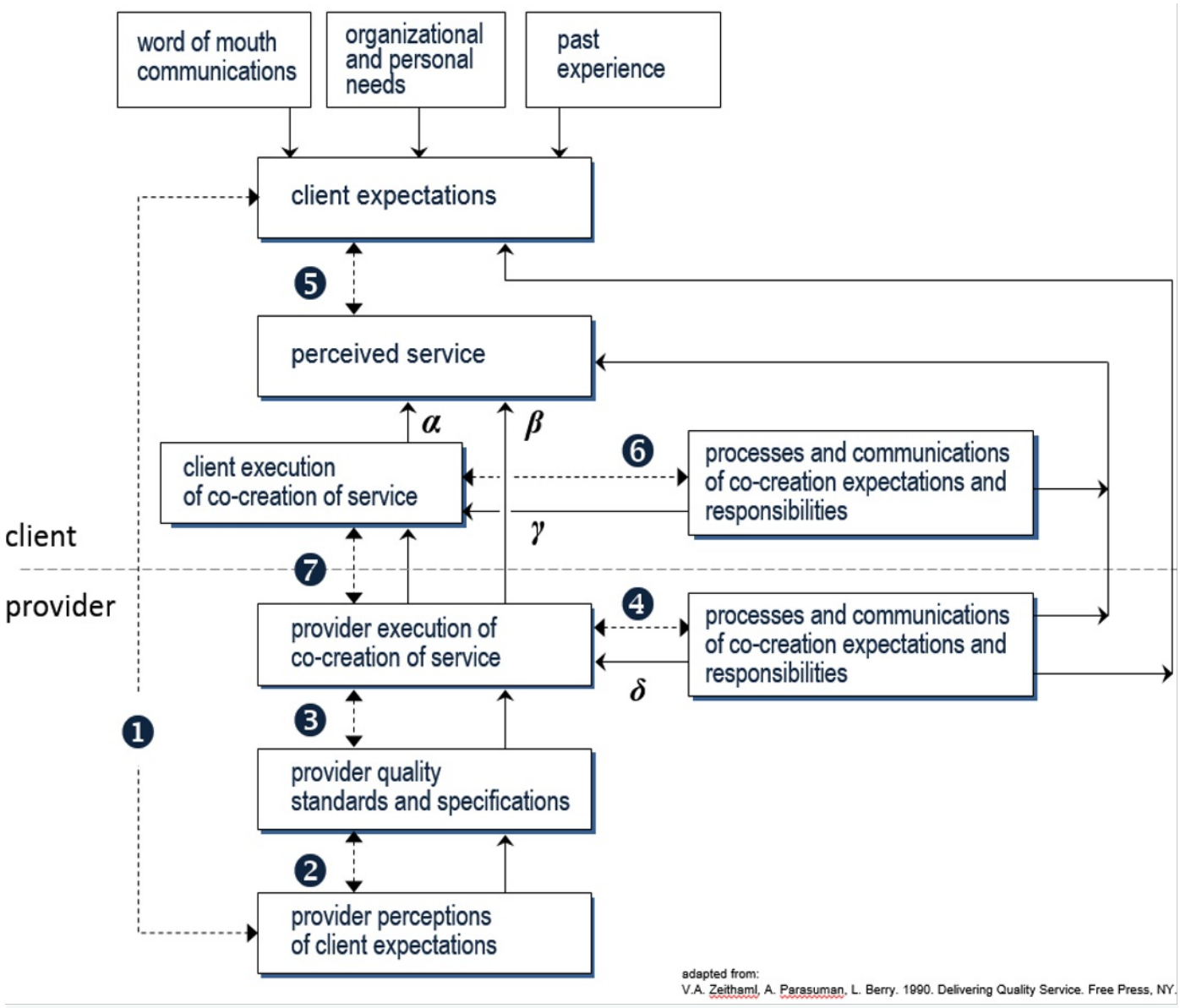

Figure 1. Updated SERQUAL Gap Model.

Gap Number			Explanation
1 not knowing what clients expect			
client expectations from provider	≠	provider perceptions of client expectations	**provider:** lack of understanding of client's needs and wants; unable to translate client's needs into quality service; lack of commitment **customer** inability to communicate needs and wants
2 wrong service-quality standards			
provider perceptions of client expectations	≠	provider standards and specifications	**provider's:** inadequate commitment to service quality; flawed standards on client's needs and wants
3 provider service co-creation performance gap			
provider performance standards	≠	provider actual delivery performance	**provider :** co-**creation** fails its own standards of quality; lack of will, systems, processes, skills, other
4 provider promises do not match delivery			
provider execution of co-**creation**	≠	provider communications of reciprocal expectations and responsibilities	**provider** lack of internal/external communications on: their own responsibilities of service co-production; client's responsibilities of service co-production
5 service quality			
client expectations	≠	client perceived service	**service failure** system effect of the gaps
6 client promises do not match delivery			
client execution of co-**creation**	≠	client communications of reciprocal expectations and responsibilities	**customer lack** of internal/external communications on: their own responsibilities of service co-production; provider's responsibilities of service co-production
7 value co-creation fails			
client execution of co-creation	≠	provider execution of co-creation	**co-creation** fails, **not** reciprocally effective; lack of communications, flawed process design

Table 1. The SERVQUAL gaps explained, including Gaps 6 and 7.

Taktchronicity is a first-principle in services (Tang and Zhou, 2009). The principle states that value co-creation between provider and customer must maintain a rhythm that sustains a mutually synchronism between the needs of the provider and customer.

Closing Remarks

Close examination of the SERVQUAL Gap Model, we uncover an omission in the model, which are deduced from the co-creation premises of service logic. We propose two additional gaps to update and enhance SERVQUAL's gap detection capabilities.

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