A STUDY ON THE ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH SERVQUAL MODEL OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS IN COIMBATORE

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ABSTRACT

The healthcare industry is undergoing a paradigm shift where patient-centric care and service excellence play pivotal roles in achieving competitive advantage. This research delves into the evaluation of customer satisfaction within private hospitals in Coimbatore, India, employing the SERVQUAL model as a framework. The healthcare industry's success is increasingly contingent on meeting and exceeding patient expectations, making the measurement of service quality and customer satisfaction imperative for sustained success. The study utilizes a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to comprehensively assess the perceptions and experiences of patients availing services in private hospitals. The primary objectives of the study involve assessing the dimensions of service quality within private hospitals, identifying factors influencing customer satisfaction, and offering strategic insights for augmenting overall healthcare service delivery. The SERVQUAL models established dimensions, including reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, are employed as the foundation for evaluating service quality. By comprehensively assessing customer satisfaction using the SERVQUAL model, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights that can inform strategic improvements in private healthcare services within the Coimbatore region.

Keywords: *Hospitals, customer satisfaction, service quality, SERVQUALmodel, economic development,*

INTRODUCTION

Hospitals play a pivotal role in fostering economic development. A leading role in guaranteeing sustainable socioeconomic progress in emerging nations is played by the health care sector. It has been abundantly clear in recent decades in India that hospital-based services have grown. An enhancement in medical services has resulted from the development of modern technology, equipment advancement, and subject knowledge of medical professionals and

other paramedical staff. Due to this, patients are increasingly satisfied with the improved level of care they receive in the hospitals. The Indian healthcare industry makes a significant financial and employment contribution to the country's economy. A growing number of hospitals have developed and taken market share in this cutthroat sector. The majority of us receive our medical care in hospitals. To keep patients, every hospital has been offering various treatment modalities, employing doctors with specialized training, and adopting cutting-edge equipment. In actuality, providing patients with high-quality care in a clean, hygienic atmosphere is a difficult undertaking for any hospital. Thus, determining the role of hospitals is highly complex. So in the current competitive environment, providers' attention has been drawn to customer satisfaction as a critical factor in determining their success and long-term survival in the health care sector.

Nowadays, a product's or service's quality must be considered before it is bought or used. Patients are also assessing and contrasting the level of care received at public and private hospitals. Many private companies are able to offer top-notch healthcare services because of technical breakthroughs and ongoing attempts to further research and development in the medical industry. As a result, there is intense rivalry between the private health insurance companies. In the healthcare industry, quality has emerged as the top priority for both patients and researchers. Hospitals work hard to measure and maintain service quality in order to deliver high-quality care, which will please and keep patients. The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in the 1980s, is a widely recognized framework for assessing and measuring service quality. This model aims to understand customer perceptions and expectations regarding service delivery in various industries. SERVQUAL is based on the premise that the quality of services can be evaluated by comparing customer expectations with their actual experiences. The SERVQUAL model consists of five dimensions that collectively shape the customer's perception of service quality they are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy. Tangibles refers to the physical appearance of facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials. Customers often form opinions about service quality based on tangible cues. Reliability focuses on the ability of the service provider to consistently deliver accurate, dependable, and promised services. It involves factors such as service consistency and the provider's ability to keep commitments. Responsiveness captures the willingness and ability of the service provider to help customers and provide prompt service. Responsiveness is crucial in addressing customer needs and concerns in a timely manner. Assurance encompasses the knowledge, courtesy, and ability to inspire trust and confidence in service providers. It involves the competence of personnel and their ability to convey credibility and reliability and Empathy Involves understanding and caring for customers, showing individualized attention, and providing a personalized service experience. Establishing trusting relationships with customers requires empathy. The SERVQUAL model has found widespread application in various industries, including hospitality, healthcare, finance, and retail. Organizations use SERVQUAL to identify areas of improvement, set performance benchmarks, and enhance overall customer satisfaction.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Even though the service industry is one of the fastest expanding in emerging nations and is becoming increasingly important to the economy, services still dominate the industrialized world today. The relevance of service management and service quality is predicted to rise in light of the modern society's amazing growth in the service sector. In today's competitive market, service quality is widely acknowledged as a vital predictor of an organization's survival and success. It would be concerning if there was a drop in consumer satisfaction brought on by subpar service. The study finding out how hospital service quality dimensions affect patients' satisfaction is the study's primary goal.

OBJECTVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the factors influencing the service quality dimensions in hospitals
- To examine the relationship between the service quality dimensions with customer satisfaction
- To suggest ideas for improving the hospital services of Coimbatore District.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic process of planning, executing, and analysing the research study. The choice of research methodology depends on the nature of the research question, objectives, and the type of data required.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

The research design is descriptive cross-sectional study as it is based on a survey conducted among patients in the private hospital.

SAMPLE DESIGN

- Population*:* The population will consist of customers/patients who have recently availed services at private hospitals in Coimbatore.

- Sampling Technique*:* A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure representation from different demographic groups.

- Sample size: The sample size fixed as 500

DATA COLLECTION

- Primary Data: Surveys will be conducted using structured questionnaires based on the SERVQUAL model to collect primary data.
- Secondary data: Secondary data was collected through Books, Journals, Magazines, Publications, Websites, Hospital information records.

- Instrumentation: The questionnaire will include Likert scale questions to measure customer perceptions and expectations regarding service quality.
- Pilot Testing: A pilot study will be conducted to test the questionnaire's reliability and validity before the actual data collection.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Halil Zaim et. al., (2020), they conducted study on "Service Quality and Determinants of Customer Satisfaction In Hospitals: Turkish Experience". Even though the service sector is one of the fastest expanding in new nations and its significance to the economy is only growing, today's industrialized countries are dominated by the service industry. The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the serqual factors, which determine consumers' perceptions of service quality, and to examine the causal relationship between service quality and consumer satisfaction in 12 hospitals in Turkey. The ordinal logistic regression technique was used for testing the framework of the relationship among the variables. The results of our analysis confirm that while tangibility, reliability, courtesy and empathy are significant for customer satisfaction, responsiveness and assurance are not.

Semabehdioglu, EylemAcar et al. (2019),In this study, the quality of services in Yoncalı Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Hospital in Kutahya, Turkey is evaluated.. SERVQUAL questionnaires (which include 22 items within 5 dimensions) were applied to 262 patients so as to get patients' perceptions of provided services.. Results denoted the negative gap for all items, that exhibits a general dissatisfaction from the service provider. Particularly, the very best gap score was in tangibles dimension and this is often followed by responsiveness, reliability, assurance and empathy.

Ramesh R.P. and Gnanasekaran. P (2017) they conducted study on "A Study on Service Quality of Selected Hospitals with reference to in Patient at Trichy". The service sectors play vital role in the society; moreover, the staff in any organization is well educated by the management regarding service. The service sectors are entirely different from manufacturing sectors. One hundred and seventy five patients are selected for this study to measure the service quality of inpatient of hospitals at Trichy. The convenient sampling method is used to collect data from 10 leading hospitals. 200 questionnaires were issued to those 10 leading hospitals, each hospital each by 20. But the questionnaires were collected back by 182. The percentage analysis used to show the socio economic factors of the patients and correlation used to find out the relationship between the socio economic factors and service quality of in patients. All the leading hospitals are about to change to multi specialty hospitals. But the fees charged in hospitals are much annoying from the patient's side. The hospitals should work as service motive and the hospitals fee should be nominal and the service should be good.

Pillai. K. R and Alpika Kumar (2016),conducted study, topic entitled "Patients' Perception on Service Quality of Hospital". Service quality of hospitals warrants paramount importance in ensuring patient care and maintaining brand reputation, they have a mission of fostering and perpetuating community well-being. Hence, the

patient perceived quality dimension in hospital needs a comprehensive and insightful understanding of their demands and expectations, by giving due consideration to the nature and intensity of illness as well as clinical interventions. The current paper examines the perceived service quality of a tertiary hospital using KQCAH scale. The study was conducted in a reputed teaching hospital in South India, which is recognized by central and state governments, defence services and public sector companies. The study was conducted on the patients who were contacted immediately after getting discharged from the hospital for four months period during 2014. Closed-end questionnaires, based on KQCAH scale, were used for data collection. The findings of the present study reveals that the individual preferences of the patients, their personality and their personal experiences during the service delivery have strong bearing on their satisfaction with health services. However, hospital sector is seemed to be incompatible to make a precise measurement of quality as each one has personalized conjectures for service quality that makes it difficult to develop a generalized valid and reliable instrument. Though the instrument has a perceivable level of content validity, It is not adequately congruent to accommodate the spatial diversity.

Dr. Ranajit Chakraborty and Anirban Majumdar (2015), they conducted study on "Measuring consumer's satisfaction in Health Care Sector: The applicability of Servqual". Healthcare is one of India's largest sectors, in terms of revenue and employment, and one can well witness the sector to expand rapidly. With the fast growing purchasing power, Indian patients are willing to pay more to avail health care services of international standard. In the era of globalization and heightened competition, it has been observed that delivery of quality service is imperative for Indian healthcare providers to satisfy their indoor as well as outdoor patients. Hence, it is essential to be aware of how the patients and patient parties evaluate the quality of health care service. Such an understanding facilitates hospital administration to enhance quality of service and satisfy patients to a great extent as well. SERVQUAL instrument among several tools of measuring service quality and patient satisfaction is the most widely used tool. This paper focuses on the measurement of patient satisfaction in the light of service quality provided by hospitals. In this regard, a review of literature on the application of SERVQUAL model has been considered to investigate the relevance of the same in measuring patient satisfaction in health care sector in today's competitive environment. The paper would end with a clear estimation of the modifications as well as the applicability of the SERVQUAL Model. Based on the platform of secondary literature review, the paper would be a move to outline and unveil the justification of measurement of patient satisfaction in the SERVQUAL way.

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND FINDINGS

For this study, the researcher created six dimensions and framed variables to measure each dimension. Likert five-point scales are used to measure each of the six dimensions. For this study, the socioeconomic characteristics of the sample respondents were gathered by the researchers.

SIMPLE PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

TABLE 1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Sl. No.	Variables	Categories	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Gender	Male	283	56.6
		Female	217	43.4
2	Age group	Up to 25 years	114	22.8
		26 years to 35 years	186	37.2
		36 years to 45 years	72	14.4
		Above 45 year	121	24.2
3.	Marital Status	Married	312	62.4
		Single	188	37.6
4.	Educational Qualification	Schooling	127	25.4
		Graduation	152	30.4
		Post-Graduation	89	17.8
		Professional Degree	76	15.2
		Others	56	11.2
5.	Occupation	Government employees	72	14.4
		Private employees	135	27
		Business	147	29.4
		Professional	34	6.8
		Housewife and retired	112	22.4
6.	Monthly family Income	Up to Rs. 30,000	121	24.2
		Rs. 30,001 to Rs. 45,000	264	52.8

		Above Rs. 45,000	115	23
7.	Kinds of Patients	Inpatients	294	58.8
		Outpatients	206	41.2
8.	Travel time to reach hospitals	Less than 20 minutes	108	21.6
		21 minutes to 40 minutes	237	47.4
		41 minutes to 60 minutes	116	23.2
		Above 60 minutes	39	7.8
9.	Recommend the hospital to relatives and friends	Yes	389	77.8
		No	111	22.2
10.	Reasons for recommend the hospitals	Good Treatment	178	45.7
		Consider Human values	46	11.8
		Doctors support	95	24.4
		Latest Equipment	70	17.9
11.	Reasons for not recommend the hospitals	More waiting time to meet Doctor	26	23.4
		Inadequate Facilities	38	34.2
		High Fee	47	42.3

Source: Primary Data

Interpretation about Demographic data

1. The above table indicates that majority of the patients were Male with 56.6% and 43.4% of the patients were Female

2. In this study age of the patients interpreted in that between 26-35 were 37.2% and above 45 years were 24.2% and up to 25 years of respondent were 22.8% and finally the age group between 36-45 were 14.4%

3. The study shows majority of the patients were married with 62.4% and unmarried with 37.6% in the hospital.

4. The Study revealed that graduate patients were 30.4%, Schooling 25.4% and Post-Graduation 17.8% Professional Degree were 15.2% and others were 11.2%.

5. The study shows that Government employees were 14.4% and Private employees were 27 %and Business persons were 29.4%,and Housewife and retired were 22.4% and among these data Professional with 6.8% only .

6. The above table indicates that majority of the respondents monthly family income is between Rs. 30,001 and Rs. 45,000 that is 52.8%, and up to 30000 were 24.2% and above 45000 were 23%.

7. The above tables revealed the kinds of patients of the respondents. The researchers has taken both inpatients and outpatients to measure the service quality of the private hospitals. Inpatients with 58.8% and Outpatients with 41.2%.

8. The study clearly shows that Travel time to reach hospitals the respondent majority were 21 minutes to 40 minutes with 47.4% and Less than 20 minutes with 21.6% and 41 minutes to 60 minutes with 23.2% and least of the respondent were Above 60 minutes travel that is 7.8%.

9. The Study revealed that the respondent's recommends the hospitals to their relatives and friends for treatments. 77.80% of the respondents are willing to recommend the hospitals to their relatives and friends for treatment and the remaining 22.20% respondents are not ready to recommend the hospitals to their relatives and friends for treatment. It shows the lack of service quality of the hospitals which they are coming for treatment, so this study is important to measure the service quality of the hospitals in this study area.

10. The table shows the reasons for recommend the hospitals. Out of five hundred sample respondents only three hundred and eight nine respondents said that they will recommend the hospitals to their relatives and friends, so these sample respondents only taken to ask the reason for recommend the hospitals. 45.7% of respondents said treatment is good and 11.8% of respondents said the hospitals staff and management are consider human values. 24.4% respondents said Doctors support is important while take treatment, these group of peoples are coming to hospitals because of Doctors support and the remaining eight 17.9%respondents said the hospitals having latest equipment for best treatment.

11. The above tables revealed that the reasons for not recommend the hospitals. Out of five hundred sample respondents one hundred and eleven respondents said that they will not recommend the hospitals to their relatives and friends, so these sample respondents only taken to ask the reason for not recommend the hospitals.23.4 % respondents said the reason more waiting time to meet Doctor to not recommend the hospitals to others.34.2 %respondents said the reason as inadequate facilities to not recommend the hospitals to others and the remaining 42.3% of respondents said the reason as high fee for consultation and to take other text in the hospitals.

Mean score – Reason for treatment of the respondents

Sl. No.	Rank the reason	Rank	Mean score
1	Quality of treatment	I	4.127
2	Equipment's availability	111	3.971
3	Experienced Doctors	11	4.032
4	Immediate treatment	1V	3.427
5	Fee payment system	VI	2.815
6	Hospitals staff support	VIII	2.636
7	Staff Nurse support	V	3.006
8	Easy to reach hospital	VII	2.791
9	Other facilities	IX	2.054

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows the mean score for the reason for taking treatment of the respondents. Likert five point scale is used to measure the reason for taking treatment in the hospitals. According to the mean score, the rank has been taken to find out the reason for taking treatment in their hospitals. Quality of treatment (Mean = 4.127) has given first rank by the respondents, followed by experienced doctors (Mean = 4.032) has given second rank by the respondents. Equipment's availability (Mean =3.971) has given third rank by the respondents. Immediate treatment (Mean = 3.427) has given fourth rank by the respondents. Staff Nurse support (3.006) has given fifth rank by the respondents , the polite approach of staff nurse is important in the hospitals and Fee payment system (mean=2.815) has given sixth rank by the respondent ,now a day's majority of the respondents are using debit and credit card for fee payment. All the hospitals have implemented the debit and credit card payment systems, so this may or may not influence much. Easy to reach hospitals (Mean = 2.791) has given seventh rank by the respondents, the easy reach of hospital is important at the time of emergency case only. Hospitals staff support(mean=2.636) has given eight rank by the respondent and finally other facilities (Mean = 2.054) like canteen, parking and food court has given ninety rank by the respondents.

Dimension of Service Quality

The researcher designed six dimensions to measure the service quality of the private hospitals. i.e. i. Assurance, ii. Courtesy, iii. Empathy, iv. Reliability, v Responsiveness and vi. Tangibility.

Level of Assurance

Sl. No.	Level of Assurance	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Low	87	17.4
2.	Medium	279	55.8
3.	High	134	26.8

17.4% of the respondents felt low level of assurance, and 55.8% of respondents felt medium level of assurance and the remaining 26.8% of respondents felt high level of assurance. Majority 55.8% of the respondents are felt medium level of assurance.

Level of courtesy

Sl. No.	Level of courtesy	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Low	120	24
2.	Medium	254	50.8
3.	High	126	25.2

24% of respondents felt low level of courtesy, and 50.8% of respondents felt medium level of courtesy and the remaining 25.20 % of respondents felt high level of courtesy. Majority 50.8% of the respondents are felt medium level of courtesy.

Level of Empathy

Sl. No.	Level of Empathy	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Low	89	17.8
2.	Medium	237	47.4
3.	High	174	34.8

17.80% of respondents felt low level of empathy, and 47.4% respondents felt medium level of empathy and the remaining 34.8% of respondents felt high level of empathy. Majority 47.8% of the respondents are felt medium level of empathy.

Level of Reliability

Sl. No.	Level of Reliability	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Low	84	16.80
2.	Medium	268	53.6
3.	High	148	29.6

16.80% respondents felt low level of 53.60% of reliability respondents felt medium level of reliability and the remaining 29.60% respondents felt high level of reliability. Majority 53.60% of the respondents are felt medium level of reliability.

Level of Responsiveness

Sl. No.	Level of Responsiveness	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Low	78	15.6
2.	Medium	286	57.2
3.	High	136	27.2

15.6% of respondents felt low level of responsiveness, and 57.2% of respondents felt medium level of responsiveness and the remaining 27.2% of respondents felt high level of responsiveness. Majority 57.2% of the respondents are felt medium level of responsiveness.

Level of Tangibility

Sl. No.	Level of Tangibility	Number of respondent	Percentage
1.	Low	36	7.2
2.	Medium	208	41.6
3.	High	256	51.2

7.2% of respondents felt low level of tangibility, and 41.6 % of respondents felt medium level of tangibility and the remaining 51.2% of respondents felt high level of tangibility. Majority of the respondents are felt high level of tangibility.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are the suggestions given by the researcher to improve the service quality of the private hospitals at Coimbatore

1. Patient are the customers for hospitals so that hospitals use to call the patients and ask about the service after discharge. Direct feedback collection is required. Because staff members contact to request feedback, this feedback will be helpful. Patient happiness is a top priority, and management must work to satisfy clients by providing the greatest care possible.

2. To raise the standard of hospital care, the management must solicit patient suggestions. Patients may be asked questions by the management, such as if their needs are being met. They should also make sure that the services they give are meeting the hospital's goals.

3. Modern technology is essential to every industry, including the service sector. The population growth forces the corporation to produce more goods. The people who demand cutting-edge products, such as those in hospitals where doctors require cutting-edge equipment for operations and scanning. Physicians guarantee the accuracy of the results and the treatment's success rate. Because this will show up in the patient's bills, the management must plan to purchase the sophisticated equipment at the same time that the machine cost should be taken into account.

4. The hospital should have a service-oriented philosophy; only after reaching out to patients will they feel prepared to assist other patients. Every patient believes that the cost is excessive. The management is able to see the equipment costs as well as the expenses incurred during test and scan procedures. Their level of pleasure will be reflected in this activity.

5. In hospitals, the office staff and nurses play a crucial role. They are putting sift basic to use. Patients may ask numerous questions while they are in the hospital for up to seven days and twenty-four hours of care. The personnel should provide patients with information about their health and psychological problems. Patients' only source of information is the nurse; they may not always meet the doctors and ask questions. The nurse should put their own troubles aside when providing care because they have familial, health, and financial concerns. The caregiver ought to teach them to handle these kinds of problems and provide the service in an efficient way.

6. Medications are discounted up to 20% at leading corporate stores, with discounts accessible at all retailers. To aid patients, a similar kind of discount ought to be offered at the drugstore. Considering that the majority of patients purchase medications via pharmacies, the pharmacist accepts the medication from the

patient, who then returns the cash. The administration ought to maintain this facility and provide the patient benefits with a discount.

CONCLUSION

The present study conducted on the assessment of customer satisfaction with the SERVQUAL model in private hospitals in Coimbatore has provided valuable insights into the factors influencing patient satisfaction and the quality of healthcare services. The SERVQUAL framework, which evaluates service quality based on tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, has proven to be a relevant tool for understanding customer perceptions in the healthcare sector. The findings of this study highlight both areas of strength and areas that require improvement in private hospitals in Coimbatore. Positive aspects include commendable scores in certain dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, indicating that these hospitals are performing well in specific aspects of service delivery. On the other hand, identified gaps suggest opportunities for enhancement in other dimensions to better meet customer expectations and improve overall satisfaction levels. Customer satisfaction is crucial in the healthcare industry, as it not only reflects the effectiveness of healthcare services but also influences patient loyalty and the reputation of the hospitals. By addressing the identified service gaps, private hospitals in Coimbatore can enhance their overall service quality, build stronger patient-provider relationships, and remain competitive in the dynamic healthcare market. It is important for hospital administrators and management to use the insights gained from this study to formulate targeted strategies for improvement. This may involve investing in staff training programs, upgrading facilities, and implementing systems that ensure consistent and high-quality service delivery across all dimensions of the SERVQUAL model.

Additionally, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of customer satisfaction using tools such as the SERVQUAL model should be integrated into the regular operations of private hospitals. This continuous feedback loop will enable hospitals to adapt to changing patient expectations, maintain high levels of satisfaction, and foster a patient-centric culture. In conclusion, the findings of this study contribute to the existing body of knowledge on customer satisfaction in the healthcare sector and provide actionable recommendations for private hospitals in Coimbatore to enhance their service quality and ultimately improve patient satisfaction.

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