

# GAP ANALYSIS OF SERVICE QUALITY IN PASSPORT OFFICE AFTER PRIVATIZATION: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

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**Abstract** *The concept of service quality has achieved great significance during the last few years and especially with the advent of globalization where customers are been exposed to the world market. The issue of quality has become more important in service industry owing to special characteristics like intangibility, perishability, variability and inseparability. But the delivery of the quality service does not only depend upon the providers, but it also depends upon the perception of the customers. This holds true for all the service areas like tourism, hospitality, banking, technology, education etc. The concept of service quality has its applicability in passport services also which had been privatized in the year 2008 with the idea “to deliver all Passport-related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible, reliable manner & in a comfortable environment through streamlined processes and committed, trained & motivated workforce”. Not much research has been done to investigate the quality of services at passport office after the revamping of the old process except for the pilot project conducted by Tata Consultancy Services (T.C.S) at Bengaluru & Chandigarh, which concluded that there were some service failures in the set up and after making the required improvements, 77 passport seva kendras were established and one of the same kind was established in Jammu also. With this backdrop, the aim of the present study is to find out the improvement in the quality of service after the privatization of the passport issuance process and to analyze the Gap in service expected by the customers viz a viz performance delivered by the passport office. The research methods used in the study are mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage and Importance Performance Analysis.*

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Importance Performance Analysis, Passport Office

## INTRODUCTION

In today's world of increasing competitive market, service quality is very significant in the creation and maintenance of competitive edge in the service industry. There are economic advantages associated with retaining loyal customers as opposed to fetching new ones. This realization has made industry practitioners and academics pay increasing attention to service quality studies. Service quality is one of the global issues that affect all organizations, be it large or small, profit or non-profit, global or local, government or private as customers are much more aware and sensitive towards these issues. Service quality is the consumer's assessment of a service's overall quality. It is the result of the comparison that consumers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the way the service has been

performed (Rust and Oliver, 1994). Differences between expectations and evaluations denote perceived service quality (Zeithaml, 2000). Service quality is sufficient when perceptions are equal or exceed expectations.

The developing Indian economy and boom in the tourism sector has made all tourism and allied sectors very sensitive towards service quality issues. According to statistics by Ministry of Tourism, the outbound travel from India is increasing continuously. And as passport is considered a vital prerequisite for travelling abroad, the quality of service offered by passport offices are very important and thus understanding this, Government of India decided to establish Passport Seva Project - a citizen-centric initiative as part of the National e-Governance Plan. Earlier the whole process of passport issuance use to take more than three to four months and sometimes more due to which people who were willing

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to travel abroad had no other option but to comply with the slow system. Understanding this short coming, the Ministry of Tourism came with an idea of privatizing the document collection process, as this was the stage identified which use to take a lot of time. Though considering the security concerns, the issuance of the passport still lies with the Ministry of external affairs and now only takes 30-45 days for a fresh passport. Besides the initial retaliation by the passport office employees nationwide, the government successfully tested the service in Bangaluru & Chandigarh and decided to establish these passport seva kendras nationwide. The concept of service quality has its applicability in passport services also which had been privatized in the year 2008 with the idea “to deliver all Passport-related services to the citizens in a timely, transparent, more accessible, reliable manner & in a comfortable environment through streamlined processes and committed, trained & motivated workforce”. Not much research has been done to investigate the quality of services at passport office after the revamping of the old process except for the pilot project conducted by Tata Consultancy Services (T.C.S) at Bengaluru & Chandigarh, which concluded that there were some service failures in the set up and thus, after making the required improvements, 77 passport seva kendras were established and one of the same kind was established in Jammu also.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The proposed study, which is empirical in nature, is conducted to examine the improvement in the quality of service after the privatization of the passport issuance process and to analyze the Gap in service expected by the customers viz a viz performance delivered by the passport office. Crosby (1981) defined Quality as consistency with fixed specifications and agrees with Karim’s definition (1996), who defined Quality as anything that accords with the characteristics of the product to meet the external clients’ needs. In addition, the product quality differs from that of a service as the earlier is tangible, whereas the latter is intangible.

Different researchers have described service quality in different ways. For instance, Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994) define service quality as ‘the consumer’s overall impression of the relative inferiority / superiority of the organisation and its services’. While other researchers (e.g. Cronin and Taylor, 1994; Taylor and Cronin, 1994) view service quality as a form of attitude representing a long-run overall evaluation. Parasuraman, Zeithamal and Berry (1985) defined service quality as ‘a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimensions’. This has appeared to be consistent with Roest and Pieters’ (1997) definition that service quality is a relativistic and cognitive discrepancy between experience-based norms and performances concerning service benefits.

From these definitions it is conclude that the service quality is an integrative assessment of the services offered to the external client, for clients are considered to be independent individuals with various requirements on the basis of which services are provided, based on certain specifications.

Parasuraman, Zelthamal & Berry (1988) have identified ten criteria and dimensions through which service quality can be assessed:

*Reliability*: the ability of an organization to accurately achieve its services in the proper time and according to the promises it has made to its clients; *Responsiveness*: the tendency and willingness of service providers to help clients and satisfy their needs, immediately reply to their inquiries, and solve their problems as quickly as possible; *Competence*: having adequate skills and knowledge that enable the employees to perform their jobs properly; *Accessibility*: providing easy access to a service in terms of location and through services provided via the telephone, the internet, or any other means of communication; *Courtesy*: treating clients respectfully in a polite friendly manner, understanding their feelings, and answering their phone calls gently; *Communication*: this occurs through gentlemanly listening to the client conveying information to them clearly and facilitating external communication with workers; *Credibility*: this can be achieved through full trust and confidence in the service provider as well as his honesty and straight forwardness ; *Security*: this depends on whether the service is free from risks and hazards, defects or doubts so that it provides bodily safety, financial security as well as privacy ; *Understanding/ knowing the customer*: this can be made achievable through the ability to pinpoint the customers’ needs as well as understanding their individual problems; *Tangibility*: this includes physical aspects connected with service such as instruments and equipment, persons, physical facilities like buildings and nice decoration and other observable service facilities.

The above-mentioned ten dimensions have been integrated into only five ones. Extensive research has been conducted in the field of service quality. Parasuraman et al. (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithamal, 1991; Parasuraman, Zeithamal, & Berry, 1985, 1988) developed a service quality measure, called SERVQUAL, which states that the customer’s assessment of overall service quality is determined by the degree and direction of the gap between their expectations and perceptions of actual performance levels. Researchers agreed on the fact that these dimensions are appropriate ones which help reveal the customers’ expectations and perceptions. Fick and Ritchie (1991) used the SERVQUAL scale to measure perceived service quality within several service industries. This new model is called ‘Servqual’. This compound word consists of the two words ‘Service’ and ‘Quality’, these five dimensions include:

1. *Tangibility*: this includes physical facilities, equipment, and the physical appearance of on employee.
2. *Reliability*: this refers to the ability to provide the exact required service according to given specifications and conditions.
3. *Responsiveness*: the inclination and willingness of the employees to serve customers quickly and properly.
4. *Assurance*: feelings of trust and confidence in dealing with the organization. This reflects the workers' knowledge and experience and their ability to build self confidence as well as confidence in the customers themselves.
5. *Empathy*: understanding the customers' personal needs, taking care of them individually and showing them all sorts of sympathy and affection, looking at them as close friends and distinguished clients.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the expectations of customers visiting passport office on the basis of the service quality parameters.
2. To study the performance of the quality of services been provided to the customers on service quality performance index.
3. To bridge the gap between the expectations & performance of the services been provided by the executives of the passport office.

## Hypothesis

Ho: There is no gap between the expectations and the performance of the quality of services on the SERVQUAL index in the passport office after privatization.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Instrument

Data was collected using a questionnaire. The survey instrument developed in this study consists of four major sections. The first section contains questions about personal profile of the respondents including gender, educational level, age, and marital status. The second section comprises 22 statements on service quality expectations as proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). The third section comprises 22 statements on service quality performance based on SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1988). While the fourth section is kept open for the respondents to make suggestions. The scale used in the study is a seven-point Likert scale,

representing a range of attitudes from 1 being strongly disagree to 7 being strongly agree to measure service quality expectations and performances respectively.

### Sample Size

Sample unit :	Passport Applicants
Sampling method :	Random sampling
Sample size :	88

The sample size in this research was determined and cross checked by using the Formula (Mendenhall et al., 1993).

$$n = \frac{N(z^2 \alpha/2) p.q}{(N-1)e^2 + Z^2 \alpha/2}$$

Where n = sample size,

N = Population size (4500) per month

$z^2\alpha/2$ =Confidence interval estimate (expressed in standard normal variable set at 95%).

e= the tolerable error level for estimation (5%).

p.q= Component of sample proportion variance estimate Maximum (0.5)

Current research assigned p=0.5 and q = 0.5; p.q = 0.25

About 90 respondents were approached from time to time at passport office, but only 79 usable responses were received thus leading to the response rate of 90%

### Statistical Tools

Statistical tools used were percentage, mean and t-test.

### Analysis & Interpretations:

In table 1, the demographic profile of the respondents is given. It is found that approx. 56% of the respondents are males and the rest 44% are females. Almost 72% of the respondents were from the age group 20 – 40 years while 19 % were between 40 – 60 years & 9% of the respondents were below 20. Almost 58% of the total respondents are graduates and above while 28% were professionals & 14% are below graduation. Most of the respondents (51%) are married and the rest 49% are single.

From Table 2, it can be concluded that almost all the 22 variables are expected to be important when it comes to the expectations of customers in terms of service quality parameters. The highest score has been given to the statement "They should have up to date equipment" (6.2) and rest all the 21 statements have got the equal score of 6.

**Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents**

N= 79

S.No.	Demographic Variable	N	Percentage%
1	Gender		
	Male	44	55.69
	Female	35	44.31
2	Age		
	Below 20	7	8.86
	20-40	57	72.15
	40-60	15	18.99
	Above 60	0	0
3	Educational Status		
	Undergraduate	11	13.92
	Graduate	28	35.44
	Post graduation	16	20.25
	Professional	22	27.84
	Ph.D	2	2.55
	Others	0	0
4	Marital Status		
	Single	39	49.36
	Married	40	50.64
	Seperated	0	0
	Windowed	0	0

**Table 2. Table representing expectations & performance of the customers visiting passport office on Service Quality index**

S.No.	Statements	Expectations X 1	Performance X 2	Gap (X1-X2)
1	They should have up to date equipment	6.2	6	0.2
2	Their physical facilities should be visually appealing	6	6	0
3	Their employees should be well dressed & appear neat.	6	6	0
4	The appearance of the physical facilities of these firms should be in keeping with the type of services provided.	6	6	0
5	When these firms promise to do something by a certain time, they do so	6	6	0
6	When customers have problems, these firms should be sympathetic and reassuring.	6	6	0
7	These firms should be dependable	6	6	0
8	They should provide their services at the time they promise to do so.	6	6	0
9	They should keep their records accurately.	6	5	1
10	They should not be expected to tell customers exactly when services will be performed.	6	5.7	0.3

11	It is not realistic for customers to expect prompt service from employees of the firms.	6	5.9	0.1
12	Their employees don't always have to be willing to help customers.	6	5.8	0.2
13	It is okay if they are too busy to respond to customers requests promptly	6	5.8	0.2
14	Customers should be able to trust employees of these firms.	6	5.7	0.3
15	Customers should be able to feel safe in their transactions with these firm's employees	6	5.9	0.1
16	Their employees should be polite	6	6	0
17	Their employees should get adequate support from these firms to do their jobs well.	6	5.3	0.7
18	These firms should not be expected to give customers individual attention.	6	5.8	0.2
19	Employees of these firms cannot be expected to give customers personal attention.	6	5.8	0.2
20	It is unrealistic to expect employees to know what the needs of their customers are.	6	5.7	0.3
21	It is unrealistic to expect these firms to have their customer's best interest at heart.	6	5.7	0.3
22	They should not be expected to have operating hours convenient to all their customers	6	5.8	0.2

As far performance is concerned, it is found in the study that almost all the statements have high performance rating ranging from 6 to 5. The highest score of 6 is given to the statements "They should have up to date equipment", "Their physical facilities should be visually appealing", "Their employees should be well dressed & appear neat", "The appearance of the physical facilities of these firms should be in keeping with the type of services provided", "When these firms promise to do something by a certain time, they do so", "When customers have problems, these firms should be sympathetic and reassuring", "These firms should be dependable", "They should provide their services at the time they promise to do so" followed by "It is not realistic for customers to expect prompt service from employees of the firms" and "Customers should be able to feel safe in their transactions with these firm's employees, (mean = 6). The Lowest score value is given to the statement "They should keep their records accurately" (mean = 5).

All the statements have got very less gap value between importance and performance ranking, thus leading to the conclusion that privatization of first phase of passport process is much appreciated on the service quality index.

After evaluating the Expectations and performance of each quality dimension, the gap between expectations and performance has been calculated on the basis of

the difference between dimension wise means of the performance and importance. All gap values have been found to be positive which indicates that passport office of Jammu is not performing according to the expectations. Though the gap value is very less, highest gap was found in reliability (0.451) and lowest gap was found in tangibility (0.08).

**Table 3. Assessment of dimension wise Service Quality of Passport Seva Kendra**

Dimensions	Expectations	Performance	Gap
Tangibility	6.19	6.11	0.08
Reliability	6.139	5.688	0.451*
Responsiveness	6.171	5.785	0.386*
Assurance	5.981	5.718	0.263
Empathy	6.051	5.782	0.269

\* Serious gap = above 0.289

Further the researcher has divided the identified gap into two categories, with a range of 0.289 i.e. moderate gap (below 0.289) and serious gap (above 0.289). Based on this only two dimensions i.e. Reliability (gap value of 0.451) and Responsiveness (gap value of 0.386) have serious gap demanding serious focus on part of passport seva Kendra employees.

**Table 4. Table Representing the dimension-wise significant difference in expectations & Performance of the Service Quality dimensions**

Dimensions	Expectations	Performance	T- Test
Tangibility	6.19	6.11	1.065
Reliability	6.139	5.688	5.099*
Responsiveness	6.171	5.785	4.469*
Assurance	5.981	5.718	4.397*
Empathy	6.051	5.782	3.546*

\* At  $t_{0.05} = 1.96$

In order to test the hypothesis, t-test has been applied as a test of significance in Table 4 which points out that out of five service quality dimensions, 4 dimensions i.e. Reliability ( $t = 5.099$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Responsiveness ( $t = 4.469$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Assurance ( $t = 4.397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), Empathy ( $t = 3.546$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) do not have the same level of services as been expected by the respondents. Thus passport seva Kendra at Jammu should work on this and should provide better services to the customers. So from the above discussion, it can be concluded that 4 out of 5 dimensions were found significantly different at 5 % level of significance on service quality index. Therefore the hypothesis that there is no gap between the expectations and the performance of the quality of services on the service quality index in the passport office after privatization is rejected.

## CONCLUSION

Today we are living in a society where organizations are judged on the quality of product/ service they offer as customers have become neo sensitive towards the service quality issues. This global trend guide organizations to work rigorously on the service quality issues. This study is focused on service quality as a means of investigating the difference in expectations and actual performance after the privatization of the passport services. While getting the questionnaire filled from the respondents it has been observed that many applicants still don't know about the change in the process and because of which people feel troubled. It is a duty on part of government agencies to make the general masses aware about the change in the process as it is correctly said that the delivery of the quality service does not only depend upon the providers, but it also depends upon the perception of the customers. After applying the t-test it is observed in the study that there is a significant difference between perception and implications of the customers, in Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. So, this research suggests that organizations like passport seva kendras should make their image as more reliable as, reliability has the highest gap followed by responsiveness among the importance and performance scale. This implies

that when passport seva Kendra promise to do something by a certain time, they should do so; Whenever an applicant has any problem, the employees should be sympathetic and reassuring and they should maintain their records accurately so that the services could be properly delivered to the customers, as these are the few aspects which should be taken care of to improve the reliability among the customers. Similarly, in case of any delay in the service the employees should clearly tell customers when service will be performed; the employees should be willing and motivated to help customers and should try and respond customers promptly as these are the few areas which should be taken care of to improve the responsiveness of employees towards the customers. Beside these the employees should be given an orientation training to improve on these aspects, also they should be given proper equipments and authority by the passport office so to help people in distress. A significant gap has also been found in assurance and empathy i.e. whatever customers had expected from the passport employees did not get in performance terms. Which implies that customers should be able to trust the employees of passport office and feel safe in their in their transactions; the employees should be polite while dealing with customers; while employees should get adequate support from the department so as to reduce the gap in the expectations and performance in Assurance. Likewise in order to overcome the gap in empathy the passport office should pay individual attention to each customer; the passport office should have convenient operating hours while employees should be sensitive towards the general queries of the customers. The results of the study seem encouraging for the employees of the Passport Sewa Kendra. However, it should be kept in mind that consumer perceptions change anytime as market situations change. Thus, continuous research efforts should be made on a routine basis to understand the perceptions of the customers in the area.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the study have contributed to the continuing enhancement of the service quality studies but with special focus on Passport Sewa Kendra in India. The research has attempted to provide useful information, yet there are certain limitations like the study area is limited only to passport applicants at Jammu. Also for better results the opinion of passport office employees could have been taken. Also sample size was small and the data collection method used by the researcher in the present study is very common i.e. questionnaire method for this research study. Other methods could have been used for this research study like group discussions, personal interview of passport applicants and employees etc for better results. A comparative study of passport applicants at other places can also be done.

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