



Differences in Perceived Service Quality of Students of Government and Private Colleges: An Empirical Investigation on Undergraduate Business Management courses in Kolkata

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Abstract

This paper endeavors to investigate the service quality perceptions of students of private run and government run undergraduate business management programs in Kolkata city. Since the scales have been adapted in this research, the factors explaining service quality have been examined through exploratory factor analysis. Internal consistency of the measures has been done with the computation of Crobach's alpha. The study also provides evidences for validity and reliability of the measures deployed. Independent samples t test is carried out across seven constructs explaining service quality of business management programs. The findings reveal perceived differences in service quality of the students from both the studied groups across six dimensions.

Keywords: Service Quality, Management Education, Factor Analysis, Kolkata, Business School

JEL Classification: M31

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Introduction

Management education across the globe has been experiencing vigorous changes due to globalization, technological revolution, demographic shift and deregulation for last two decades. Adoption of strategies in terms of markets, product offerings and alliances by the management schools are need of the hour (Friga et al., 2003). Side by side, management education sector has become competition infested like for-profit industries (Corley & Gioia, 2003). The researchers have reported the efficacy of marketing practices in higher and management educational institutions to counter competition and withstand changes in industry (Moogan et al., 2001; Moogan, 2011; Ivy, 2008). Course structure decisions, media rankings, academic collaborations, reputation of management of business schools have been the major focus areas of administrators and academicians in the said field (Wedlin, 2007;). The issue of management of school service quality has not missed the lens of the researchers in recent times. A good number of research studies have been undertaken to study business school service quality in different geographical settings (Pariseau & McDaniel, 1997; Morales & Calderon, 1999; Oldfield & Baron, 2000; Sohail & Shaikh, 2004).



Management education in India has witnessed unprecedented growth since late 1990's especially due to the emergence of private business schools which aim at catering to the trained manpower needs of Industries in India and overseas (Raju et al., 2015). There has also been huge increase in the number of intake in various management programs across the country (Sanchita & Goel, 2012). In India, management courses both at undergraduate and post graduate level considerably vary in terms of infrastructure, pedagogy, faculty and placement of the students on completion of course (Banerjee & Mondal, 2013).

The initial success of management program at post graduate level in India prompted the introduction of the course of similar kind at undergraduate level in order to meet the demands of management professionals as well as to make the students ready to pursue higher studies in the same field. The undergraduate management program, known as Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), expose students to the areas of organizational studies, finance and accounting, communication skills and marketing etc. Currently more than 90 colleges offer BBA programs which are affiliated to various well known universities in the state. There are around 80 colleges offering BBA courses in Kolkata and these courses are mainly affiliated to University of Calcutta and Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad University of Technology (formerly known as WBUT).

In present work, extant literature has adequately been explored and the insights have been presented in the following sections along with theoretical foundations at the backdrop. Survey of extant literature points to the fact that service quality of management education in India and other countries have been widely researched. However, there is hardly any study to empirically explore service quality of undergraduate business management programmes in the state of West Bengal. The current research attempts to study service quality perceptions of students belonging to the government and private run undergraduate management programs in Kolkata city.

Backdrop of Study

Service Quality Concept

Service quality as perceived by the consumers is the result of a comparative assessment process involving expectation from a service and perception of the rendered service (Gronroos, 1984). According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985), service quality denotes the comparative evaluation of service outcome and service delivery process. The authors have proposed "tangibility", "reliability", "responsiveness", "assurance" and "empathy" as the dimensions of service quality. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) stated, "Perceived service quality is therefore viewed as the degree and direction of discrepancy between consumers' perceptions and expectations."

According to Lewis and Booms (1983), service quality measures the extent of match/mismatch between delivered service level and customer expectations from the service. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) brought in an attitudinal perspective for defining service quality which is to be considered as overall judgment or attitude with respect to supremacy of the service. Athiyaman (1997) defined service quality "as consumers' overall evaluation of the goodness and badness of a product or service".

Service Quality Measurement

Parasuraman et al. (1988) constructed a measuring instrument consisting of 21 items to quantitatively measure service quality construct and this instrument is known as "SERVQUAL"

capturing five dimensions of service quality. This instrument assesses consumers' expectations and perceptions of a service rendered and the level of perceived service quality could be determined through a gap of perception and expectations across five dimensions. Babakus & Boller (1992) pointed to the methodological flaws in SERVQUAL and reported that five dimensions explaining service quality construct did not hold true. Buttle (1994) questioned whether the customers always perceive service quality in terms of perceptions and expectations gaps. Cronin & Taylor (1992) proposed an alternative measuring instrument of service quality (SERVPERF) arguing that service quality is an attitude. SERVPERF directly measured service quality construct on 7 point scales. According to Cronin & Taylor (1994)

"Service quality captured by the SERVPERF scale can provide a longitudinal index of the service quality perceptions of a service firm's constituencies."

Parasuraman et al. (1994) proposed another measurement instrument of service quality. The instrument measured the gap between expected and perceived service – conceptualized as "Measure of Service Superiority" (MSS). The scale gauged the gap between "perceived service" and "adequate service" and this gap is marked as "Measure of Service Adequacy" (MSA). The study of Jain and Gupta (2004) revealed that un-weighted SERVPERF scale is the better measure of service quality as far as convergent validity and discriminant validity are concerned. This scale showed better ability to capture variation of service quality on an overall basis. The measurement of higher educational service quality has been done in line with either SERVQUAL or SERVPERF. There are certain problems in capturing service quality in higher educational context using five dimensional SERVQUAL (Sultan and Wong, 2010).

Marketing of Higher and Management Education

In higher education industry, students are conceived as primary customers consuming educational services (Hill, 1995). Higher educational institutes are developing their strategies in line with the marketing practices of other industries to compete in the era of globalization and internationalization of education industry (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). Building strong global networks, sustaining strong brand identity, strategic collaboration with industry and developing offshore campuses, alliances between smaller, regional and global players are the strategic options to the institutes offering higher education (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). Moogan (2011) urged to have customized communication strategies on the part of the players in higher education to effectively market themselves to the prospective students. It has also been observed that some institutes of higher and management education have adopted marketing practices due to decline in student admissions (Taylor & Darling, 1991). The students' decision making to study in higher educational institutes resemble consumer buying behavior in traditional marketing contexts (Jackson, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Ivy (2008) offered new marketing mix elements consisting of premiums, programs, prospectus, promotion, price, people and prominence for business school. Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka (2010) advocated the need for involvement of all institutional members (including the academicians) in marketing of higher education institutions to attract the prospective students in highly competitive market. Brand is the most important consideration in selection of higher education institutes (especially universities). Brand equity of higher educational institutes arises out of "consumer attributes", institutional attributes, marketing programs, "product attributes" and "symbolic attributes" (Mourad, Ennew & Kortam ; 2011). Market orientation enables the management schools to assess the student perceived needs and wants. It can ensure a balance between "provider specified" and "user- specified" approaches to delivery and curriculum development (Nicholls, Harris, Morgan, Clarke & Sims, 1995). It is

imperative for the educational institutes to be updated to the current needs of the market. Though new product offering the HEIs should cater to the demands of the market by following the new product development process practiced by the business organizations. The study conducted on the select business schools points to the reality how they have adapted to the changing scenario (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2012). Implementation of relationship marketing approaches in higher education can affect the student retention favorably. Reduced retention level can bring in efficiency in the system. This calls for investment in building student-institute bond which would result in alumni loyalty (Ackerman and Schibrowsky, 2007). The brand reputation of universities for research and teaching can positively influence student and faculty member retention (Temple, 2006). The current literature shows how universities are regarded as brands and like strong brands the reputed universities command student engagement. The studies report the adoption of social media by institutes of higher education and conclude that students engage with fan pages of well-known university brands for self-expressions (Brech et. al, 2017). Several business schools across the globe are engaging the various stakeholder groups- current and potential students, faculty members and administrative staff, placement partners and collaborators – through building brand community in social media (Chauhan and Pillai, 2013).

The higher education institutes can be benefited out of quality relationship between student and institutes which is possible if the universities invest resources in building various social media platforms for them coupled with the “engaged” students (Clark et. al, 2017). To be successful in international markets, it is imperative for the institutes to build recognition, reputation and financial resources and variety of programmes along with quality alumni and international affiliations (Mazzarol, 1998). Educational qualifications of the students, motivations to choose an institute, past experience with the educational service resemble “consumer attributes” (e.g. socio economic background, brand experience) in main stream business situation (Mourad, Ennew & Kortam; 2011). In management education industry, prospective students engage themselves in information search before taking final decision to study. They show complex buying behavior by searching information from a variety of offline and online sources (Nicholls et al., 1995; Veloutsou et al., 2004; Yang and Mutum, 2015; Mondal, 2017). Quinn et al. (2009) considered students as one the customers in higher education setting, as they pay fees for service which is rendered in the form of educational instructions and they also avail other administrative services and buy “auxiliary service” (accommodation, food, recreation etc.). In service setting, customers play certain roles in service delivery process by providing inputs prior to service encounter. The quality of service depends on the input provided by them. In higher education, students’ input (e.g. students’ preparation before examination, completion of assignments) or participation greatly affects educational service delivery. From this perspective, the students can be considered as primary customer of higher education (Hill, 1995). Higher educational institutes are implementing quality management practices to ensure improvement in performance and to satisfy the needs of the students more efficiently. The basic premise in development and implementation of total quality management approach is assuming student as customer (Sohail and Shaikh, 2004). In higher education setting, the students develop higher educational brand loyalty which is the outcome of the students’ attitude towards institute/department and “sense of engagement”. This phenomenon bears similarity to consumer behavior in main stream business sector (Erdogmus and Ergun, 2016). Clayson and Haley (2005) criticized the customer paradigm in higher education furnishing a number of shortcomings of this approach. In typical services marketing context, customers’ insights are taken into consideration in services designing; in case of education it does not work that way. The student as customer mindset can be detrimental to student well-being which can be achieved through gaining of knowledge. The customers judge service delivery by

the providers; likewise it would be inaccurate to make an evaluation teacher's (service provider) knowledge by the students. The problem of accountability might arise in case a student fails to do well in academics. Royo (2017) argued that in higher education, student-teacher relationship and interaction pattern differs from the provider-customer relationship in typical service business. Shahaida et al. (2009) pointed that student is to be considered as the "stakeholder" in higher education as the students take part in service delivery process by gaining degree after the course. The authors view the student as the "co creators of the service" rendered by faculty and institute.

Review of Literature

The future of management education has been shaped by these forces - shortfall of Ph.D holder faculties, intensified competition for markets, rapid growth in acceptance of online programs, existing media rankings, increased focus on undergraduate program and pressing expectations of different stakeholders (Acito, McDougall and Smith 2008). The Service quality construct in present economic era has been given utmost importance in business education industry (Stern & Tseng, 1993). Banerjee & Mondal (2013) pointed out the differences in perceptions of industry executives and academia across eleven issues relating to quality of management program. The key issues involved were international exposure of the course, practical focus, area of specialization, case study approach, academic accreditation and industry oriented syllabus etc. Oldfield & Baron (2000) grouped the variables explaining service quality of business education program into three dimensions - "requisite", "acceptable" and "functional". "Requisite" dimension included how the academic staff handled the students with care. "Functional" dimension involved faculty and management decisions related to various rules. "Acceptable dimension meant the service attributes which were of minimum importance to the students, even if these features are to be present to provide acceptable level of service quality. Pariseau and McDaniel (1997) studied quality of services of business schools using SERVQUAL and reported that "assurance", "reliability" and "empathy" are the most critical predictors of student perceived service quality. The study also confirmed that faculty and students had different levels of service quality perceptions. LeBlanc & Nguyen (1997) identified seven factors- "reputation", "administrative personnel", "faculty", "curriculum", "responsiveness," "physical evidence" and "access to facilities"- which affect business school students' overall assessment of service quality. Sohail & Shaikh (2004) found that six factors namely "physical evidence", "contact personnel", "reputation", "curriculum", "responsiveness", "access to facilities" significantly impact service quality of management programme. The authors concluded that "contact personnel" was the most important factor with regard to management students' assessment of service quality. Mondal et al. (2015) uncovered the influence of different educational backgrounds of post graduate management students on their perceptions of business school service quality. Ravindran (2012) investigated the differences in perceived service quality of business school between general course students and management students. Mbise & Tuninga (2012) reported discrepancy between students' perceived service and expected service across the dimensions of business school service quality which was captured by an extended SERVQUAL instrument. Thomas (2007) reported the forces that influence the business school dynamics and inter segment rivalry in management education. These forces include-faculty, substitute programmes, "non- traditional competition", collaborative university programmes, corporate promoted business schools. Umashankar and Dutta (2007) postulated the adoption of balanced score card approach in higher education to develop "a cascade measure" to translate the mission of the institute into a framework to create stakeholder value. The authors argued that institutes should improve service quality through investment in staff and faculty training and increased service quality in turn would generate

student satisfaction which would result in more loyal customers (students). Annamdevula and Bellamokonda (2012) offered a scale for measuring service quality in higher education using 27 variables summarized under five factors- "teaching and course content", "administrative services", "academic facilities", "campus infrastructure" and "support services". Deshields Jr, Kara & Kaynak (2005) studied that business school students' experience with faculty, classes and advising staff forms "college partial experience" leading to student satisfaction, provided there is positive "college partial experience". Tsinidou, Gerogiannis and Fitsilis (2010) examined relative importance of educational variables summarized under the dimensions – "academic staff", "administrative services", "library services", "curriculum structure", "location", "infrastructure", and "career prospects". Abdullah (2006) deployed 41 item instruments for assessing service quality in higher education using SERVPERF (direct measure instead of disconfirmation paradigm). This instrument corresponds to 6 factors- "nonacademic aspects", "academic aspects", "reputation", "access", "programme issues" and "understanding". In the context of management education, B school's service quality dimensions – "instructor", "learning resources", "academic courses" and "student engagement" significantly influence student satisfaction (Seng and Ling, 2013). Kwek, Lau and Tan (2010) investigated service quality in management education using a hybrid approach – both from the students' and the provider's point of view. This work reveals interrelationship between education quality and perceived quality of the students with one being an antecedent to another. Vaniarajan and Vijayadurai (2010) identified placement services, "learning outcomes", "responsiveness", "personality development", "physical facilities" and academics are the key service quality factors impacting the student satisfaction in management schools. The research work points out the differences in service quality on these dimensions across business schools, engineering colleges and science colleges. Cheng and Tam (1997) suggested that institutes should understand the problems in higher education from different perspectives– goal (institutional objectives, standards and plans), resource input (resources generated through operation), process (classroom environment, leadership, involvement, learning process), satisfaction (satisfaction of key internal and external stakeholders), legitimacy (public relations, marketing, reputation of institute), intuitional learning (identification of external needs, monitoring, programme appraisal and staff skill development) - to improve the educational quality. Chawla and Sharma (2014) reported dissatisfaction among students due to negative difference between perceptions and expectations across the "tangible", "reliability", "assurance", "responsiveness" and "empathy" dimensions of service quality in management institutes in India. This work pointed out that the students of management institutes had greater level of service quality than that of non-management degree programs. Service quality has significant impact on students' word of mouth behavior. Functional quality of HEIs has greater impact on word of mouth behavior than technical quality which impacts on word of mouth communication (Smith and Ennew, 2001). Yousapronpaiboon (2014) studied service quality of Private universities in Thailand and found negative gap between perceptions and expectations of the students across five dimensions of service quality- tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Zafiroopoulos and Vrana (2008) reported that staff had greater expectations from the institutes than students in higher education in Greece. The study also pointed out that the staff's perception of service level was higher than that of students. In Italian higher educational industry, student perception of service quality changed over time period. There was considerable difference in service quality of newly enrolled students and that of graduating students (Petruzzellis et al., 2006).

Research Methodology

Research Problem and Hypothesis

This research study aims at exploring the service quality of management programs offered by government and private colleges in Kolkata city. In this work, efforts have been made to investigate whether there is any difference in government and private college students' perceptions of service quality with reference to undergraduate management program.

H_0 : There is no statistically significant difference between government and private management college students' perceptions of service quality across its dimensions with reference to undergraduate management programs.

H_1 : There is statistically significant difference between government and private management college students' perceptions of service quality across its dimensions with reference to undergraduate management programs.

Survey Instrument

For the survey purpose, the adapted version of questionnaire developed by LeBlanc & Nguyen (1997) has been used. This questionnaire consisted of 31 items that capture service quality of a business education program. The responses have been measured on 7 point Likert type scale.

Sample and Procedure

Kolkata city was chosen for conducting this study, as most of the government and Private colleges offering management programs at undergraduate level are situated in Kolkata. An initial list of Government and private colleges was prepared. Following a randomized procedure suggested in Mondal & Banerjee (2012), colleges from both the category were selected for distributing the structured questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed after making personal visits to the college campuses. The students selected at a randomly selected time point were given the questionnaire. A total of 317(146 from Government colleges and 171 from private colleges) completely filled up questionnaire was collected during the period of data collection.

Statistical Tools

Exploratory factor analysis has been carried out to identify the dimensionality of service quality in the context of undergraduate level business management programmes. To study the differences in students' perception across seven service quality dimensions Independent Samples t Test has been done.

Analysis and Findings

To investigate the dimensional structure of service quality in the context of present study exploratory factor analysis has been done. For a satisfactory exploratory factor analysis, KMO measures of sampling adequacy needs to be more than 0.5 (Kaiser, 1974). In this work, KMO statistics is 0.837 and this result implies that factor analysis is appropriate for this study.

Table 1: Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor	Variables	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Faculty Personnel	How good courses are taught to the students	.793	0.757
	Faculty member' research productivity	.778	
	Innovativeness of faculty members	.734	
	Academic profile of faculty	.730	
	Faculty members are friendly and courteous	.712	
	Appearance of faculty members	.683	
Physical Infrastructure	Overall cleanliness	.829	0.802
	Illumination and lighting conditions in classrooms	.779	
	State and look of building and grounds	.731	
	Décor and atmosphere	.790	
	Comforts offered by classrooms	.717	
	Layout of classrooms	.570	
Programme reputation	Community services offered	.874	0.754
	Up datedness of curriculum	.790	
	Institutes' culture, values and beliefs	.716	
	Innovativeness of programme	.656	
	Administration's attitude towards students' interest	.480	
Administrative personnel	Problem solving ability of administrative personnel	.879	.778
	Appearance of administrative personnel	.737	
	Administrative personnel has sound knowledge of rules and procedure	.679	
	Friendliness and courteousness of administrative personnel	.681	
	Availability of administrative personnel	.614	
Responsiveness	Changes are informed to the students on time	.874	0.784
	Registration process is done on time without error	.689	
	Accuracy in record keeping	.676	
Curriculum	Number of course offerings	.803	0.77
	The extent to which programme objectives are explained to the students	.745	
	Standard of orientation programs and course content	.619	
Access to Infrastructural facilities	Ease of access to reading rooms	.860	0.767
	Access to computer facilities	.850	
	Availability of parking	.623	

Bartlett's test of sphericity shows significant result. The result of analysis calls for orthogonal rotation (varimax). Reliability of the scales was measured using Cronbach's alphas. All the factors showed acceptable level of alpha values ≥ 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Seven constructs employed in the measures had alpha values more than 0.70 indicating that scales had good internal consistency. Validity is an important criterion for choosing measurement scales for an empirical research study. Validity of instrument implies its ability to measure what it is required to measure. Validity of an instrument is evaluated through examination of construct validity

which can be examined through convergent and discriminant validity.

Convergent validity is established if Average Variances Extracted (AVE) shared between the constructs and their measures are greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this work, AVE values for seven constructs- faculty personnel (0.547), physical Infrastructure (0.549), programme reputation (0.512), Administrative personnel (0.524), responsiveness (0.565), curriculum (0.528), and access to infrastructural facilities (0.617) – are more than 0.50. Thus convergent validity of the scales is confirmed. If Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) is less than average variances extracted (AVE) shared between the constructs and their measures, discriminant validity is founded (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this work, Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) of all the seven constructs have values more than their AVE values. This provides evidence for discriminant validity of the measures employed in the research study.

Table 2: Results of Independent Samples t Tests

Constructs	Levene's Tests for equality of variances		Results
	F statistic	P value	
Contact Personnel: Faculty	6.971	0.009*	alternative hypothesis is accepted
Physical evidence	18.669	0.000*	alternative hypothesis is accepted
Reputation	62.598	0.000*	alternative hypothesis is accepted
Contact Personnel: Administration	8.186	0.005*	alternative hypothesis is accepted
Responsiveness	1.895	0.170**	null hypothesis is accepted
Curriculum	4.881	0.028*	alternative hypothesis is accepted
Access to facilities	9.783	0.002*	alternative hypothesis is accepted

*Significant ($p < 0.05$) ** Not significant ($p > 0.05$)

In Independent Samples t test, Levene's test for equality of variances finds out whether there is a difference between the groups under study or not. In case of factor (contact personnel: faculty), Levene's Test yields a probability value of 0.009 ($p < 0.05$). The result supports the alternative hypothesis. So, there is difference between government and private management college students' perceived service quality across the factor- faculty personnel. In case of second factor (physical Infrastructure), from Levene's Test it is seen that p value is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). It suggests that difference between two groups is statistically significant. The result of the test rejects the null hypothesis and accepts alternative hypothesis. The implication is that there is a difference in government and private management students' perceived service quality on physical infrastructure dimension. Reputation is one of the most critical factors of service quality of a management program. In the present study, Levene's Test for equal variance shows p value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) and the result leads to acceptance of alternative hypothesis. The practical implication is that there is considerable gap in perceived service quality with regard to reputation dimension. It is found that the students of government and private run management programs have different level of service quality perceptions across reputation. For administrative personnel dimension p value in Levene's Test for equal variances is 0.005 ($P < 0.05$) and as a result null hypothesis with respect to this factor is rejected. Acceptance of alternative hypothesis in this case implies that there is different level of perceived service quality over this factor between the studied groups. Levene's Test for equal variances for Responsiveness dimension reports p value of 0.170 ($p > 0.05$). The test result accepts the null hypothesis. On responsiveness dimension, as the result indicates, Perceived service quality does not differ across the studied groups. The implication

of this result is that on responsiveness dimension students' belonging to both the groups find no difference in service quality. In relation to curriculum dimension, independent sample t test registers p value of 0.028 ($p < 0.05$) which indicates that there exists statistically considerable difference in level of service quality perceptions between the groups under study. The students from government and private programs differ in their perceived service quality on this dimension. Access to infrastructural facilities is the seventh factor of service quality of business education program in this study. In Levene's Test for equality of variances across this dimension, the value of p is 0.002 ($p < 0.05$). The result implies that students from government and private run business education programs have disparities in perceived service quality on access to infrastructural facilities dimensions.

Conclusion and Future Research Direction

The current research work attempts to study differences in service quality between government and private college students of undergraduate business education programs in Kolkata city. Seven constructs that explain service quality of business education have been addressed in this work. Exploratory factor analysis approach has been adopted to investigate the factor structure in this work. Independent Sample t tests have been computed across all the seven dimensions of service quality. The study reveals different levels of perceived service quality across six dimensions out of seven. The undergraduate students belonging to government and private colleges perceive differences in service quality in relation to faculty personnel, physical infrastructure, programme reputation, administrative personnel, curriculum and access to infrastructural facilities. However, across responsiveness there is no difference in perceptions of both the groups. The findings of this research may interest the educational policy makers and administrators. The courses of actions may be adopted to bridge the differences in perceived service quality across the dimensions pointed out in this work.

Further research study of similar kind can be undertaken at national level. The above study does not investigate the differences in satisfaction level among the students belonging to the business schools of different status. Future studies can also investigate the differences in service quality levels over gender and family income and educational background wise adopting larger samples.

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