A Focus Group Study on exploring service quality parameters of University Libraries

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Abstract: **This paper aims to describe the various criteria or parameters in attaining the service quality at university libraries. Service quality act as a strategic tool to university libraries in better ways to support learning and research. The object of this study is to contribute to the literature by identifying the major service quality criteria from the point of view of users of the university libraries in Haryana. Focus group s were used to identify the most momentous criteria of service quality, along with continual effort to provide maximum satisfaction to the library clientele. Information gathered through personal interview which consist of structured questions. The research put focus on the following seven major criteria as most significant for the university library users. Based upon the customers expectation, university libraries to assess their performance construct seven quality parameters namely – Library Building and Infrastructure, Staff Supportiveness, Collection Development, Library Facilities, IT and Web-based services and Service Delivery along with related attributes can be used to predict customers satisfaction.**

Keywords – **University libraries, Service quality, User satisfaction, SERVQUAL, Quality parameters**.

I.   INTRODUCTION

A University is considers as a community where scholars and teachers act the role of head, students are playing the role of body and library is the heart. Library is a service providing sector. Library services play a vital role and occupy an important position in the field of education. Academic community particularly in a university utilizes library services for research and teaching purposes.

The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948-49) expressed that "the library is the heart of all the university's work, directly so, as regards its research work and indirectly as regards its educational work, which derives its life from research. Scientific research needs the library as well as its laboratories while for humanistic research the library is both library and the laboratory in one. Both for humanistic and scientific studies, a first class library is essential in a university." (India, 1949)

Honorable Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the Ex. President of India is a positive thinker and abundant visionary of powerful and economically lending India in 2020." These pictures came into survival because India is a "young country" as majority of population lies between the age group of 25-40 years. The present era of Information and Technology, Knowledge is widely accepted as power. To strengthen the power of knowledge, education plays a very significant role and libraries act as a proper agency for providing essential information by using print and non print resources of information to everyone to accomplish appropriate education all the way through one's life time. The library has a chiefly considerable share in acquisition, processing, organization and dissemination of knowledge.

A good library is directly related with the maximum satisfied users. User's satisfaction completely depends on quality of services provided by libraries. S.R. Ranganathan who is widely well known philosopher in Library and Information Science, always focused at the user satisfaction as a core of all library activities. However, there are number of dimensions that help to excel all-round user satisfaction. The best assessor of quality is the library user whose own experiences, beliefs and motivations all influence the service quality expectation. Since, achieving the best service quality is an ultimate aim of university libraries, the library performance measurement and quality of services that are offered are very important and this aim can be achieve only by means of "listening to our library clientele".

The roles of quality measurement are widely recognized as

❖   To support the managerial activities
❖   To validate organizational effectiveness and creditability.
❖   Trailing quality achievements of an organization.
❖   Assisting in decision making and improving library and information services and

❖ Associating various sources of data and planning strategy.

Libraries need to evaluate their quality of services in a systematic manner in order to assess its internal and external objectives, goals, execution and results of continuing or completed activities, operations, projects, programs or policy with the aim to determining the scope of fulfillment of outlined objectives, importance, competence, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the library's operations.

❖ To exhibit that funding is used appropriately and effectively to maintain their services, justify their role and existence.

❖ To identify their current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and treats for the purposes of planning, monitoring progress and finding the better ways to improve quality of library services.

❖ It can be used to measure the status of the library by monitoring its progress through a comparative analysis of past and current performance correlation with desired level of performance.

❖ It enables the leader to make informed decisions regarding operations management and service delivery.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Abagai (1998) suggested that, the use of library by users and indeed their satisfaction with library services depends on availability of suitable learning materials, accommodation and competent staff in the library. This main objective of any library is to support the community, an objective which is achieved through systematic acquisition and organization of all forms of recorded and undocumented information in all fields pertinent to the goals of the public and making such information available for use. He also stated that, the use of the library include how to locate information including the techniques of using the catalogue, the classification system in use, getting assistance from the library staff and having knowledge of library approach to reference services, borrowing pattern knowledge of opening and closing time in the library and others. In other words, accessibility of library information resources, the knowledge of their existence and procurement of some basic skills on how to locate such materials and information depend on the aims and pursuance of library.

Zacarias et al (2004) state that lifelong learning is dynamic to ensure high levels of performance in a knowledge society, the strategic model of a university library may then be the synergistic entity that will enhance the procurement of new knowledge and skills and should be viewed as an stimulating body in constant interaction with the environment, drawing from it and embossing it with influences, in a continuous dialectical process or inputs and outputs. In this context, as inter-operative and transformative arrangements, information technology have become an instrument of change, bringing many benefits to the strategic library model allowing library to be at the centre of a knowledge network that integrates number of human and artificial actors, preferring communication for the construction of knowledge. Thus, the primary functions of a university library must observe with the university moral belief, the primacy, relevance and quality.

Sahu (2007) concluded that a quality service is means as fully meets the expectations and requirements of the users. **Nejati and Nejati (2008),** in their article on service quality at University of Tehran Central Library explore the significance of service quality aspects from the user's perspective. To measure service quality of University of Tehran Central Library, SERVPERF methodology was used. The reliability aspect of service was measured that refers to the delivery of service as dependability and accuracy. **Popoola and Haliso (2009)** state that Library services are the activities that libraries and their personnel render to meet the information needs of their users. Such services are core and traditional library services.

Kassim (2009) evaluated the quality performance of library by measuring the users' satisfaction with library services, infrastructure, collection/information provided by an academic library. The study was conducted on 650 final year students of three faculties in a public university in Malaysia to determine their opinions on their satisfaction level on the three dimensions. the Statistical Product and Service Solutions were used to analyze descriptive and inferential statistics. To compare the mean satisfaction scores among the users from the three faculties, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used. The results of the study shows that maximum respondents were satisfied with the quality of library services, its infrastructure, collection/information of the library as a whole. Most of the respondents were satisfied with infrastructure (Mean=3.41), followed by collection/information (Mean=3.27), and library services to users (Mean=3.18). The result also revealed that there is significant difference on the satisfaction on services,infrastructure/place/space, and libraries' collection/information among the respondentsof the three faculties.

Adeniran (2011) conducted study at Redeemer's University, Mowe, Nigeria to examine the relationship between service quality and users' satisfaction. The study was done to find out if users of Redeemer's University library were satisfied with the services it provides. Questionnaires were administered to seven (7) academic staff and one hundred and seventy nine (179) students who visited and used the library during the period of research with the assistance of the library

staffs. The result showed that, of the academic staff and students who formed the population for the study, students were found to have used the library most and that users were satisfied with the services of the library.

Shoeb (2011) investigated the overall service quality of the library system of Independent university, Bangladesh. He revealed that perceived services were legging behind the desired service and attributes of service quality fall short of user perception.

Kannappanavar and Swamy (2012) evaluated users' perception and opinion on Users' Education Programmes in Agricultural University Libraries in India with special reference to South India. Out of 1000 respondents comprising of three categories of users, i.e. post-graduate students, research scholars and faculty members (at different levels), 765 (77%) questionnaires were filled and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study showed that the majority of the post-graduate students (284, or 63.96%), research scholars (88, or 54.66%) and faculty members (112, or 70.00%) reported that they are satisfied with the user education programme conducted by the library personnel, eleven percent (11%) of the users are partially satisfied and very few users reported that they are not satisfied with the user education programme. **Hossain & Islam (2012)** attempted to measure perceived service quality associated with user satisfaction of Dhaka University Library with the help of modified SERVQUAL instrument. It was found that the 'library hours' is the only service item, which got the exclusive acceptance and ensured highest/optimum satisfaction of the users, while other items were lower than expectation scores, indicating dissatisfaction to library users.

In accord with this general paradigm shift in librarianship, library users look for certain Parameters/ attributes when accessing to their services that enable them to meet the necessities of the current knowledge society, providing at the same time libraries with the opportunity to offer a quality service.

III. SERVICE QUALITY MODELS FOR EVALUATING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN LIBRARIES

Definitions of quality which stress that the 'goodness' of a product or service can only be measured in terms of the degree to meet users' satisfaction. Library is basically a service oriented organization. It provides services directly to the users or readers. Therefore, users' satisfaction is the primary or basic aim of every library and to provide better services for users' complete satisfaction, the utilization of library sources should be in adequate manner.

A few more models and paradigms have been recommended in the field of customer satisfaction in relation to service quality. SERVQUAL and

SERVPREF are two popular service quality model that are being used worldwide to evaluate service quality. The SERVQUAL model was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) based on the disconfirmation structure. The model is also referred as "Gap Model", underscoring the expectancy disconfirmation theory. Based on five domains, that is, tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) posited that service quality could be measured by obtaining the difference between perceptions of performance and the expectations in those domains. But the SERVQUAL may not be the best model for measuring the user satisfaction and service quality paradigms in the library land information service. SERVQUAL is a universal model common to all kinds of organizations, it needs customization for use within library settings. As a result, SERVPREF and LIBQUAL have occurred to fill the deficiency gaps of the SERVQUAL model.

SERVPREF is merely a subcategory of SERVQUAL. The justification behind the development of this model was that:

- Measuring customers expected service level, preceding to the service delivery, is incredible: and
- Measurement of expected service level after service delivery may be incorrect, as the customers' expectations, by then, have previously been influenced by the service.

Nevertheless, the SERPREF model has not been exclusively researched in the appropriate settings of libraries. On the other hand, Cook, Heath and Thompson (2001) identify LIBQUAL, which is also a modified version of SERVQUAL, was designed by library and information science researchers on the basis of the underlying methodology of SERVQUAL. LIBQUAL is a Web administered library service quality measurement protocol that has been used worldwide in different types of libraries. Based on three core domain namely- effect of service, information control and library as a place reflect the service quality of libraries.

As the conceptual construction of this model is the same as SERVQUAL, the issues relating to the conceptual criticisms are also application to this model. The theoretical and methodological formation of these models have been criticized by a number of researchers and have not been resolved till date. It is apparent that researchers should keep on experimenting until a suitable model is established.

Methodology

Since of the effectiveness of the existing service quality models such as SERVQUAL, SERVPREF and LIBQUAL have been criticized. In that context, this study constructed an analytical model for university libraries in Haryana based on the disconfirmation and

performance only paradigms. Focus group method was used in this study because the intention of this research was to collect data regarding customer attributes about service quality and customer satisfaction of university libraries. The foundation for the collection of data was laid by a literature survey. The literature survey analysed the existing theories, frameworks and research findings to identify the pertinent quality Parameters along with various attributes used in past research studies in the field of service marketing in library and information services. About Seventeen Parameters alone with One hundred and twenty seven quality attributes were identified from the literature. The identified Parameters were then discussed at focus group meetings to select attributes appropriate to the context of the university libraries in Haryana. These Parameters and attributes were merged and grouped in seven major headings.Subsequently, a questionnaire was designed, based on the attributes identified by the focus groups, to gather data for refining the attributes

and to identify pertinent quality Parameters to build up an analytical model for predicting customer satisfaction.

For the study of focus group, four universities were selected. They are Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra (1965), ChoudharyCharan Singh Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar (1970), MaharshiDayanand University, Rohtak (1976), Guru Jambheshwar University, Hisar (1995).

Four focus groups were established from the four selected universities, that is , one focus group per university. The 30 participants were choosen from each university, consisted of twenty students, six faculties, and four research scholars. Approximately three hour discussions were held for each focus group. The main purpose of these discussions was to obtain a clear view of the most relevant quality Parameters that may have an impact on customer satisfaction in the context of university libraries in Haryana.
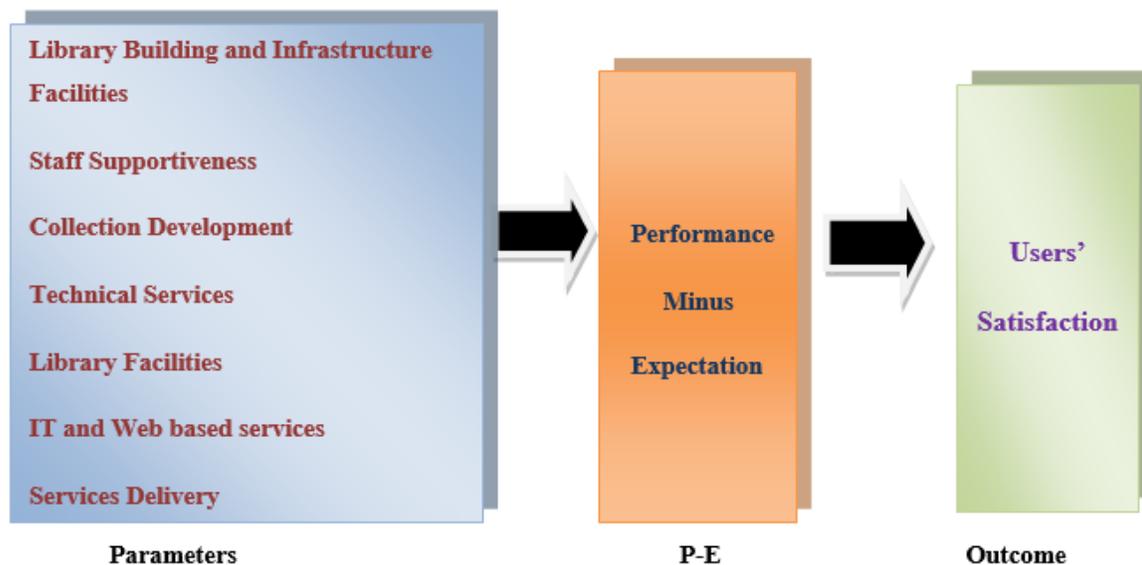

Figure 1 – An Analytical model to predict users' satisfaction of University Libraries

Seven major Parameters were identified. They were

1. Library Building and Infrastructure facilities - This Parameter attracts the customers to visit in the library. Library building should be centrally place and easily accessible. There should be functional and convenient library furniture and multiple facilities that definitely put a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

2. Staff Supportiveness- This Parameters includes attributes that is related to staff approachability, complaint responsiveness, cultural sensitivity, courtesy, personal attention to customers promptness and so on.

3. Collection Development - This Parameter depicts collection completeness and convenient accessibility to collection.

4. Technical services – Technical services consists of proper organization, maintenance and preservation of library documents. It also consists of library guides, orientation programme, classification, and shelving of books, etc.

5. Library Facilities – Library facilities also plays a key role in obtaining maximum user satisfaction. This includes sanitary facilities, drinking water, photocopying, safe property counter etc.

6. IT and web based services - This Parameter consists of access to technological equipments and services like access of computers, ports for laptop connection, audio visual equipments, wifi, e-databases etc

7. Service Delivery – This is the last and most important Parameter because this was the only Parameter that brought all above seven Parameters under one roof. Delivery of service, main objective of libraries to gain maximum satisfaction from customers.

Using these service quality Parameters, the focus groups further documented the connection between customer satisfaction and service quality and suggested that libraries should identify quality attributes to stimulate customer satisfaction. The focus group considerations were followed by and investigative survey to refine seven quality Parameters established by focus groups and to identify their quality attributes to employ in constructing the analytical model for envisaging customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

The analytical model derived by this study provides a guiding framework for an understanding customer satisfaction in relation to service quality in university libraries. This analytical model is grounded in the literature, and the findings from focus group discussions and the investigating survey and it was not empirically tested. The empirical testing may yield interesting results for researchers, academicians, and practitioners.

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