# A Conceptual Framework of Service Quality in Management Education Institution

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## Abstract

*Higher education plays pivotal role in society formation, national growth and overall economic development. India is world's third largest higher education provider. Despite only few Indian institutions have earned global distinction. It is now exposed to serious threat of cut throat competition in terms of quality and fulfilling the demands. Quality itself a slippery concept, and service quality increases the complexities as service itself is abstract. The fate of any institutions depends how customers evaluate service quality. This paper attempts to understand service quality in the context of higher education. A through literature reviews and research papers have been studies to have greater understanding of the service quality. It highlights service quality dimension using the SERVQUAL model and how the institute should address these issues to gain competitive advantage. Moreover, this paper creates the theoretical foundation for the further empirical research in the area of service quality in higher education.*

**Key Words:** *Higher Education, Service, SERVQUAL, Quality, Quality Dimension.*

## INTRODUCTION

In 21$^{st}$ century, the overall quality of the national competition is attributed to the current development of education in particular, the quality of higher education. Higher education is the pivot element of societal formation, national growth and overall economic development. It is the source of dynamism for the economy creating employment and social opportunities for the people.

LPG (Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization) has brought phenomenal transformation in all sectors of the economy. India is the third largest higher education provider in the world in terms of student enrollment while it is first in terms of number of institutions is now exposed to serious threat of cut-throat competition in terms of quality and fulfilling the demands.

Now the young generation will be the main force of socialist construction, and quality of their education is directly related to the country's fate. To make our country stand in the new century powers of the world, our current task is to improve the education systems and fully implementation of quality education.

This paper covers the conceptual aspects of service and service quality, the main focus is to understand the SERVQUAL dimension in the context of management education in order to create concrete understanding for the empirical study of service quality in management education.

## MANGEMENT EDUCATION IN INDIA

Management education courses provide basic knowledge about management concepts and business structure.

In India it began in the 1950s as a part-time education for practicing executives, and full-time management degreed offered by a few universities. Later in 1961, the Government of India established the Indian Institute of Management at Calcutta and Ahmedabad in collaboration with the Sloan School of management (MIT), the Ford Institute, and the Harvard Business School respectively. Soon several commerce departments in universities repacked their curriculum to offer an MBA degree. Subsequently IIM at Bangalore, Lucknow, Kozhikode, Indore and Shillong were established. As in, 2006-07 there were over 1100 business schools in the country. Of these, 5 were private aided institutions, 903 were private unaided and 149 were government aided (NKC Report 2003-09). As of now, the number of business schools has risen to approximately 1817 (www.aicte-india.org). To meet the growing demand of schools in the 11$^{th}$ five year plan of India proposed 7 new IIMs by the end of 2012. The three IIMs are operational

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from session 2010-11 at Ranchi, Raipur and Rohtak and rest will come up in at Tiruchirapalli, Jammu and Kahsmir, Rajasthan and Uttrakhand.

## Classification of Indian Business /Management Schools:

1. Autonomous schools which are affiliated to Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) and All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) (Under Ministry of Human Resource Development) such as, Indian Institute of Management (Presently 10 IIMs), XLRI, etc.
2. Management schools and department in universities come under purview of National University Education system. These departments are regulated and monitored by the University Grant Commission.
3. Private Universities/Institutions which are sponsored by various societies/trusts/corporate bodies.

According to EY-FICCI report 2001, India is registering significant growth in the number of universities in the last decade with the CAGR of around 7 per cent (Table 1 while in terms of college the CAGR reaches upto 9.2 per cent (Table 2). There were 20 Universities and 500 colleges at the time of independence. Annual Report 2009-10, MHRD states that at present, there are 504 universities and university-level institutions (as on 31.12.2009). Table 3 depicts the current status in colleges of higher education. The management institutes are second growing area after engineering in private sector. Despite having one of the largest higher education system in the world few Indian institutions have earned global distinction. The institutes should not only focus on the intake but also take initiative to understand the requirement of client and provide them quality service.

### Table 1 : Growth in the number of Universities

| Year | No. of Universities | CAGR (%) |
|------|---------------------|----------|
| 1947-48 | 20 | *5 %* |
| 1950-51 | 28 | |
| 1960-61 | 45 | |
| 1970-71 | 93 | |
| 1980-81 | 123 | |
| 1990-91 | 194 | |
| 2000-01 | 266 | |
| 2007-08 | 416 | *7 %* |
| 2008-09 | 456 | |

*Source:* EY-FICCI-report09-Making the Indian higher education system future ready

### Table 2 : Growth in the number of Colleges the last decade

| Year | No. of Universities | CAGR (%) |
|------|---------------------|----------|
| 1947-48 | 496 | 5.9 % |
| 1950-51 | 578 | |
| 1960-61 | 1819 | |
| 1970-71 | 3277 | |
| 1980-81 | 4738 | |
| 1990-91 | 5749 | |
| 2000-01 | 11146 | |
| 2007-08 | 20667 | 9.2 % |

*Source:* EY-FICCI-report09-Making the Indian higher education system future ready

### Table 3 : Current Quality Status in Colleges of Higher Education in India (As on March 31, 2005)

| Details | Numbers |
|---------|---------|
| Total Number of Colleges | 17,625 |
| Number of Colleges under UGC purview | 14,000 |
| Number of Colleges recognized under Section 2(f) of UGC Act | 5,589 (40%) |
| Number of Colleges recognized under Section 12(B) of UGC Act | 5,273 (38%) |
| Number of Colleges actually funded by the UGC | 4,870 (35%) |
| Number of Colleges accredited by the NAAC | 2,780 (20%) |
| Number of Colleges accredited by the NAAC and scoring above 60% | 2,506 (17.9) |

*Source*: Draft Report of Working Group on Higher Education for XI-Five-year Plan.

## THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

### Quality: Concepts and Definitions

Quality is much debated term. Quality means different to different people. For 'relativists' it is like 'beauty', that lies in the eye of the beholder. Whereas, 'objectivists' believe quality can be specific attributes that can be identified. The word quality derived from Latin word 'qualitas' (property, quality, value, characteristic, features and ability) which refers to 'qualis' meaning 'what kind of'. Quality with a variety of meaning and connotations, it has been referred to as 'slippery concept' (Pfeffer and Coote, 1991). Many authors (Nigvekar, 1996; Warren et at, 1994; Sallis, 1996) have referred to the highly cited words of Pirsig (1974).

The dictionary meaning of quality is "degree of excellence" and "superiority in Kind". Quality has different meaning to

different people. Some of the definition covering the broader aspects of quality is being discussed below.

The British Standard Institution (BSI) defines quality as "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs" (BSI, 1991).

Many scholars have defined quality considering various aspects associate with the quality from various agents of the goods user and service recipients.

Crosby (1979) defines quality as 'conformance to requirement'.

Juran and Gryna (1980) define quality as "Fitness for use".

Deming (1980) defines quality as "predicable degree of conformance to a standard" later they defined in terms of "customer focus".

Delmore & E Shaker (2002) defined quality "as the degree of excellence of entire educational experience".

These different notions of quality have lead Reeves and Bedner (1994) to conclude "The search for a universal definition of quality and a statement of law like relationship has been unsuccessful". According to Gummesson (1990) it might be useful to create an insight into the many dimensions that from a fuzzy entity referred to as quality through social consensus rather that defining it. Garvin (1988) classified the various definitions of quality into five major groups, viz. Transcendent definition, product-based definition, user-based definition, manufacturing-based, and value-based definitions.

In the words of Mukhopadhyay (2005), "product specification is actually the minimum conditions for quality, but not the sufficient condition". Table 4 illustrates the quality definition with reference to the context.

## Quality in context to Higher Education

The concept of quality is not well defined in higher education (Cheng and Tam, 1997; Pounder, 1999). According to Mukhopadhyay (cited in Sahney, Banwet and Karunes, 2004), the term 'quality in education' has been defined by various scholars, such as "excellence in education" (Peters and Waterman, 1982), "value addition in education" (Feigenbaum, 1951), "fitness of educational outcome and experience for use" (Juran and Gryna, 1988), "specifications and requirements" (Gilmore, 1974; Crosby, 1979), "defect avoidance in education process" (Crosby,

1979) and "meeting or exceeding customer's expectations of education" (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985). Therefore, a single definition of education quality is not possible, rather, it would be more appropriate to define education quality based on the criteria that stakeholders used to judge quality, and also to consider the competing views when assessing the education quality (Green, cited in Sahney et al., 2004).

Barnett (1992) quotes a 'suggestive definition by Barrow (1991) to define 'quality' in higher education:

A high evaluation accorded to an educative process, where it has been demonstrated that, through the process, the students' educational development has been enhanced…. not only have they achieved the particular objectives set for the course but, in doing so, they have also fulfilled the general educational aims of autonomy of the ability to participate in reasoned discourse, of critical self evaluation, and of coming to a proper awareness of the ultimate contingency of all thought and action.

Watty (2003) suggests that the dimension of quality as perfection can be removed, since higher education does not aim to produce defect-free graduates. Lomas (2001) suggests that fitness for purpose and transformation seem to be the two most appropriate definitions of quality, according to small-scale research with a sample of senior.

Cheng (1995) argues, "Education quality is the character of the set of elements in the inputs, process and output of the education system that provides services that completely satisfy both internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations". There is also an increasing expectation by students that they should have choices in terms of subjects, modes of delivery, methods of assessment and time spent on campus.

Harvey and Green (1993) in their seminal work "Defining quality, assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education" have pointed out that quality is a relative concept. They have provided five discrete but interrelated notion of quality. As cited in Watty (2003) key aspects of each of these categories can be summarised as (Figure 1).

## Service Quality Dimensions

Service quality is an abstract and elusive construct because of three features unique to the service: intangible, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption (Parasuramn, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985).

Generally there are eight dimensions or attributes which characterize quality of product or services for the use (Gravin, 1987) namely Performance, Reliability, Durability, Aesthetics, Features, Conformance, Serviceability, Perceive Quality.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985), in their exploratory research reveled service quality dimensions viz. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication and understanding the customer. In year 1988 (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) extended their research and these ten service dimensions were then reduced to five attributes namely reliability, assurance, tangibles, responsiveness and empathy.

## SERVQUAL INSTRUMENT / MODEL-CONCEPTS

Among the various service quality models, the Service Quality Gap Model, also known as SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) is the most commonly quoted service quality models. A conceptual model of service quality through empirical research developed by Parasuramn et. al (1985). The SERVQUAL Gap model (Figure 2) highlights the five service quality gap.

1) Gap 1: Consumer expectations – Management Perception of consumer expectation.

2) Gap 2: Management perception of consumer expectations – service quality specifications actually set.

3) Gap 3: Service quality specification- actual service delivery.

4) Gap 4: Actual service delivery- external communication about service.

5) Gap 5: Expected service – perceived service. This gap is the result of the four other gaps. (Cox & Dale, 2001).

The SERVQUAL (Service Quality) scale conceptualizes and has been developed for the service sector. It has 22 items that has been grouped into five generic dimensions.

1) Tangibles: it contains four items related to physical facilities, equipment, appearance and grooming of personnel and material associated to service.

2) Reliability: The factor consists of five items pertaining to ability to perform the promised service dependably

and accurately, timely service, error free records, etc.

3) Responsiveness: It is comprised of four items which address the issues of willingness to help customer and provide prompt service.

4) Assurance: the four items related to competence, courtesy, credibility and security is covered under the assurance factors.

5) Empathy: it includes five items related to access, communication, understanding the customer, caring and individual attention that the firm provides its customer is assessed.

A 7-point Likert scale was used to rate each items. It measures expectation and perceptions separately. Customer expectations "are beliefs about service delivery that serve as standards or reference points against which performance is judged", whereas customer perceptions are "subjective assessments of actual service experiments" through interaction with the providers (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2006).

The SERVQUAL model is frequently used and adopted in the extant literature to evaluate the students' perceived service quality in the education industry (Russell, 2005).

### Application of SERVQUAL Model

1. Determine the relative importance of the five dimensions in influencing customers' overall quality perception.

2. Use in categorizing a firm's customer into several perceived quality segment (High, medium and low).

3. To assess its service performance relative to its principal competitors. And compare itself to the competitors in terms of strength and weaknesses on these particular dimensions.

4. To identify the most salient service quality dimension for its target market.

5. Can pinpoint area requiring managerial attention and actions to improve service quality.

### Table 5 : Customer Group (Madu and Kuei 1993)

| Customer Group | Explanation |
| --- | --- |
| **Student** (Consumer) | That directly receives services. |
| **Parents** (Customer): | That pays for the education. |

| **Corporation** (Customer) | That hires the students |
| **Faculty** (Customer): | That teaches students the knowledge needed to perform the job |

Before delivering the service quality is it important to know the service receipting. Owlia and Aspinwal (1996) state that the definition of customer is different from that used in service or manufacturing industries because students, staff, government and families are all customers of the educational system and all have diverse needs. It is important to identify the customer and their respective need. Madu and Kuei (1993) in their study define group of customer that are stakeholders in service output (see Table 5).

## SERVQUAL Dimension in Context to Management Education

ServQual Model is widely used in service quality. These dimensions are viewed from the conceptual point of view to have greater understanding and its implication for the management education institution. Once the theoretical framework of these dimensions is understood we are able to develop modified SERVQAUL for the education institutions and measure it to serve the customer well up to their expectation.

The service quality dimension of SERVQUAL model is being discussed as under.

1. **Tangibility:** Service being intangible makes it tough to evaluate service quality. So it is necessary to 'Tangibilizing the Intangible'**.** Customer takes tangible factors like physical facilities, equipments, personnel communication material, etc as a factor easy for evaluation of the service quality.

   In order to impart quality management education management schools should provide modern and up-to-date infrastructure, teaching aids, library with sufficient number of books; research journal; online journals, computers labs with wi-fi and internet facility, auditorium, hostel facility, canteen, play ground and other recreational facility, etc. As a result of mushrooming of management schools a lager number of institutions operating in a small land area. These institute shows major gaps in tangible aspects as they are unable to provide hostel, play ground and other recreational facility.

Faculty facilitates the teaching learning process. So institutes should provide them latest and quality infrastructure in order to enhance the service experience of their client. 'Tangibilizing the Intangible' costs to the service provider so, sufficient funds should be provided with the intention to motivate and support the faculty and students to participate in various development activities and management must be customer-centric and dedicated for continuous quality improvement.

2. **Reliability:** It is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. In services the reliability is very important for measuring service quality. Consumers observe tangibles to judge the reliability of promised services to be delivered. Consumers evaluate various process such as admission process, teaching-learning process, examination and evaluation process, summer in-terns and placement etc to measure service quality. The business school should adopt effective and efficient process, procedures and it should be well documented.

   Reliability ensures quality output which can be trusted by all the stakeholders. The ultimate aim of management education is to prepare and produce an internationally competent person who is capable of handling diverse situation in an efficient manner (Rao and Suganhdi, 2010).

3. **Responsiveness:** It is willingness to help customer and provide prompt service. This quality dimension is very important in services. In the age of ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) time is very important as customer wants prompt service. Whenever consumer approaches to service provider with their queries, request, problems, complaints these should be attended and resolved with desired response within the stipulated time to improve customer satisfaction and quality.

   Internally, Management school should establish redressal cell comprises of student representative, teachers, registrar, etc. for solving the various problem viz. courses, syllabus, examination, result, placement, etc. of all stakeholder (students, parents, industry, and management). These cells should come forward to help faculty and administration staffs too.

   Law commission has suggested three-tier structure for redressal of grievances. The process in the system

should be transparent and prompt. All the information should be made available in the desired format to all the stakeholders.

4. **Assurance:** It is the verification of quality requirements of 'fitness for purpose, and fitness of purpose'. It includes knowledge, competences, courtesy, and credibility. It is related with the declaration and guarantee with which the employees and the organization can use their knowledge and accuracy to convey trust and confidence among the customer. The institutes should make the document for process; take frequent feedback form its stakeholders in the transaction. The tangible aspect, responsiveness and reliability in syllabus modification, examination and evaluation, quality of industry interaction, research and consultancy services gives assurance to the employee, organization, society , students and parents that the management education will help in achieving required economical and societal development to build the nation.

Two external agencies namely National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is responsible for undertaking both institutional and programme accreditation and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) qualifies set of practices. The management schools should get the accreditation (NAAC grades accredited institutes as 'A', 'B', and 'C' while grade 'D' is for non-accredited institutes) and ISO certification that can be put in place by institutions world-wide.

5. **Empathy:** It is the ability of the service provider to provide individual caring attention to its customers, Access to organization's representative communication and understanding the customer. The ultimate aim of the educational institute is to create high-quality human individual with intellect that can develop nation.

It ensure supportive educational environment which help students in inculcating skills especially interpersonal skill. As a manager, they have to ultimately mange most complex and dynamic resource i.e., human being.

Teachers after parents plays very important role in shaping the behaviors of their student through the knowledge. Their support is indispensable. Empathetic approach in delivery of services develops their personality as well as shapes their skills. Teachers,

administrative staff, should be very empathic, polite while providing facilities, training, placement and other services to the students. This will definitely encourage students to come forward with the deficiencies in the service delivery process that will help to improve the services to meet the demands of stakeholders. The empathetic approach reduces the tension and help to assure the quality and increase the satisfaction.

## CRITICISM

Kelso (2008) Measuring service quality in higher education institutions continues to be challenging and incommodious endeavor. A number of scholars have questioned the applicability of the SERVQUAL model. Cronin & Taylor (1992) argued that service quality is derived from perceptions of performance alone and the expectations are irrelevant and even provide misleading information for a model intended to evaluate perceive service quality. Still SERVQUAL is a good model to measure the gap using inferred model. Perceptions greater than expectations signal satisfactory service quality and perception less that expectation indicate unsatisfactory service quality (Parasuraman, Berry & Zeithaml, 1985; Zeithaml et. al., 1993). Direct disconfirmation models such as SERVPERF, IPA and HEdPERF (especially developed model for higher education by Firdaus Abdullah (2006), attempt to evaluate students perceptions only, thereby providing an absolute measure of performance which is a measure of how the service performed on the basis of the student's absolute level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service received.

The SERVQUAL instrument, "despite criticisms by a variety of authors, still seems to be the most practical model for the measurement of service quality available in the literature" (Brochado, Marques, 2007). Many scholars have used the dimension of SERVQUAL instrument with the additional dimensions related to the respective field of study and named as adapted SERVQUAL. Soutar and McNeil (1996) showed that the SERVQUAL dimensions together with the additional dimensions were helpful in accounting for difference s in student satisfaction. Ruby (1998) used an adapted SERVQUAL to demonstrate how a market-driven assessment model could be used to measure student satisfaction. Slade, Harker and Harker (2000) used an adapted SERVQUAL instrument to measure difference in perception of student who does complete their university course and those who do not. Thus it can be concluded that it SERVQUAL is the foundation instrument for the measurement of the service quality and can be used successful with some adaptation.

## CONCLUSION

Service Quality is a 'Slippery Concept' that can only be experience by the customer but describing it is altogether a difficult task. Different people look service quality from its own lenses. Service quality is very critical aspect that decides the fate of any organization. India is the third largest Education provider in the world and it is unfortunate that we are not able to address the service quality in education the way we should. In the cut-throat competition it is out top most priorities to take a serious call on management education.

Tangibilizing the tangible is important as customer is influenced by modern and up-to-date infrastructure. The size of campus is limiting factor in providing the sufficient facilities with modern infrastructure. Management should try to provide adequate infrastructure to both students and faculty and should invest for continuous quality improvement.

It is the need of hours that effective and efficient process, procedures related to admission, examination, evaluation and feedback should be documented to create a reliable image of the service provider.

Institution's service quality should be supported by the third party certification that is essential in competitive environment. ISO certification and NAAC accreditation promises that services would be delivered by the certain standard which is above average.

Tandon, Angrish (2006), in their study remarked that though we have a well-established educational system but given the number of higher education institutes in India, only a few of them IIMs have credible standing among the best in the world. Proliferation of management institutes has resulted into decline in quality of management education.

A continuous and rigorous research should be promoted to identify the new and newer dimension of service quality in education per se in such and dynamic globalized world. A customer centric approach should be adopted. We (owner and the management) should keep this in their mind that 'we are in education business not businessmen in education'. Government, service provider (educational institutes), faculty, parents, students, corporate should demand, support and suggest in evolving improved and competent process, procedures to improve service quality in education.

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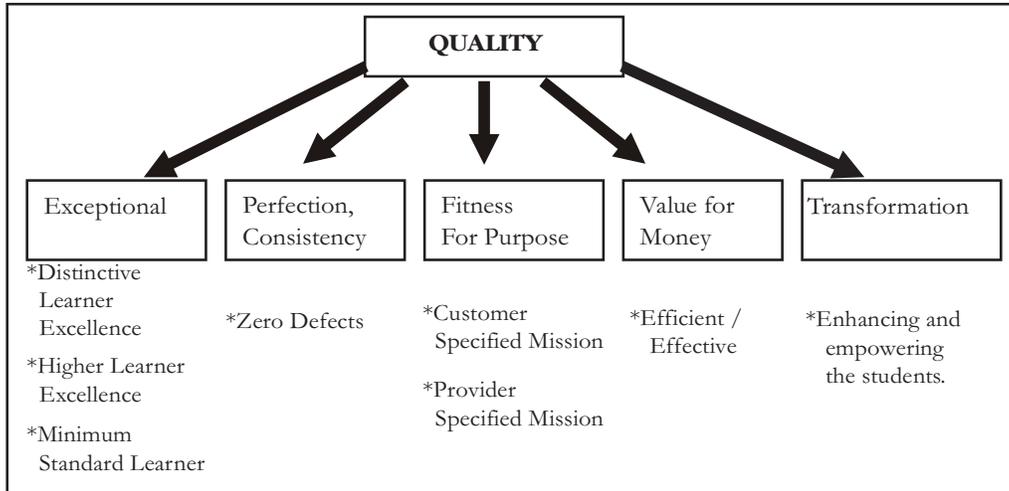31. Watty, K. (2003), "When will Academics Learn about Quality?", Quality in Higher Education, Vol. 9, No. 3.

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**Table 4 : Definition of Quality with Reference to Context**

| Quality of Product | Quality of Services | Quality in Education |
|---|---|---|
| It is evaluation based on measurable attributes or ingredients | It is evaluation based on his or her perceptions on intangible dimensions (out come, interaction and physical environment.)*Michael Brandy and Joseph Cronin* | Quality refers to the excellent process of physical and intellectual development of the learner, inculcation of values, self and social knowledge and professional or vocational training. |

**Figure 1 : Meaning of Quality**

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                          ┌──────────────┐
                          │   QUALITY    │
                          └──────────────┘
        ┌──────────┬──────────┬──────────┬──────────┐
        ▼          ▼          ▼          ▼          ▼
┌────────────┐┌────────────┐┌────────────┐┌────────────┐┌──────────────┐
│ Exceptional││ Perfection,││  Fitness   ││ Value for  ││Transformation│
│            ││ Consistency││ For Purpose││  Money     ││              │
└────────────┘└────────────┘└────────────┘└────────────┘└──────────────┘
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*Distinctive
 Learner
 Excellence                                                  *Efficient /      *Enhancing and
                          *Zero Defects    *Customer          Effective         empowering
*Higher Learner                             Specified Mission                    the students.
 Excellence
                                           *Provider
*Minimum                                    Specified Mission
 Standard Learner

*Source: Watty, 2003*

**Figure 2 : A Conceptual Model of Service Quality**
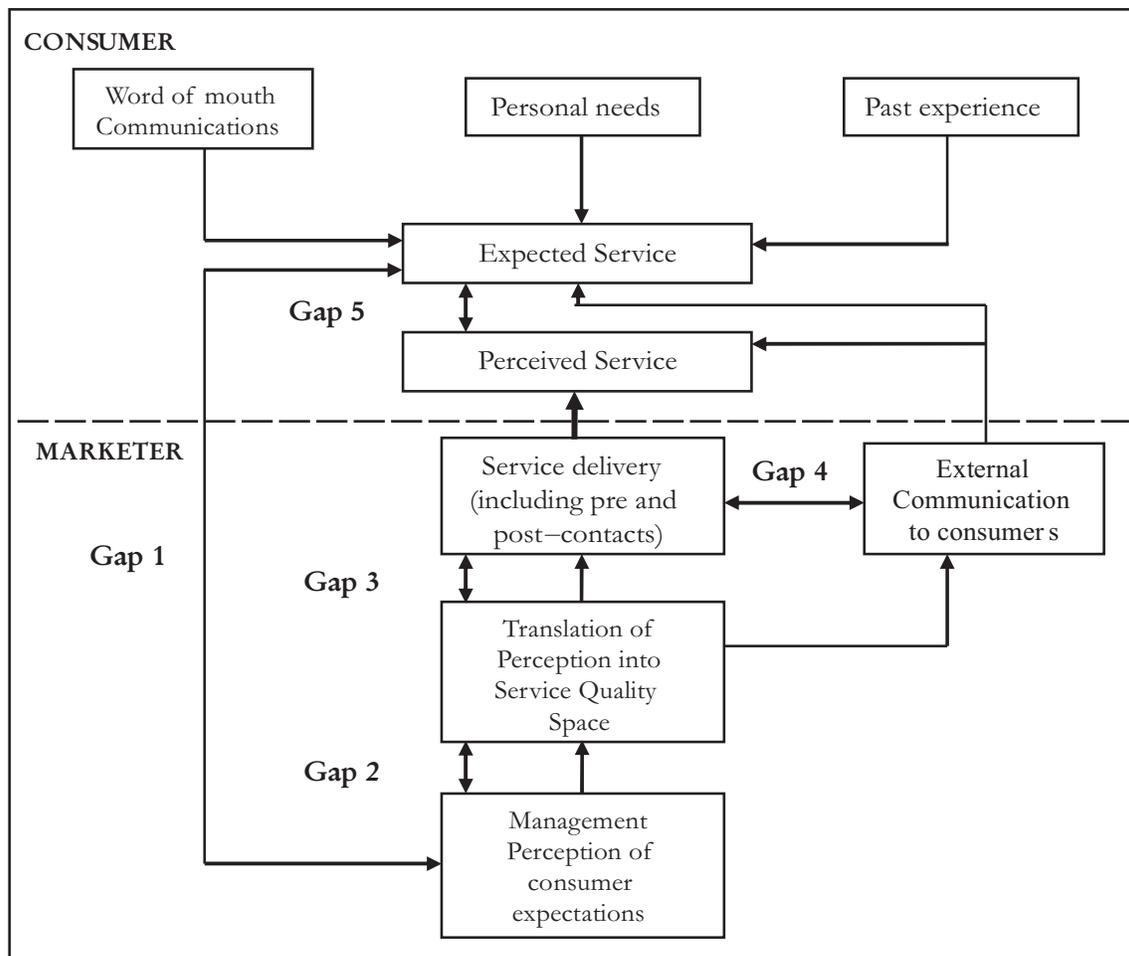


*Source: Parasuraman et.al. 1985*