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Determinants of Expected Service Quality in Conventional and Islamic Banking in Pakistan

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore the determinants of expected service quality in both conventional and Islamic banking within Pakistan. A convenient sample of 800 customers was drawn from 80 branches of five conventional and five Islamic banks in Pakistan. Data collection was conducted using a self-designed questionnaire. Out of the total distributed questionnaires, 513 were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 64%. Of these, 38% were filled out by female customers and 62% by male customers. This data provides a foundation for analyzing customer expectations regarding service quality in both banking systems, offering insights into gender-based perceptions and overall service satisfaction. The results of the study indicate a significant relationship between expected service quality and three key determinants in conventional banks: tangibles, responsiveness, and assurance. However, a weaker relationship was observed between service quality and the determinants of reliability and empathy in commercial banks. In contrast, for Islamic banks, all five determinants—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—showed a significant relationship with expected service quality. These findings are valuable for both academics and policymakers, as they provide insights into the differing customer expectations and perceptions of service quality in conventional versus Islamic banking. The results can guide improvements in service delivery and help shape policies that address specific determinants of service quality, enhancing customer satisfaction in both banking systems.

Keywords: Service Quality, Conventional Banking, Islamic Banking, Pakistan

JEL Codes: G21, M31, Z12

1. INTRODUCTION

The banking sector plays a vital role as the lifeblood of modern trade and commerce, with its role becoming increasingly integrated in recent years due to advancements in technology and improvements in communication systems. These developments have facilitated greater integration within the banking industry, enabling faster and more efficient services. As highlighted by Parasuraman et al. (1985), the success and survival of any business institution hinge on its ability to deliver high-quality services to customers. Over the past two decades, expected service quality has been a subject of considerable debate, particularly regarding how it influences customer satisfaction and loyalty. For management, it is crucial to understand the key pillars of expected service quality, how to effectively measure it, and what actions should be taken to enhance customer value. Extensive research has been conducted on the dimensions of expected service quality and their impact on customer satisfaction across various business sectors. In the context of banking, this is particularly significant, as banks are required to perform multiple functions, offering a diverse range of products and services while keeping up with the latest technological advancements. In today's highly competitive global business environment, providing top-notch service and meeting customer expectations is essential for banks to remain competitive and relevant. Understanding the drivers of service quality can help banks tailor their offerings to meet the evolving demands of their customers, thereby strengthening customer loyalty and ensuring long-term success.

In Pakistan, the banking sector consists of two main types: Islamic banks and conventional banks, both offering a range of facilities to their customers. However, due to changing policies and uncertain economic conditions, the banking sector in Pakistan has faced considerable instability since 1950. A significant turning point came in 1974 when the sector was nationalized, leading to poor performance due to inferior products and services. To address these issues, the banking sector was privatized in 1992, allowing for greater flexibility and improved service delivery. The introduction of Islamic banking further diversified the sector, with Meezan Islamic Bank becoming the first fully registered and operational Islamic bank in Pakistan in 2002. Since then, the Pakistani banking sector has seen steady improvements, driven by a mix of local and foreign stakeholders, contributing to a more diverse pattern of ownership. This diversity has intensified competition among banks, with both Islamic and conventional institutions vying to attract a larger customer base by delivering high-quality services.

Today, Pakistan is home to six Islamic banks and thirteen conventional banks, all offering various products and services across different regions. As competition intensifies, these banks operate in a highly competitive environment, striving to meet customer expectations by enhancing service quality. Providing exceptional services has become a critical factor in gaining long-term benefits, ensuring customer loyalty, and maintaining a competitive edge in the evolving financial landscape of Pakistan. According to Ahmad et al. (2010), Pakistani customers of Islamic banks tend to have higher expectations regarding service quality compared to those of conventional banks. In today's banking landscape, customers

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are increasingly informed and highly concerned about the quality of services they receive. Customer satisfaction plays a crucial role in maintaining loyalty; if their expectations are not met, customers have no hesitation in switching to other banks. Islamic banks, operating under Sharia'h principles, focus on fostering business and trade activities while ensuring compliance with Islamic law.

Islamic banking in Pakistan is experiencing significant growth, expanding its network, size, and structure. This expansion is due in part to the successful integration of commercial banking, microfinancing, and Islamic banking across the country. The entrance of Islamic banks has had a notable impact on Pakistan's monetary system, influencing the balance of supply and demand for money. Moreover, as highlighted by Khan et al. (2008), Islamic banks contribute to a more stable financial sector in comparison to conventional banks, reinforcing their role in promoting sustainable growth and stability within the broader financial landscape. This stability, coupled with the unique principles of Islamic banking, positions these institutions as strong competitors in Pakistan's banking industry, attracting a growing number of customers. According to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP, 2010), the share of Islamic banking increased to 6.4 percent during the quarter, with a 3.2 percent growth in assets, contrasting with a decline in the asset base of conventional banks. Additionally, Islamic banking expanded its branch network by 5.4 percent, reflecting the sector's steady growth. In today's competitive banking environment, banks are increasingly focused on customer satisfaction, recognizing that customers value not only the service itself but also the support provided after the service has been delivered (Agnihothri et al., 2002).

Building long-term, sustainable customer relationships is crucial for businesses, and offering high-quality services plays a key role in achieving this. Customer perception of a firm's expected service quality is a critical concept that can create a competitive advantage. Therefore, bankers must prioritize improving expected service quality to ensure customer satisfaction. This is particularly important in the case of Islamic banks, where expected service quality has a stronger and more positive impact on customer satisfaction compared to conventional banks in Pakistan. Despite existing research, the Pakistani banking industry continues to pay increasing attention to the study of expected service quality, particularly within Islamic banking. There is a need for further research to bridge the existing gaps in understanding service quality in this sector. The purpose of this study is to identify the key dimensions of expected service quality in both Islamic and conventional banking systems, offering insights into how banks can enhance customer satisfaction and competitiveness.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 provides an introduction to the study. Section 2 presents a review of the relevant literature. Section 3 outlines the data collection process and explains the methodological framework used in the analysis. Section 4 presents the results of the study, while the final section concludes the research, summarizing key findings and offering suggestions for future research directions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the early 1970s, both theory and research on consumer satisfaction have been extensively explored by various researchers, including Olshavsky and Miller (1972) and Anderson (1973). Theoretical and empirical studies from the 1970s generally supported the notion that customer satisfaction is linked to the size and direction of "disconfirmation experiences," which result from an individual's initial expectations. Disconfirmation occurs when a product or service fails to meet, meets, or exceeds those expectations. In the 1980s, a new dimension was added to the concept of customer satisfaction, focusing on the emotional response of customers to their experiences with a particular product or service (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). In the 1990s and 2000s, further research expanded the "confirmation/disconfirmation" framework as a central concept for understanding customer satisfaction (Davis and Heineke, 1998; Woodruff et al., 1991). This model posits that customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is determined by the difference between expectations and the actual performance of a product or service. If performance matches or exceeds expectations, satisfaction occurs; otherwise, dissatisfaction results (Vavra, 1997; Davis and Heineke, 1998). Despite these advancements, one question that has remained largely overlooked in the development of customer satisfaction research is whether customer satisfaction differs between products and services, or if it can be understood in the same way for both. Another related question concerns which direct or indirect measures should be used to fully comprehend and evaluate the behavioral components of customer satisfaction that stem from consumption experiences (Malhotra et al., 1994). Several studies, including those by Boulding et al. (1993), Mittal and Baldasare (1996), Chandon et al. (1997), and Dobni et al. (1997), have attempted to analyze customer satisfaction using multiple behavioral measures.

In the context of financial services, studies have also highlighted gaps in the literature regarding general service satisfaction and the development of specific measures to evaluate customer satisfaction within financial service experiences. Howell and Shamir (2005) identified key dimensions for assessing customer satisfaction, including availability, responsiveness, timeliness, completeness, tangibility, empathy, reliability, and professionalism. These dimensions provide a general framework for evaluating customer satisfaction but may need to be adapted to fit the specific nature of different products or services. Taylor and Baker (1994) and Howard and Sheth (1969) proposed that customer satisfaction can result from dimensions beyond quality, suggesting that factors such as needs, equity, and experience with the service or provider may play a role in shaping satisfaction. This indicates that customer satisfaction is a multifaceted phenomenon that is not always directly tied to perceived quality. As a result, the concept of 'Expected service quality' has gained popularity as a way to better understand and analyze customer satisfaction.

However, the relationship between customer satisfaction and expected service quality remains a topic of debate. Some researchers, such as Bitner (1990) and Parasuraman et al. (1985), argue that customer satisfaction is an antecedent of expected service quality, while others, including Anderson and Sullivan (1993), Cronin and Taylor (1992), and Taylor and Baker (1994), suggest the reverse: that expected service quality is an antecedent of customer satisfaction. The concept of expected service quality gained significant attention in the early 1980s, particularly through the work of Lehtinen &

Lehtinen (1982). Parasuraman et al. (1985) initially identified ten dimensions of expected service quality, including reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding/knowing the customer, and tangibles. These ten dimensions were later condensed into five core dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). A 22-item scale, known as SERVQUAL, was developed to measure these dimensions of expected service quality.

SERVQUAL has been widely applied across various service industries, including appliance repair and maintenance firms, retail banks, long-distance telephone providers, security brokers, and credit card companies, to assess the quality of service. Its validation and application in these diverse settings have contributed to the development of a standardized scale for measuring expected service quality across different service organizations. SERVQUAL has also been used in various business contexts, such as hospitals, banking (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Spreng and Singh, 1993), business school placement centers, tire stores, dental school clinics, acute care hospitals (Carman 1990), and discount and department stores (Finn and Lamb, 1991; Teas, 1993; Dabholkar et al., 1996). Despite its widespread use in other industries, SERVQUAL has seen limited application within the financial services sector. However, its utility in measuring expected service quality across diverse service sectors highlights its potential for broader use, including within financial services, where understanding and improving service quality remains a critical priority for maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3. METHODOLOGY

A convenient sample of 800 customers from 80 branches of five conventional and five Islamic banks in the Khyber Pakhtoonkhawa (KPK) province of Pakistan participated in this study. The conventional banks included Allied Bank of Pakistan, Habib Bank of Pakistan, Muslim Commercial Bank of Pakistan, National Bank of Pakistan, and United Bank of Pakistan. The Islamic banks consisted of Meezan Bank Limited, Askari Islamic Bank, Al-Baraka Islamic Bank, Alfalah Bank, and Bank Islami. A total of 513 completed questionnaires were returned, yielding a response rate of 64%. Of these, 38% were filled out by female customers, and 62% by male customers. The questionnaire was structured on a five-point Likert scale, allowing participants to rate their perceived service quality based on their personal banking experiences. To analyze the data, this study employed partial least squares (PLS) based structural equation modeling (SEM), a second-generation analytical tool. SEM, utilizing platforms such as LISREL and PLS, is widely used by researchers to assess the significance of relationships between various variables. This approach allows for a detailed examination of the associations within complex models, offering insights into how the variables interact and contribute to the overall framework. In this study, SEM was specifically used to investigate the role of banks' tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy in determining the expected service quality of banks in Pakistan. The method’s capacity to reflect complex relationships provides a meaningful understanding of how these factors influence perceived service quality in both conventional and Islamic banks.

4. RESULTS

The objective of this study is to examine the determinants of expected service quality in both conventional and Islamic banking in Pakistan. Separate results have been collected to analyze the associations between various determinants and the expected service quality in both banking systems. The findings from the partial least square (PLS) structural models are illustrated in Figure 2 for conventional banks and Figure 3 for Islamic banks in Pakistan. The PLS structural model provides insights by indicating coefficients and t-values, which help in assessing the relationships between different constructs and variables. The standardized coefficients reflect the relative strength of these statistical relationships, offering a clear view of which factors are more influential in shaping expected service quality. Additionally, the model helps estimate t-values for the variables under study, allowing for a better understanding of the significance of the relationships between service quality determinants and overall customer satisfaction in both conventional and Islamic banking. This analysis aids in identifying the key drivers of service quality that banks should focus on to improve customer experiences and expectations.

Table 1: Regression Weights: Conventional Banks

Path	Estimate	S.E.	t value	P
TANGIBLE-SERVQUAL	1.112	.065	2.353	.000***
RELIABILITY-SERVQUAL	.331	.074	9.534	.253
RESPONSIVENESS-SERVQUAL	.175	.082	2.148	.042*
ASSURANCE-SERVQUAL	-.219	.076	2.888	.014**
EMPATHY-SERVEQUAL	.001	.037	7.026	.980

Table 1 provides the regression weights for different dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL) in the context of conventional banks. The paths listed represent the relationships between each dimension of service quality (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and overall service quality (SERVQUAL). The estimates, standard errors (S.E.), t values, and p values are shown to evaluate the significance of these relationships. The path between tangibility and SERVQUAL has an estimate of 1.112 with a standard error of 0.065. The t value is 2.353, and the p value is 0.000*, indicating that this relationship is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that tangible aspects (e.g., physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel) are a strong and significant predictor of overall service quality in conventional banks. For reliability, the estimate is 0.331 with a standard error of 0.074. The t value is 9.534, and the p value is 0.253, which is not significant. This implies that reliability (the ability to perform promised services dependably and accurately) is not a significant predictor of service quality in this case.

Responsiveness has an estimate of 0.175, with a standard error of 0.082. The t value is 2.148, and the p value is 0.042*, indicating that responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service) is a significant predictor of service quality ($p < 0.05$), though the effect size is relatively small. The path for assurance shows a negative estimate of -0.219, with a standard error of 0.076. The t value is 2.888, and the p value is 0.014, making this relationship statistically significant at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). This negative relationship suggests that higher assurance (confidence, knowledge, and courtesy of employees) may be inversely related to perceived service quality in this sample, which could indicate a need for further investigation into this surprising finding. Lastly, empathy has an estimate of 0.001, with a standard error of 0.037. The t value is 7.026, but the p value is 0.980, indicating that the relationship between empathy (caring and individualized attention) and overall service quality is not significant. In conclusion, the table shows that tangibility, responsiveness, and assurance are significant predictors of service quality in conventional banks, with tangibility having the strongest effect. However, reliability and empathy do not significantly contribute to overall service quality in this model.

Table 2: Regression Weights: Islamic Banks

Path	Estimate	S.E.	t value	P
TANG-SERVQUAL	1.17	.055	7.197	.000
REL-SERVQUAL	2.03	.084	4.466	.000
RESP-SERVQUAL	-0.06	.042	2.148	.032
ASSU-SERVQUAL	1.29	.066	2.888	.004
EMP-SERVEQUAL	-0.12	.075	3.026	.020

Table 2 provides the regression weights for different dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL) in the context of Islamic banks. The relationships between each dimension (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) and overall service quality (SERVQUAL) are evaluated using regression estimates, standard errors (S.E.), t values, and p values to determine the significance of each path. The relationship between tangibility (TANG) and SERVQUAL in Islamic banks has an estimate of 1.17, with a standard error of 0.055. The t value is 7.197, and the p value is 0.000, indicating that this path is highly significant ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that tangible aspects (such as physical facilities, equipment, and the appearance of personnel) have a strong and significant positive impact on service quality in Islamic banks. For reliability (REL), the estimate is 2.03 with a standard error of 0.084. The t value is 4.466, and the p value is also 0.000, making this relationship highly significant ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that reliability (the ability to provide promised services dependably and accurately) is a key driver of service quality in Islamic banks, with a relatively large positive effect.

The path between responsiveness (RESP) and SERVQUAL has an estimate of -0.06, with a standard error of 0.042. The t value is 2.148, and the p value is 0.032, indicating that this relationship is significant ($p < 0.05$). However, the negative estimate suggests that higher responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service) may be associated with a slight decrease in perceived service quality, which may reflect certain expectations or challenges in service responsiveness in Islamic banks. Assurance (ASSU) has a positive estimate of 1.29, with a standard error of 0.066. The t value is 2.888, and the p value is 0.004, making this path significant ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that assurance (which includes employee knowledge, courtesy, and the ability to convey trust and confidence) positively contributes to service quality in Islamic banks. Lastly, empathy (EMP) has a negative estimate of -0.12, with a standard error of 0.075. The t value is 3.026, and the p value is 0.020, indicating that this relationship is significant ($p < 0.05$). The negative estimate suggests that higher levels of empathy (providing caring and individualized attention to customers) are associated with a reduction in perceived service quality in this context, which may be due to specific cultural or operational dynamics within Islamic banks. In sum, the table shows that tangibility, reliability, and assurance are significant positive predictors of service quality in Islamic banks. However, responsiveness and empathy show negative relationships, indicating that these dimensions may not contribute positively to the overall perception of service quality in this particular banking context.

5. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to thoroughly investigate the role of five critical determinants—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—in shaping the expected service quality in both conventional and Islamic banking sectors in Pakistan. These determinants are essential components of service quality that significantly influence how customers perceive the overall performance of banks. Tangibles refer to the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel, which can affect a customer's first impression and overall experience with the bank. Reliability involves the bank’s ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, which directly impacts trust and long-term customer relationships. Responsiveness focuses on the willingness of the bank to help customers and provide prompt service, ensuring that customer inquiries and issues are addressed efficiently. Assurance covers the knowledge and courtesy of employees, as well as their ability to inspire confidence and trust, which is especially important in a sector dealing with sensitive financial transactions. Empathy highlights the provision of caring, individualized attention to customers, making them feel valued and understood. By examining these five determinants in both conventional and

Islamic banking contexts, the study seeks to explore how the expectations of service quality differ between the two banking systems.

Islamic banking, governed by Sharia'h principles, emphasizes ethical and interest-free financial practices, which may lead to different customer service expectations compared to conventional banks. The study will also identify which of these factors play the most significant role in influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty in each type of bank. The results of this investigation are expected to provide valuable insights for bank management and policymakers, enabling them to tailor their service strategies to meet customer expectations more effectively. By improving the elements that customers deem most important, banks can enhance service quality, foster customer loyalty, and gain a competitive advantage in an increasingly crowded and competitive financial market. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader understanding of service quality in the banking industry, offering a detailed comparison between the conventional and Islamic banking models within the Pakistani context. The study utilized partial least square (PLS) based structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships between various determinants and expected service quality in both conventional and Islamic banks in Pakistan.

The findings for conventional banks indicate that tangibles (the physical appearance and facilities) and responsiveness (the bank's willingness to assist customers promptly) have a positive and significant impact on expected service quality. Interestingly, assurance (the confidence and trust inspired by bank employees) was found to have a significant negative impact on service quality in conventional banks. This suggests that customers in conventional banks may have expectations of assurance that, if unmet or perceived inadequately, can detract from their overall satisfaction. Furthermore, reliability (the bank's ability to deliver on its promises) and empathy (personalized attention and care) did not have a statistically significant impact on expected service quality, indicating that these factors may not be primary drivers of customer satisfaction in conventional banks within the sample studied. In the case of Islamic banks, the results show that tangibles, reliability, and assurance have a significant positive impact on expected service quality. This suggests that Islamic bank customers highly value the physical attributes of the bank, the dependability of its services, and the trust and confidence inspired by its employees. However, there is a notable negative relationship between responsiveness and empathy with expected service quality in Islamic banks. This could imply that Islamic bank customers may have higher expectations for responsiveness and empathy, and when these expectations are not met, they perceive a lower level of service quality. These findings highlight key differences in the factors that influence customer perceptions of service quality in conventional versus Islamic banks. For conventional banks, improving tangible aspects and responsiveness could enhance service quality, while managing customer expectations around assurance is crucial. For Islamic banks, maintaining strong reliability, tangible quality, and assurance is vital, while efforts should be made to better meet customer expectations for responsiveness and empathy to improve service quality perceptions. This research provides valuable insights for bank management to focus on the most impactful areas of service delivery, depending on the type of banking system.

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