Chapter 19

A Mixed Methods Research Study Exploring Customer Satisfaction With the Quality of Service in University Libraries in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

University library administrators in Sri Lanka, realising the necessity of complying with customer perception of high-quality service, have begun to search for alternative ways to satisfy their clientele on the basis of service quality. This study therefore aims to meet this need by developing a model to assess the extent to which service quality indicators may be used to predict customer satisfaction, from a service quality perspective. The research methods were "mixed methods of research," which involved a combination of positivist and phenomenological inquiries that led to the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in line with the purpose of the study, which was exploratory in nature and searched for causality. The model based on the performance-only paradigm and the linearity assumption between the constructs was found to be the best parsimony model that provided for enhanced predictive performance, calibration, and potential insight into attributes and domain relevance.

INTRODCUTION

Mixed methods of research (MMR) offer three specific benefits: "address confirmatory and explanatory research questions," to "provide stronger inferences than a single method or worldview," and to "produce a greater assortment of divergent and/or complementary views" (Venkatesh et al., 2016, p. 437). Given the general lack of methodological rigor in customer satisfaction and service quality studies in the field

of Library and Information Scinices (LIS), mixed methods of research were applied to the development of a model for customer satisfaction from the perspective of service quality in Sri Lankan university libraries. Considering the recent research, the use of mixed methods has significantly grown in many deciplines other than LIS. A scoping review published in 2018 focused and, tracing publications as far back as 1950, shows an exponential increase over time in the number of publications defined as mixed methods (De Allegri et al., 2018). However, there are many substantial shortcomings of the methods used in the existing literature. Many studies have adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods but have not conceived of both as part of a single research effort and have therefore failed to make full use of an integrated approach to data collection and analysis. This chapter, therefore, seeks to illustrate the rigour of MMR design and how it can lead to richer and high-precision findings. This chapter aims to identify a framework for rigorous MMR, apply that methodology to the field of customer satisfaction from the prospective of service quality, and illustrate to the reader how to effectively utilize it in the disciplined of LIS.

It is a general belief among the public that libraries in the universities in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, have better facilities and better tangible and intangible resources, than university libraries in the outer districts of the country. The nature and efficiency of library and information services provided vary from library to library. Furthermore, pressed by the demands of customers and guided by a desire to enhance their image, library administrators have started taking an interest in providing various documentation work and new services to the wider customer community. The motivation underlying this is that customer demands are continually growing, and library administrators are keen on proving that they are important players in the teaching and learning process of the university. While these circumstances prevailed in the university sector, a quality assurance scheme was introduced in universities in 2007, by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAA) of Sri Lanka that assesses these libraries. In recognising the importance of the quality of library services, the QAA (2008) states:

It is a prediction for continuous quality improvement that the Universities and libraries develop and sustain a Quality Culture within their institutions. Quality Culture is the creation of a high level of internal institutional quality assessment mechanisms and the ongoing implementation of the results. Quality Culture can be seen as the ability of the library to develop quality assurance implicitly in the day-to-day work of the institution (library) and makes a move away from periodic assessment to ingrained quality assurance (pp. 1-2).

QAA has already recognised that there should be three main components for quality measurements of libraries: output indicators, process indicators and input indicators. Customer surveys of library services, which mainly focus on customer satisfaction, have been found to be an important output indicator for university libraries. Administrators in the libraries of the Sri Lankan universities are left to ponder ways and means of satisfying customers and providing good quality service that meets customers' perceptions. Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) suggest that:

… the only criteria that count in evaluating service quality are defined by customers. Only customers judge quality; all other judgments are essentially irrelevant. Specifically, service quality perceptions stem from how well a provider performs. That is, customers' expectations about how the provider should perform (p. 16).

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