

RESEARCH PAPER

# Measuring service quality in international fast food chains in Ludhiana

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was undertaken to measure the service quality in International fast food chains in Ludhiana by selecting 200 customers on convenience basis. The primary data were collected with the help of a well structured schedule. An adopted SERVQUAL scale was used to assess the service quality. The study revealed that the service quality offered did not meet the customers' expectations on most aspects. The highest gap and poor internal consistency viz., 1.10 and 0.548, respectively, was found in the parameter, empathy. The lowest gap and good internal consistency viz., 0.71 and 0.886, respectively, was found in the parameter, reliability. The results further revealed that the reliability dimension was the most significant and tangibles dimension was the least significant amongst the five dimensions. Out of the five international fast food chains, the average scores for Pizza Hut were the highest on the three dimensions, namely, tangibles, reliability and empathy.

**KEY WORDS :** Service quality, International fast food chains, SERVQUAL

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**F**ast food has become an essential part of Indian lifestyles in today's era. It is the term given to food that can be prepared and served very quickly in a packaged form for take-out/take-away. Outlets may be stands or kiosks, which may provide no shelter or seating, or fast food restaurants [also known as a quick service restaurants (QSR)]. Teenagers and young adults are the primary targets of fast food centers. So these centers are now a common feature in cities and towns around the world and their brands are amongst the most recognized in the world (Consumers International, 2009). Fast food is one of the world's largest growing food type and this concept came up during 1920s. In 2006, the global fast food market grew by 4.8 per cent and reached a value of 102.4 billion and a volume of 80.3 billion

transactions (Kaur, 2013).

According to the survey, India's fast food industry is growing by 40 per cent a year and more than 70 per cent of urban Indians consume food from take away restaurants once a month or more regularly. Out of this 70 per cent, 37 per cent of the adult populations carry food from take away restaurants at least once a week. Out of the 28 countries surveyed, India is among the top ten countries in terms of frequency of fast food consumption (Venkatachari, 2009). Indian fast food market is estimated to double from the current Rs. 3,400 crore in the next three years, largely driven by demand from smaller cities, says a report by Crisil. "The QSR market will more than double to around Rs. 7,000 crore by 2015-16 from Rs. 3,400 crore in 2012-13, driven largely by new store additions," the report said, adding most of the new stores will come up in the tier smaller cities. "Over the next three years, new store additions will increase by 16 to 18 per cent annually, propelled by the rapid expansion of global players into smaller cities," Crisil said (Kashyap *et al.*, 2013).

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Backman (1994) stated that fast food should have four generic aspects: a low relative monetary price, quick service of the end product, suitability for eating with fingers and low finished product durability. Although fast food is perceived as a relatively low-price product, this does not lessen the level of customer expectations of quality food and services. The international fast food chains in India have redefined ambience, marketing strategy, and menu, etc., according to the Indian taste and preference. International giants such as McDonald's, Kentucky fried chicken (KFC), Domino's Pizza, Pizza Hut and subway bombarded the Indian food market. McDonald's is one of the world's largest food service retailing chain, preparing and serving a range of foods. The company has operated more than 31,900 fast food restaurants serving more than 58 million people in 118 countries, including US, Europe, Latin America, Canada, etc., of total 31,900 McDonald's restaurants, over 6,500 are operated by the company and over 25,400 are operated by franchisees and affiliates (Yunus *et al.*, 2013). In India, McDonald's now has a network of over 160 restaurants since its launch in 1996. KFC also known as Kentucky fried chicken is a chain of fast food restaurants based in Louisville, Kentucky, United States. It is a brand of Yum and founded by Colonel Harland Sanders in the year 1952, now stretches worldwide with more than 18,000 restaurants in about 80 countries and territories with revenue of 15 billion US dollars. Today KFC mainly sell fried chicken, hamburgers, French fries, soft drinks and other western style fast food. In India; KFC is growing rapidly and today has presence in 21 cities with close to 107 restaurants.

Domino's Pizza started in 1960 as a single store and now it serves more than 1 million people in 70 countries having more than 10,000 stores. It holds a share of 62 per cent of pizza market and 72 per cent share in pizza delivery in India (Anonymous, 2013). Pizza Hut is the world's largest pizza chain with over 12,500 restaurants across 91 countries. In India, Pizza Hut has 140 restaurants across 34 cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Pune and Chandigarh amongst others. Subway restaurant is the world's largest submarine sandwich chain with its main office located in Milford, Connecticut. In India Subway Systems India Private Limited opened its very first restaurant in 2001 in New Delhi and has swiftly grown its operations to 183 operating restaurants in 26 cities across India (Kaur, 2013). There are 5 McDonald's outlets, 4 KFC outlets, 5 Domino's Pizza outlets, 7 Pizza Hut outlets and 8 Subway restaurants in the city of Ludhiana (Anonymous, 2014). The main reason behind the success of these multinational chains is their expertise in product development, sourcing practices, quality standards, service levels, standardized operating procedures in their restaurants and a strength that they have developed over years of experience around the world. The quality of the service is assessed not only on the end result but also on how it is

delivered during the service process and its ultimate effect on consumers' perceptions (Douglas and Connor, 2003).

Many researchers have conducted studies in measuring service quality in the past twenty years. Service quality can be defined as the difference between customers' expectations for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perceptions of the service received (Asubonteng *et al.*, 1996). Gefen (2002) also defined service quality as the subjective comparison that customers make between the quality of the service that they want to receive and what they actually get. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) offered several insights and propositions concerning consumers' perceptions of service quality. Specifically, their research revealed 10 dimensions that consumers use in forming perceptions of services, dimensions that transcend different types of services.

The major insights gained through their research suggested a conceptual service quality model. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) based on a survey with 200 consumers about five different service categories, have developed a standardized instrument called SERVQUAL, which can be used to measure customer perceptions of service quality. They then have retested and refined their original SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1991). SERVQUAL consists of 22 items measuring customers' expectations and another 22 items measuring their perceptions of five dimensions of service performance. Thus, service quality, as perceived by consumers, stems from a comparison of what they feel service providers should offer with their perceptions of the performance of service provided by service providers (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988).

Surprenant and Solomon (1987) stated that customers and service providers had roles to play during and possibly after service encounters and that these roles were based on "interpersonal interactions" between organizations and customers. Czepiel (1990) concluded that research on service quality must always include the perspectives of both the provider and the receiver. The research conducted in a bank in Tehran, Iran showed that the customer satisfaction played the role of a mediator in the effects of service quality on service loyalty (Mosahab *et al.*, 2010). Munhurrin *et al.* (2010) measured service quality amongst front-line employees and customers in a major public sector department in Mauritius. The findings revealed that while there was a significant shortfall in meeting customer expectations, the front-line employees appeared to have a good understanding of what these expectations actually were. So the public sector organizations have come under increasing pressure to deliver quality services (Randall and Senior, 1994) and improve efficiencies (Robinson, 2003). Rahman (2012) surveyed 450 telecom customers in Bangladesh from Dhaka city and the results reflected that most of the telecom customers were

highly concerned about service quality followed by corporate image.

It has caught on as a trendy thing amongst youngsters to visit the fast food outlets and spend leisure time there. This is apparently is due to modern look offered by the outlets. The purpose of this study was to ascertain the service quality offered by International fast food outlets in Ludhiana as perceived by experience of the respondents.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study was restricted to Punjab as a number of International fast food chains are coming up fast in Punjab. An exploratory research design was formulated which guided the collection and analysis of data. The population for the study consists of all the customers of International fast food chains of Ludhiana in Punjab. In the first stage, five International Fast food chains namely, McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), Domino's Pizza, Pizza Hut and Subway were selected for the study on judgement basis. Efforts were made to select the giant fast food chains that bombarded the Indian food market. In the second stage, 40 customers each from International fast food chains were selected on convenience basis. Thus an ultimate sample consisted of 200 respondents. The primary data were collected with the help of a well structured schedule.

An adopted service quality (SERVQUAL) model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), was used for the study. This model has five distinct dimensions suggested the following labels and concise definitions for the dimensions:

- Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.
- Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
- Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
- Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
- Empathy: Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

These dimensions contribute to assessment of service quality in any setting. The respondents were asked to rate their expectation and perception on scale of 1 to 5 where 1 stands for strongly disagree and 5 stands for strongly agree. The mean scores were calculated and gap was found for each dimension. The service quality gap was calculated first for International fast food chains and then a comparison of service quality among International fast food chains was made. The SERVQUAL scale requires the respondent to rate the 22 items on scale from 1 to 5 twice, first to indicate the expectations and next to give their perception of the actual service provided. This gives the expectation and perception scores of each item

in the five service dimensions. Further, the difference between the customers' expectations and perception of the service received gives the service quality gap. The collected data were then grouped into tables and analyzed using various statistical tools such as percentage, mean scores, Cronbach's alpha, one way analysis of variance, etc. Alpha was developed by Lee Cronbach in 1951 to provide a measure of the internal consistency of a test or scale; it is expressed as a number between 0 and 1. A low value of alpha could be due to a low number of questions, poor inter-relatedness between items or heterogeneous constructs. A maximum alpha value of 0.90 has been recommended (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011) (Table A).

**Table A : Rule of thumb describing internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha**

Cronbach's alpha	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.9$	Good
$0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$	Poor
$\alpha < 0.5$	Unacceptable

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section includes a brief profile of the respondents and comparison of service quality assessment among the International fast food chains.

### Demographic profile of the respondents :

The perusal of Table 1 provides the insights of demographic profile of the respondents. It showed that 72 per cent of respondents were male and 28 per cent were female.

It was seen that 47 and 21.5 per cent of respondents fall under the age group of 20-29 and 30-39 years, respectively. Also, 28 and 44.5 per cent of respondents have annual income between Rs.2-3 lakhs and Rs.3-4 lakhs, respectively.

The results showed that 38.5 and 19 per cent of respondents were students and were in service, respectively and 28 per cent of respondents were businessmen. It can be said that most of the customers of international fast food chains were young people who were financially independent with stable careers. Further, 34 and 25.5 per cent of respondents go for eating out once a week and once a fortnight, respectively. The results revealed also showed that 29 and 41.5 per cent of respondents spend within range of Rs.101- Rs.500 and spend within range of Rs.501- Rs.1000, respectively. It was seen that majority of respondents opted to visit international fast food chains with friends and family that is 52 and 34.5 per cent, respectively.

### Service quality assessment of international fast food chains :

The perusal of Table 2 revealed that for the parameter 'Tangibles', the difference between the mean scores for

expectations and that for actual experience for International fast food chains was the lowest (-0.72) for the statement that their employees were well dressed and appear neat and the highest difference (-1.17) for the statement that the appearance of physical facilities (outside store) of fast food chains was according to the kind of services provided. The overall mean score for difference from the parameter 'Tangibles' came out to be -0.92 for International fast food chains. The difference

between the mean scores for expectations and that for actual experience was the lowest (-0.45) in respect of reliability showed that the fast food chains were sympathetic and reassuring if customers had problems. The statement that fast food chains were dependable showed the highest difference (-1.13). The overall mean score for difference from the parameter 'Reliability' came out to be -0.71.

As far as responsiveness was concerned the difference

<b>Table 1 : Demographic Profile of the respondents (%)</b>						
Parameters	McDonald's	KFC	Domino's	Pizza Hut	Subway	Total
	n=40 (each)					
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	23	32	28	26	35	72
Female	17	8	12	14	5	28
<b>Age (Years.)</b>						
<20	10	13	12	10	4	24.5
20-29	22	17	19	16	20	47
30-39	5	8	6	9	15	21.5
40-49	2	1	2	3	1	4.5
>49	1	1	1	2	0	2.5
<b>Annual family income</b>						
< Rs.1 Lac	2	1	2	1	1	3.5
Rs.1-2 Lac	3	2	7	5	1	9
Rs.2-3 Lac	13	10	12	10	11	28
Rs.3-4 Lac	17	19	15	18	20	44.5
> Rs. 4 Lac	5	8	4	6	7	15
<b>Occupation</b>						
Student	13	18	12	15	19	38.5
Serviceman	8	5	11	9	5	19
Businessman	10	13	8	11	14	28
Housewife	3	2	5	3	2	7.5
Retired	6	2	4	2	0	7
<b>Frequency of visit</b>						
More than once a week	2	3	8	9	8	15
Once a week	7	6	19	16	20	34
Once a fortnight	18	12	9	8	4	25.5
Once a month	10	14	3	5	6	19
Less than once a month	3	5	1	2	2	6.5
<b>Expenditure per visit</b>						
Less than Rs.100	5	2	1	0	2	5
Rs.101-Rs.500	19	6	11	9	13	29
Rs.501-Rs.1000	10	17	18	20	18	41.5
More than Rs.1000	6	15	10	11	7	24.5
<b>Companion preference</b>						
Family	11	14	15	13	16	34.5
Friends	23	20	21	22	18	52
Co-workers	4	3	3	4	2	8
Alone	2	3	1	1	4	5.5

between the mean scores for expectations and that for actual experience for the International fast food chains was the lowest (-0.40). This showed that the employees of International fast food chains were never too busy to respond to customer requests promptly. The difference between the mean scores for expectations and that for actual experience was the highest (-1.51) which showed that the fast food chain employees were always willing to help customers. The overall mean score for difference from the parameter 'Responsiveness' came out to

be -0.82. The difference between the mean scores for expectations and that for actual experience in respect of assurance for International fast food chains was the lowest (-0.61) showed that the customers felt safe in the transactions done by the fast food chain's employees. The highest difference was (-1.31) showed that the customers were able to trust employees of fast food chains. The overall mean score for difference from the parameter 'Assurance' was estimated to be -1.04.

**Table 2 : Service quality gap and Cronbach's alpha for International fast food chains**

Particulars	Actual service received (P) mean score	Expected service (E) mean score	Service quality gap (P-E)	Cronbach's alpha
Statements relating to the dimension tangibles				0.798
Fast food chain has up-to date equipment.	3.68	4.42	-0.74	
The physical facilities at this fast food chain are visually appealing.	3.64	4.51	-0.87	
Their employees are well dressed and appear neat.	3.60	4.32	-0.72	
The appearance of physical facilities (in store viz., serving trays, menu cards) of their fast food chain is according to the kind of services provided.	3.24	4.30	-1.06	
The appearance of physical facilities (outside store viz., parking, kids play area, waiting area) of their fast food chain is according to the kind of services provided.	3.08	4.25	-1.17	
Overall score of tangibles	3.44	4.36	-0.92	
Statements relating to the dimension reliability				0.886
The order delivery time is according to the time promised.	3.70	4.52	-0.82	
If customers have problems, the fast food chain is sympathetic and reassuring.	3.91	4.36	-0.45	
The fast food chain is dependable.	2.90	4.03	-1.13	
When the fast food chain promises to do something by a certain time, it does.	3.42	4.00	-0.58	
The fast food chain maintains error free sales transactions and record.	3.60	4.20	-0.60	
Overall score of reliability	3.51	4.22	-0.71	
Statements relating to the dimension responsiveness				0.676
The staff tells the customers exactly when services will be performed.	3.69	4.54	-0.85	
It is realistic for customers to expect prompt services from employees of this fast food chain.	3.89	4.42	-0.53	
The fast food chain's employees are always willing to help customers.	2.80	4.31	-1.51	
The fast food chain's employees are never too busy to respond to customer requests promptly.	3.82	4.22	-0.40	
Overall score of responsiveness	3.55	4.37	-0.82	
Statements relating to the dimension assurance				0.706
Customers are able to trust employees of this fast food chain.	3.09	4.40	-1.31	
Customers feel safe in the transactions done by this fast food chain's employees.	3.52	4.13	-0.61	
The employees of this fast food chain are polite.	3.20	4.37	-1.17	
The employees get adequate support from this fast food chain to do their jobs well.	2.90	3.99	-1.09	
Overall score of assurance	3.18	4.22	-1.04	
Statements relating to the dimension empathy				0.548
The customers get individual attention in this fast food chain.	2.89	4.47	-1.58	
The employees of this fast food chain understand the needs of their customers.	3.70	4.38	-0.68	
The employees of this fast food chain have their customers' best interest at heart.	2.50	4.10	-1.60	
The fast food chain has convenient operating hours.	3.67	4.20	-0.53	
Overall score of empathy	3.19	4.29	-1.10	

The results presented in Table 2 further revealed that the lowest difference between the mean scores for expectations and that for actual experience for empathy in the case of the International fast food chains was estimated to be -0.53 indicating that the fast food chain operating hours were convenient to the customers. The highest difference was estimated to be -1.60 for empathy. This showed that the employees of fast food chains had their customers' best interest at heart. The overall mean score for difference from the parameter 'Empathy' came out to be -1.10.

The values for all the dimensions were negative which showed that expectations were higher than perception.

The results also showed that the International fast food chains were strong in reliability which means that the employees had the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately while they were weak in empathy which means that the fast food chain did not provide personalized and a careful attention to the customers. The reliability has been calculated for different dimensions using Cronbach's alpha. The perusal of Table 3 showed that the value of alpha ranges from 0.548 to 0.886 for service quality dimensions. The Cronbach's alpha co-efficient for the five items of parameter 'Reliability' was 0.886, the alpha for the five items of parameter 'Tangibles' was 0.798 and four items of parameter 'Assurance' was 0.706, depicting that the items have relatively high internal consistency. The alpha for the parameter 'Responsiveness' was 0.676 revealed the acceptable internal consistency and alpha for the parameter 'Empathy' was 0.548 which showed the poor internal consistency among its items.

#### Service quality dimensions comparison :

In the perusal of Table 3, the average scores of five International fast food chains considered in the study were compared for all the five dimensions of service quality. The results revealed that the dimension of Tangibles is not significant in the analysis. The average scores given by respondents for this dimension appear to be very close to each other, thus confirming the insignificance indicated above. This showed that the respondents were neutral as far as Tangibility dimension is concerned, that is, the respondents found the tangible features at all the five fast food chains equivalent. The dimensions of Reliability and Empathy are

most significant closely followed by responsiveness dimension and then by Assurance dimension. This finding is confirmed by reviewing the average scores on these dimensions between the five fast food chains. The average scores reflect variations between the five chosen fast food chains on the four dimensions (other than Tangibles) indicating varied perceptions of the respondents on these dimensions based on their service quality experience at the outlets.

#### Conclusion :

The study revealed that the perceived performance on all dimensions fell short of expectations. This indicated that the service quality offered did not meet the customers' expectations on most aspects. There is a need to reduce the gap between expectation and perception dimension in the assurance and empathy. While comparing the dimensions of service quality of International fast food chains, the highest gap was found in the parameter, empathy. Therefore, fast food chains should give more careful and personalized attention to the customers. The results also showed that the International fast food chains were strong in the parameter, reliability depicting the strong ability of employees to perform the service accurately. While comparing the values of Cronbach's alpha of five dimensions, it was emphasized that the parameter, reliability, showed the highest internal consistency as its items were correlated with one another and the parameter, empathy, depicted the poor internal consistency because of poor inter-relatedness between its items. The results further revealed that the reliability dimension was the most significant and tangibles dimension was the least significant amongst the five dimensions. Out of the five international fast food chains, the average scores for Pizza Hut on the dimensions, tangibles, reliability and empathy was the highest which emphasized that Pizza Hut meets highest satisfaction level on the service quality dimensions as perceived by the respondents. In conclusion, knowing how customers perceive the service quality and being able to measure service quality can benefit industry professionals in quantitative and qualitative ways. So, assessing service

**Table 3 : Comparison of average scores for five service quality dimensions**

Dimensions	McDonald's	KFC	Domino's	Pizza Hut	Subway	F-value	Sig
Tangibles	3.61	3.24	3.48	3.76	3.10	1.418	0.350
Reliability	3.10	3.36	2.59	4.56	3.96	6.500	0.032
Responsiveness	3.75	4.27	3.12	3.45	3.05	2.380	0.184
Assurance	3.54	3.12	3.22	3.10	2.91	2.181	0.207
Empathy	3.27	3.45	2.62	3.47	3.15	4.271	0.072

quality and better understanding how various dimensions affect overall service quality would enable organizations to efficiently design the service delivery process.

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