

Does Service Quality Impact Relationship Quality? Analyzing The Moderating Effect Of Demographic Variables In The Path Model – Empirical Evidence From Indian Retail Banks

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study is to analyze the impact of service quality on relationship quality in the context of India retail banks. Previous researchers have identified that service quality as a core competency of service industries, whereas the term relationship quality has occupied the prime spot in relationship marketing research for various reasons, the present study attempted to investigate the impact of service quality on relationship quality. At times, the demographic variables can act as a differentiator in the path model, the study made an effort to investigate the moderating role of the demographic variables. The authors developed a structured questionnaire, items used in the questionnaire were adopted from existing literature. The developed questionnaire was distributed among bank customers through e-mail and were requested to fill the same. The authors used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to analyze the path model between service quality and relationship quality. Findings of the study showed that there exist a positive relationship between service quality and relationship quality. The results also revealed that the relationship duration and type of bank has a moderating effect on the path model between service quality and relationship quality. However age and gender of the respondents did not show any moderating effect on the path model. Previous researchers has suggested that it cost more to acquire a new customer when compared to retaining an existing customer. The technology aspects of a service industry like banking mobile banking, e-services can be easily mimicked by the competitors, whereas the quality dimensions of banking industry cannot be easily imitated by the competitors, hence the banks shall establish good service quality and improve relationship quality to stay ahead of competition and win the minds of the customers.*

Keywords: *Moderating effect, Relationship Duration, Relationship Quality, Service Quality, Structural Equation Modelling.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Retaining an existing customer is a key factor for success in today's competitive environment.

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From the existing literatures it is evident that retaining a customer is less expensive when compared to acquiring a new customer (Gallo, 2014). As per the quote “Change is the only Constant” several changes in the market place is happening some of the notable changes includes growing consumer diversity, increasing individualization, time scarcity, value conscious customers, information availability, technology aptitude of the customers, decrease in loyalty, Kumar (2010). These changes in market place has forced the service organizations to serve the customers in innovative ways. Three decades ago the term service quality was coined by the researchers Parasuraman *et al.*, (1988) which measured the quality of service offered by the organizations. Service quality which was once considered as a differentiator has now become a necessity from the customer's perspective. Service Firms in order to stay ahead of competition should invest their time and efforts in building relationship with the customers. The rapport between customers and firms will increase the bondage and will help in increasing the interparty interactions. These interactions will be mutually beneficial, heling the organizations to build their topline and the customers to derive maximum value out of any transaction involved with the service organization.

Banking Industry in India is growing in an exponential phase. The number of bank branches has increased from 70,373 in the year 2005 to 1, 09,811 in the year 2013. The per capita deposit has increased from Rs.16281 in the year 2005 to Rs.56380 in the year 2013, it is comparatively around 3.4 fold increase. The per capita credit has increased from Rs. 10,752 in the year 2005 to Rs.44,028 in the year 2013 (Reserve Bank of India, 2013), a simple mathematical calculation will reveal that it is approximately 400 percent growth rate and it was expected that these measures will increase in the near future. Given the potential of the Indian Banking sector it is important to study about the factors that influence the performance of the banks. Though there are several financial measures that reveal the performance of the banks, Service Quality (SQ) remained as one of the vital factor that measured the perception of the customers Afsal Asharaf *et al.*, (2019). In the recent past the term Relationship Quality emerged and it was also used for measuring the perception of the customers towards the banks. Relationship quality measures the relationship building factors trust,

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commitment and relationship satisfaction and reveals how well the banks are maintaining relationship with them. The present study attempts to find the association between service quality and relationship quality.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Consumers are becoming highly selective and the loyalty level towards a product or service is decreasing constantly. In a survey of bank customers the answer for the question “How many financial service providers do you currently hold relationships with? Even though 35.1% of customers were loyal to one service provider, this figure decreased to 30.2 % in the year 1996 and further decreasing in the preceding years. (Kumar & Werner, 2012) as more and more options become available for consumers to diversify their holdings consumers are becoming less loyal taking this as an advantage. The research arguments for this study is adopted from social exchange theory that deals with answering two basic research question “Why do people and organizations engage in relationship exchange” and “How the relationship exchanges are created or avoided?”. Answers for these research question can be widely found in the relationship marketing literatures and handful of service operations research studies. These research articles mainly focused on two widely used terminologies service quality and relationship quality.

The term service quality can be understood as degree of service excellence and how well the customers’ perceives that excellence (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2009). Relationship quality can be defined as “Customer’s perception of how well the whole relationship fulfils the expectations, predictions, goals and desires the customer has concerning the whole relationship” (Jarvelin and Lehtinen, 1996). Previous literatures has suggested that service quality and relationship quality are two different constructs and are vital for a service organization to prosper (Keating 2003), however handful of research has examined the association between service quality and relationship quality. Giovanis *et al.*, 2015 has mentioned in his research study that relationship quality can some time replace service quality. Henning *et al.*, (2002) argued that the relationship quality may play a major role in bringing out the relationship marketing outcomes. Given the scenario and perspectives on the existing literatures, it was supposed that there could be an influence of service quality on relationship quality and hence it was hypothesized that

H1: Service Quality has a significant positive impact on Relationship quality.

Previous literatures have suggested that analyzing the moderating effect can have a significant impact while binging insights from the collected data Arora *et al.*, (2012). It is evident from the literature age can act as a moderator in the service industry like banks. The way in which a youngster perceives a bank and its services is entirely different from the way in which a middle aged human being perceives it. The human experience based on age makes them behave differently for a given situation and level of service they receive. Hence the hypothesis

H2a: Age Moderates the path model between Service Quality and Relationship Quality.

From the exiting literatures, it was found that gender can have a moderating effect, especially in terms of relationships. Men will react differently while trusting a bank when compared to women. The commitment level of men shall differ when compared to women. The men and women are considered as two side of the coins Chew *et al.*, (1993) on how they perceive service quality of banks. Hence it was hypothesized as

H2b: Gender Moderates the path model between Service Quality and Relationship Quality.

There are two broad classifications of scheduled commercial banks in India, namely public sector banks and the private sector banks, the existing literatures has suggested that the service level of the public sector banks differs when compared to the service level of private sector banks (Nataraj, 2015). The employees approach towards the customer service also differs when compared with the public sector banks and private sector banks Hence it was felt that the type of bank shall moderate the association between service quality and relationship quality resulting in the hypothesis

H2c: Type of bank moderates the path model between Service Quality and Relationship Quality.

Duration of relationship with the bank has a significant effect on perceiving service quality and relationship quality. Previous researchers has identified that relationship duration shall act as a moderating variable in the structural equation modelling path model (Barker 2013). Therefore it was assumed that relationship duration can have moderating effect in the path model between service quality and relationship quality. Hence it was hypothesized as

H2d: Relationship Duration has a moderating effect in the path model between service quality and Relationship Quality.

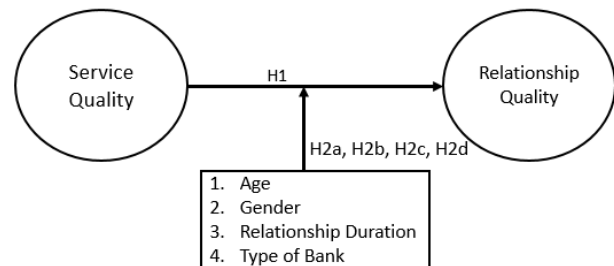


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The authors developed a structured questionnaire, items used in the questionnaire were adopted from existing literature.

Two latent variables are used in the questionnaire the first being service quality and the second one is relationship quality.

The scales used for the latent variable service quality were adopted from Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988 research article, in which the authors specified Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness (RATER) model. The service quality in present study was constructed as an eleven item latent variable.

The scales used for the second construct relationship quality was adopted from Nataraj and Rajendran (2018), in which the authors specified relationship quality as trust, affective commitment and relationship satisfaction model. The construct relationship quality in the present study is constructed as a nine item latent variable. The study was conducted in two phases, initially a pilot survey was conducted and the reliability of the items were tested after making necessary changes in the questionnaire, The developed questionnaire was circulated among bank customers through e-mail and were requested to fill the same. Snowball sampling method was followed to identify the respondents. The questionnaire was circulated to 2500 bank customers across India and 622 usable responses were collected leading to an effective collection rate of 24 percent. The responses were recorded in IBM SPSS software. To analyze the path model between relationship quality and service quality, IBM AMOS software was employed. The authors used Hayes' process model to analyze the moderating effect of relationship duration, type of bank, gender and age of the respondents.

In order to establish reliability the authors used Cronbach's' alpha. The values of Cronbach's alpha for constructs service quality and relationship quality were found to be greater than 0.84 and 0.88 respectively, which is greater than the proposed cutoff value 0.7, thus establishing reliability. To establish convergent validity, the authors used Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The average variance extracted by the latent variables service quality and relationship quality was found to be greater than 0.5, establishing convergent validity. To establish discriminant validity, the procedure suggested by Fronell and Lacker (1981) was followed, the square root of average variance extracted has to be greater than the inter correlation among the constructs, it was found that the square of average variance extracted was greater than the correlation among service quality and relationship quality, therefore it was clear that service quality and relationship quality are two different constructs establishing discriminant validity.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A. Structural Equation Modelling and Path Analysis

Step 1: Measurement Model - The measurement model output of the path model between service quality and relationship quality is shown in Figure 2. The beta coefficient of the path model between service quality and relationship quality was found to be 0.62 and the R square value of the path model was found to be 0.38.

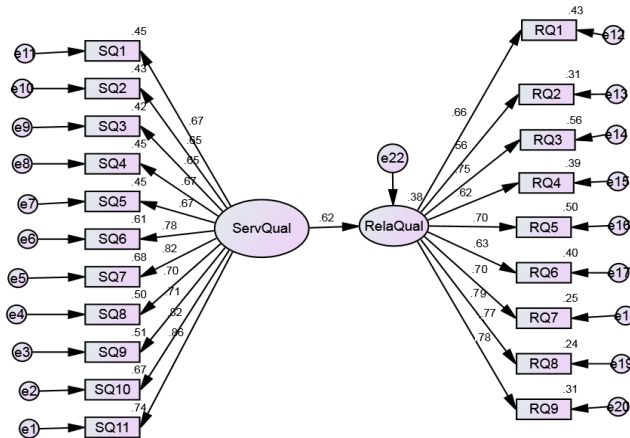


Figure 2: Measurement Model Output of the Path Model

Step 2: Goodness of Fit Indices - The goodness of fit indices were also above the desired level as mentioned in the existing literature. The normed chi square value was found to be 3.42 and it is well within the acceptable limits. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) was found to be greater than 0.9. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker- Lewis Coefficient (TLI) values of the present model was found to be 0.93 and 0.94 and it is greater than the cutoff level 0.9. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was found to be 0.03 and 0.05 respectively, which is below the threshold values as shown in the table.

Table I- Table Showing goodness of fit indices of the path model.

Goodness of Fit Indices		
List of Indices	Desired Level	SQ->RQ Model
χ^2		578.32
Degrees of Freedom (df)		169
Normed χ^2 (χ^2/df)	< 5.0	3.42
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	>0.90	0.92
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	>0.90	0.93
Tucker- Lewis Coefficient (TLI)	>0.90	0.94
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	<0.08	0.03
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	<0.07	0.05

The statistical results of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) was satisfactory. Therefore it can be inferred that that there exist a positive relationship between service quality and relationship quality supporting the stated hypothesis H1.

B. Moderation Analysis

Step 3: Moderation Analysis - The moderating effect of age and gender on the path model between service quality and relationship quality did not show any satisfactory statistical effect, therefore it can be concluded that age and gender did not moderate the path model between service quality and relationship quality and the stated hypothesis H2a and H2b were not supported.

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However the moderation analysis of relationship duration and type of bank showed statistically significant results. The relationship duration was divided in to two categories, namely high relationship duration and low relationship duration. The average value of relationship duration of the 622 sample respondents was found to be 3 years and it was taken as the cut off value for classification. The bank customers who are having less than or equal to three years of relationship with the bank were classified as low relationship duration and the bank customers with more than three years of relationship with the bank were classified as high relationship duration.

The R-Square value for moderation analysis was found to be 0.299 and the F statistic was found to be 87.85, which is significant at 0.001 level.

Table II- Table showing Model Summary of Moderation analysis results- Relationship Duration as Moderator

R- Square	MSE	F- Statistic	df1	df2	P
0.299	0.294	87.85	3	618	0.000

The interaction between service quality and relationship duration was found to be positive and the t-statistic value was significant at 0.05 percent level. The Lower Control Limits (LCLI) and the Upper Control Limits (UCLI) was calculated by bootstrapping in to 5000 samples and zero does not lie between the lower and upper control limits, therefore it can be statistically inferred that the relationship duration moderates the path model between service quality and relationship quality. In order to further establish the statistical results of moderation analysis the change in R-Square value after introducing the moderator relationship duration was calculated. From the results it can be concluded that the F-Statistic of change in R-Square is 7.53 and significant at 0.05 level of significance. To have a clear indication of the statistical results explained previously a graphical representation of the moderation analysis is depicted in Figure 3. The graph has service quality in X- axis and relationship quality in Y axis, the prediction of relationship quality by service quality under two different scenarios namely high relationship duration and low relationship duration is shown in two different lines. The slopes of the lines for low relationship duration and high relationship duration was found to be 0.42 and 0.72 respectively, establishing that the relationship duration acts as a moderator in the path model between service quality and relationship quality, supporting the stated hypothesis H2c.

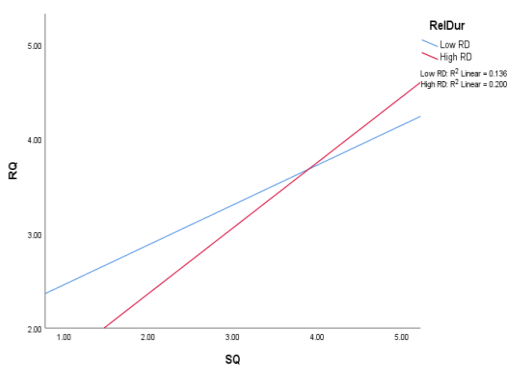


Figure 3: Chart showing interaction effect of relationship duration.

The scheduled commercial banks in India was classified in to two broad categories, namely public sector banks and private sector banks and deployed as a moderator in the path model between service quality and relationship quality. The R-Square value for moderation analysis was found to be 0.295 and the F statistic was found to be 86.44, which is significant at 0.001 level.

Table III- Table showing Moderation analysis results- Type of Bank as Moderator

R- Square	MSE	F- Statistic	df1	df2	P
0.295	0.296	86.44	3	618	0.000

The interaction between service quality and type of bank was found to be positive and the t-statistic value was significant at 0.05 percent level. The Lower Control Limits (LCLI) and the Upper Control Limits (UCLI) was calculated by bootstrapping in to 5000 samples and zero does not lie between the lower and upper control limits, there for it can be statistically inferred that the type of bank moderates the path model between service quality and relationship quality.

In order to further establish the statistical results of moderation analysis the change in R-Square value after introducing the moderator relationship duration was calculated. From the results it can be concluded that the F-Statistic of change in R-Square is 4.57 and significant at 0.05 level of significance.

To have a clear indication of the statistical results explained previously a graphical representation of the moderation analysis is depicted in Figure 4. The graph has service quality in X- axis and relationship quality in Y axis, the prediction of relationship quality by service quality under two different scenarios namely public sector banks and private sector banks is shown as two different lines in the graph. The slopes of the lines for public sector banks and private sector banks was found to be 0.428 and 0.63 respectively, establishing that the type of bank acts as a moderator in the path model between service quality and relationship quality, supporting the stated hypothesis H2d.

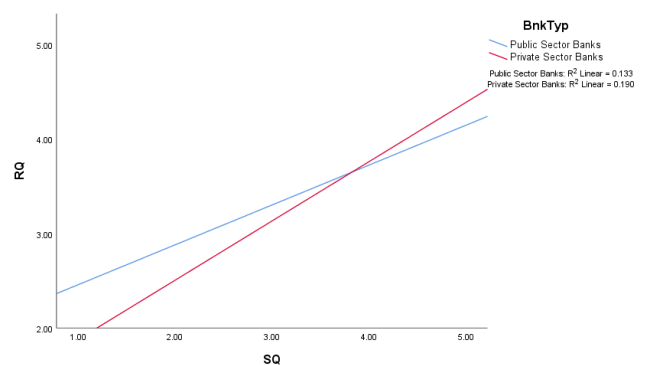


Figure 4: Chart showing interaction effect of Bank Type.

C. Discussion of Results

The results of path analysis suggest that the beta coefficient of the path model is 0.62, Therefore it can be inferred that a unit change in service quality will result in 0.62 increase in relationship quality and the R-square value was found to be 0.38,

which means that thirty eight percentage of variance in relationship quality could be explained by service quality. The R-Square value was found to be significant at one percent level hence the results shall be consistent even if similar research study is simulated with increase in sample size. The results of the study is contradicting with the arguments of Giovanis *et al.*, 2015, that relationship quality shall service quality, rather service quality acts as an antecedent to relationship quality. The presence of good service quality is essential to establish better relationship quality.

The results of the study also revealed that the demographic variables gender and age did not moderate the relationship between service quality and relationship quality, hence it can be inferred that men and women perceive service quality and relationship quality equally and there is no gender difference in it.

The important contribution of the research study is that relationship duration and type of bank moderates the relationship between service quality and relationship quality. Therefore the banks shall use the duration of relationship as a segmentation variable for identifying the varying needs of the customers and satisfy those identified needs with good service quality and achieve better relationship quality.

The moderation effect of type of bank revealed that the private sector banks are performing better in the sense of service and relationship quality, hence the public sector banks shall adopt the best practices of private sector banks to establish better relationship quality with their existing customers.

V. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although the results of the research were satisfactory, there are certain research limitations. The after effects of service quality is not limited to relationship quality alone, good service quality has other benefits as well.

Hence the researchers in the field of relationship marketing and service operations shall focus on the after effects of service quality.

The results of the present study revealed that thirty eight percent of relationship quality shall be explained by relationship quality, the remaining sixty two percent shall be explained by some other variables, hence further research is required to analyze the other antecedents of relationship quality apart from service quality.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study attempted to answer the research question, “Does service quality impact relationship quality?” and the research findings suggested that the answer is yes, service quality impacts relationship quality and the impact was found to be thirty eight percent.

The research study also attempted to investigate the moderating effect of the demographic variables and it was found that relationship duration and type of bank act as a moderating variable in the path model between service quality and relationship quality. The below table will provide a summary of the research study.

Table IV- Table showing results of stated hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Particulars	Supported/ Not Supported
H1	Service Quality has a significant positive impact on Relationship quality.	Supported
H2a	Age Moderates the path model between Service Quality and Relationship Quality.	Not Supported
H2b	Gender Moderates the path model between Service Quality and Relationship Quality.	Not Supported
H2c	Type of bank moderates the path model between Service Quality and Relationship Quality.	Supported
H2d	Relationship Duration has a moderating effect in the path model between service quality and Relationship Quality.	Supported

In current scenario, technology has overtook the banking industry. Introduction of smart phones and mobile banking applications has disrupted the traditional banking models, gone are the days where the customers are expected to visit banking premises to receive services, with the technological advantage in today’s competitive world, banks has to find their means of survival. Previous researchers has suggested that it cost more to acquire a new customer when compared to retaining an existing customer. Hence to stay ahead of competition, it is necessary to be unique and outstanding. The technology aspects of banking can be easily mimicked by the competitors, whereas the quality dimensions of a service industry cannot be easily imitated by the competitors. In case of service industries like banks, service quality and relationship quality are the two identified and most discussed measures in the literature. The present study revealed that there exist a positive relationship between service quality and relationship quality. Therefore the banks shall establish service quality and enhance relationship quality to stay ahead of competition and win the minds of the customers.

APPENDIX

Codes	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE
SQ1	The bank maintains consistent service standards (Padmavathy et al., 2012)	0.67	0.88	0.78
SQ2	The bank always provides reliable services (Padmavathy et al., 2012)	0.65		
SQ3	The bank employees are polite and friendly, (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.65		

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SQ4	The bank employees are knowledgeable and give precise answers to inquiries (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.67		
SQ5	The bank employees keep my financial data confidential (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.67		
SQ6	The bank has an appealing physical facilities (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.78		
SQ7	The bank has amicable Layout and Process flow and it is easy to find what I need (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.82		
SQ8	The bank gives me a personal attention (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.7		
SQ9	The bank shows a real concern in understanding my needs (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.71		
SQ10	This bank delivers services at the earliest and uses a process driven approach in banking (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.82		
SQ11	The Bank employees are open and clear to provide necessary and sufficient information when asked. (Al-hawari, et al 2015)	0.86		
RQ1	I feel "emotionally attached" to the bank (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.66	0.83	0.76
RQ2	I have a strong sense of belonging to the bank (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.66		
RQ3	I feel happy being a customer of the bank. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.75		
RQ4	In general, I am satisfied with the relationship with my bank. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.62		
RQ5	In general, I receive high quality service from my bank. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.7		
RQ6	The bank is having good reputation. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.63		
RQ7	The bank will not do anything against my interest. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.79		
RQ8	The bank always treats me fairly. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.77		
RQ9	The bank has the ability to provide solution for my needs. (Nataraj and Rajendran, 2018)	0.78		

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