MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY LEVEL IN THE JORDANIAN TELECOMMUNICATION SECTOR FROM ITS CUSTOMERS' PERSPECTIVE USING THE SERVPERF SCALE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to measure the service quality level in the Jordanian telecommunication sector from the perspective of its customers. The study was applied in three well-known telecom companies in Amman, Jordan; Zain, Orange, and Umniah during 2017. In order to achieve the study's objective, the researchers adopted a questionnaire that consists of (27) items. This questionnaire has adopted the SERVPERF scale and made modifications and additions on it. The latter scale adopts (5) dimensions for measuring service quality, which are: (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). The questionnaire forms were distributed to (500) customers who have experience in dealing with the aforementioned companies. However, the researchers retrieved (422) questionnaire forms (i.e. the response rate is 84.4 %).The obtained data were analyzed by the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences" (SPSS) program. The researchers concluded Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale jointly and separately. However, the highest percentage of positive attitudes was towards the dimension of tangibility, whereas empathy has got the lowest percentage of positive attitudes.

Key words: Measuring service quality, Services Quality (SQ), SERVPERF, SERVQUAL.

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Background of the study:

In the field of business, companies and organizations usually seek to provide their customers with products, services or both. In general, products are usually evaluated through the degree of customer's satisfaction and the numbers of loyal customers (Parasuraman,1985; Cronin, and Taylor, 1992).However, when it comes to evaluating services, the criteria used by researchers are more complicated. Thus, the process of assessing the quality levels of services is more complicated (Gronroos, 1988). Furthermore, it is highly important to shed a light on the matters related to services and their quality levels because the service industry has become one of the major pillar of countries' national economic systems (Koepp, 1987; Bateson, 1989).

Furthermore, the number of the companies that provide services for customers have been increasing all around the world. Such increasing number can be seen clearly in the US economy. Thus, due to the increasing number of such companies, the competition between them have been increasing and becoming more intense. Thus, in order to survive in the global and local competitive markets, the need to raise the service quality level has been increasing and it has become the main concern of all companies. Raising the service quality levels shall help those companies in obtaining a competitive advantage. In order to raise the service quality level, companies need to measure the current quality levels of their services from the perspective of their customers. That shall be done in order to exert efforts to improve the weaknesses of services and their quality levels and to meet customers' needs and expectations. In order to facilitate the process of measuring such levels, there have been also many scales proposed by theorists and researchers to measure the service quality level (Abdullah, 2006)

The competition in the contemporary economic environment has been increasing rapidly. Thus, companies that provide services have been seeking methods to excel, survive and differentiate themselves from others (Ali et al., 2010). In addition, this increasing competition in the global and national markets has forced many firms to conduct service quality assessment processes into their consideration as being one of their primary assessment processes (Yarimoglu, 2014). Thus, it can be said that all companies are in need for effective methods that can assess their service quality levels in order to obtain a competitive advantage and achieve higher levels of customers' satisfaction. In this manner, such companies would themselves with more loyal customers (Sweeney, 1997).

It is already known by all people that the major goal of all firms is to increase the profitability and productivity levels (Al-Khattab and Al-Dehayyat, 2010). That can be done through exerting efforts that can gain and attract new customers or through exerting efforts for turning the current customers into loyal ones. However, the latter method is more preferred by companies and considered less costly because satisfying the current customers to turn them into loyal ones would need less costs than making advertisement to attract new ones. The latter method is also preferred because it shall gain more profits and achieve higher growth rates. However, regardless of the selected method to increase the profitability and productivity levels, service quality levels shall always remain a key factor influencing companies' success and profits (Kotler, Armstrong, 2007).

In the light of the aforementioned, service companies have been facing major challenges which must be overcome in order to survive in the contemporary competition and satisfy customers. Many of those challenges can be overcome by improving the service quality levels. In order to achieve that, such

current levels must be accessed through using special techniques and scales. Thus, many researchers have been highly concerned with improving those techniques and scales and proposing new ones in order to provide companies with accurate reliable information about their service quality levels measured from their customers' perspective (Yarimoglu, 2014). One of the major scales is the SERVPERF scale that aims to measure such levels of service quality from customers' perspective (Cronin, and Taylor, 1992).

However, it should be noted that reaching the acceptable service quality level is something difficult and challenging to achieve. It becomes even harder to achieve when the company is adopting traditional method for evaluating customers' attitudes about such levels (Al-Khattab and Al-Dehayyat, 2010). Thus, through the current study, the researcher shall make use of the SERVPERF scale to measure the quality level of Jordanian telecom services from their customers' point of view.

1.2 .Statement of the Problem:

In the light of the aforementioned information, measuring services quality levels is something highly important because identifying quality levels shall help companies to improve themselves (Abdullah, 2006). Thus, due to such importance, the current study shall measure the quality levels of the Jordanian telecom services by their customers' perspective through adopting the five dimensions of the SERVPERF scale; (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy).

1.3 The Study's hypotheses:

The study's hypotheses are presented below and they are derived from the dimensions of the SERVPERF scale:

The main hypotheses:

H1:　　Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale jointly; (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy).

H2: Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale separately

*Sub- Hypotheses derived from hypothesis (2):

H2.1 Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by tangibility
H.2.2. Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality levels of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by reliability
H.2.3. Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality levels of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by responsiveness
H.2.4 Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality levels of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by assurance
H.2.5 Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality levels of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by empathy).

1.4. The Study's Questions:

The current study aims to provide answers for the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale jointly?

2. What are the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the dimension of tangibility?

3. What are the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the dimension of reliability?

4. What are the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the dimension of the responsiveness?

5. What are the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the dimension of assurance?

6. What are the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the dimension of the empathy?

1.5. Limits of the Study:

The study was conducted in 2017 and it investigated Jordanian telecom customers towards the service quality level of three Jordanian telecommunication companies located in Amman; Zain, Umniah and Jordan.

1.6. Limitation of the Study:

The results of the current study can't be generalized to all the attitudes of Jordanian telecom customers because the current study is limited to its instruments and its reliability and validity. The results are also limited to the objectivity of the respondents.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The researcher has reviewed several relevant studies:

2.1. Definitions of the concept of Services Quality (SQ):

Brown, and O‟Sullivan (1995) and Heskett et al. (1994) define the term "service" as being things that are produced, distributed, and consumed through having an interaction between the service provider (the seller) and its recipient (the buyer). As for the term "quality", Crosby (1979) defines it as being *a "conformance to requirements*". However, Juran (1974) defines it as being the "fitness for use". As for Parasuraman (1985), he defines it as being the knowledge that customers have about the goods.

 As for the term "service quality", Drewand Bolton (1991) define it as being a form of attitude that is related to customers' degree of satisfaction that results from the gap that exists between customers' expectations and the service performance level.   Parasuraman (1985) and Parasuraman et al. (1988) define service quality as being an evaluation for the degree of excellence of the service or customers' attitudes towards it.

Bitner and Hubbert, (1994) define "service quality" as being customers' evaluations for the strengths and weaknesses of the company and its services. Parasuraman (1985); PHAN, and NHAM, (2015) and Edvardsson and others (1994) believe that "service quality" is the ability of the service to meet customers' expectations and satisfy their needs and demands.

Nitecki and Hernon, (2000) define service quality as being the extent of contrast between customers' expectations about the service and their perceptions for its performance level after its actual use. Gronroos, (2007) defines service quality as being customers' assessment for the service when they compare their expectations with their perceptions after receiving it.

Unlike goods, services are considered intangible. Thus, measuring service quality is harder and more complicated than measuring products' quality (Alrawashdeh, 2014). Measuring service quality is a multi-dimensional process that results from identifying customers' evaluations for the benefits gained from the service and its delivery (PHAN, and NHAM, 2015)

Researchers have proposed several scales for measuring service quality levels. However, one of those scales is the SERVQUAL scale that includes forty four (44) items for identifying customers' attitudes towards the service quality levels (Alrawashdeh, 2014). However, there is another scale called the "SERVPREF" which Cronin, and Taylor (1992) suggest. The SERVPREF scale consists of twenty-two (22) items and it is based on the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman, 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

2.2. Concept of (Service Quality scale (SERVQUAL):

The issue of service quality has been attracting the attention of many researchers since the 1980s. Such attention increased after proposing the first scale for measuring service quality by Gronroos (1988). The latter researcher also believes that companies can differentiate themselves from others through fulfilling customers' expectations and providing them with a service of excellent value.   Later on, Parasuraman, (1985)propose a new scale called SERVQUAL which has become a well -known scale that can measure service quality level from customers' perspectives. At first, Parasuraman, (1985) proposes ten dimensions for this scale. After that, Parasuraman et al. (1988) reduce the number of these dimensions to

become five ones. The SERVQUAL scale aims at measuring the service quality level through measuring the size of the gap that exists between customers' expectations about the service and their perceptions about it after receiving it. When applying this scale, such level is measured by five dimension (Al-Khattab and Al-Dehayyat, 2010)

Researchers have been conducting many studies that aim to investigate the effectiveness of adopting the SERVQUAL scale when measuring service quality level. Some of those researchers have criticized this scale as being not fully inclusive. In other words, many believed that this scale does not cover all dimensions of service quality (Parasuraman, 1985; Brady and Cronin, 2001; Shahin and Samea, 2010). Due to not being fully inclusive, Cronin and Taylor (1992) propose a new scale called SERVPERF which is concerned with measuring service performance level to identify service quality level (Al-Khattab, Al-Dehayyat, 2010).

The SERVPERF scale aims to measure the service quality level through adopting five dimensions for service quality; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). SERVPERF scale also seeks to identify customers' perceptions about the service without comparing them with their expectations. This method replaces the previous method that is adopted by the SERVQUAL. For instance, SERVQIAL scale seeks to measure the gap size between customers' expectations and perceptions for the actual value of the service after receiving it (Cronin, and Taylor, 1992).

2.3. The SERVQUAL & SERVPERF scales:

SERVQUAL scale provides companies and researchers with a technique that can be adopted for assessing service quality (Buttle, 1996). Parasuraman, (1985) is the one who propose the SERVQUAL scale which has been developed later over the years. SERVQUAL scale also adopts five dimensions for measuring service quality; tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Some of SERVQUAL items aim to measure customers' expectations, whereas its other items aim to measure customers' perceptions about the service performance after receiving it. (Adil et al, 2013)

As for the SERVPERF scale, its five dimensions are defined below (PHAN, and NHAM, 2015; Gronroos, 2007):

- Tangibility: It refers to the physical evidence of the service, such as: the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and etc….

- Reliability: It refers to the company's ability to perform the promised service dependably, accurately.
- Responsiveness. It refers to the employees' degree of willingness to help customers and provide them with prompt services.
- Assurance: It refers to the knowledge that employees have and how courteous they are when dealing with customers. It also refers to their ability to gain customers' confidence and trust (i.e. how trust worthy they are)
- Empathy: It refers to the caring attention provided by the firm for its customers.

There are differences between the SERVQUAL and SERPERF scales. For instance, SERVQUAL include items related to customers' expectations and perceptions about services. They include such items in order to conduct a comparison between customers' perception and expectation. As for the

SERVPERF scale, all of its items seek to measure customers' perception about the service and its quality and performance without comparing them to their expectations (i.e. items of the SERVPERF scale only measures customers' perceptions towards the service performance and quality) (Abdullah, 2006). However, Cronin and Taylor (1992) believe that the SERVPERF scale is an instrument that focuses on performance only and measuring it without taking into consideration customers' expectations and other dimensions. However, other researchers – such as Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Oliver (1989) – believe that customers' assessments of services depend highly on their assessments for the performance level.

As for the Cronin and Taylor (1992); Parasuraman, (1985) and Quester (1995), they believe that SERVPERF scale is more credible and objective than the SERQUAL scale. They also believe that SERVPERF provides a better image about the service quality level than the SERQUAL scale.

Yarimoglu (2014) believes that the SERVPERF scale is the most preferred scale by researchers for measuring service quality level. He also believes that this scale can be used in various sectors, such as the: health, fast food, entertainment and sport sectors. As for Stafford et al (2011), they believe that both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF scales are able to measure service quality level.

3. THE STUDY'S METHODOLOGY:

3.1 The study's instrument:

The current study is a quantitative study. For instance, the researchers designed a questionnaire that consists of (27) items. It is based on the SERVPERF scale which consists of twenty-two (22) items and adopts five dimension of service quality. These dimensions are (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). This questionnaire was designed to measure the service quality level of Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF from their customers' perspective. The questionnaire was distributed to customers of three Jordanian telecom companies; Zain, Umniah and Orange.

3.2 Population and Sample:

The population of the study consists of all the Jordanian telecommunications customers. As for the sample, it consists of 500 customers who are customers for Zain, Orange and Umniah. The sample is considered to be a convenience sample. The researchers distributed 500 questionnaire forms to the selected sample, but they have retrieved 422 questionnaire forms only. Thus, the response rate is 84.4%. As for the respondents' characteristics, they are presented below in table (1).

Table (1): Respondents' Demographic characteristics

Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender		
Male	316	74.9
Female	106	25.1
Income		
Less 800 $	16	32.0
800-1200$	21	42.0
1201-1500$	8	16.0
Above 1500$	5	10.0
Age		
Less than 25	316	74.9
25-35	76	18.0
36-45	18	4.3
Above 45	12	2.8
Education		
High school	28	6.6
Diploma	30	7.1
Bachelors	346	82.0
Post graduate studies	18	4.3
Number of years in dealing with Zain, Orange or Umniah		
5 years or less	126	29.9
6-10	212	50.2
11 years or more	84	19.9

Based on table (1), 82% of the respondents hold a bachelor degree and 74.9 % of the respondents are males. The table also shows that 42 % of them earn 800 – 1200 $. As for the respondents age, most of them (74.9) are less than 25 years old. It can be also noticed that 50.2 % of the respondents have been dealing with telecommunication companies for 6 – 10 years.

3.3 Statistical analysis:

The collected data were analyzed statistically by the researchers through using the SPSS program. The researchers also calculated the means and standard deviations of the questionnaire's statements to identify their attitudes about the quality level of Jordanian telecom services. The results of this analysis are presented below:

Table (2): Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for respondents' attitudes towards the service quality dimensions

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Tangibility	422	4.2417	.67329	.03278
Reliability	422	3.9355	.76230	.03711
Responsiveness	422	3.9265	.73304	.03568
Assurance	422	4.0746	.71425	.03477
Empathy	422	3.8284	.76995	.03748
Total	422	3.9905	.60230	.02932

Based on table (2), respondents have positive attitudes towards the aforementioned dimensions of service quality because the above means exceed the values of the scale (3). The highest percentage of positive attitudes were towards tangibility. However, empathy has got the lowest percentage of positive attitudes.

3.5 Reliability:

Cronbach Alpha test was conducted to identify how reliable the questionnaire is. Its value is 0.926 which is considered as a high value because it far exceeds the accepted value (0.60). That means that the instrument and the study's results are highly reliable.

3.6 Validity:

The questionnaire was reviewed by a panel of experts in the field of marketing and the researchers made the necessary modification, corrections and additions in the light of their comments.

4.RESULT:

4.1. Hypotheses Testing:

4.1.1 Testing hypothesis (1):

H_1: Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale jointly.

One sample t test was conducted to test hypothesis (1). The results of this test are presented below in table (3):

Table (3): Results related to hypothesis (1)

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)**	Mean Difference
33.784	421	.000	.99052

** significant at 0.01

In the light of the above values, it was found that hypothesis (1) is accepted due to having a t-value of (33.784) which is statistically significant at the significance level of (0.05). That means that Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale jointly.

4.1.2 Testing Hypothesis (2) and its sub-hypotheses:

H_2: Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale separately.

One sample t test was conducted to test hypothesis (2) and its sub-hypotheses. The results of this test are presented below in table (4).

Table (4): Results related to hypothesis (2) and its sub-hypotheses

	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)**	Mean Difference
Tangibility	37.886	421	.000	1.24171
Reliability	25.211	421	.000	.93555
Responsiveness	25.965	421	.000	.92654
Assurance	30.908	421	.000	1.07464
Empathy	22.103	421	.000	.82844

** significant at 0.01

In the light of the above values, it was also found that respondents' have positive attitudes towards the quality dimensions of Jordanian telecom service; (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy).That was concluded through having the following T values for those dimensions respectively: (37.886, 25.211, 25.965, 30.908, 22.103).

5. CONCLUSION:

This paper aimed to measure the service quality level in the Jordanian telecommunication sector from the perspective of its customers. The study was applied in three well-known telecom companies in Amman, Jordan; Zain, Orange, and Umniah during 2017. In order to achieve the study's objective, the researchers adopted a questionnaire that consists of (27) items. This questionnaire has adopted the SERVPERF scale and made modifications and additions on it. The latter scale adopts (5) dimensions for measuring service quality, which are: (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). The questionnaire forms were distributed to (500) customers who have experience in dealing with the aforementioned companies. However, the researchers retrieved (422) questionnaire forms (i.e. the response rate is 84.4 %). In the light of the conducted statistical analysis, all of the study's hypotheses were accepted. Thus, Jordanian telecom customers have positive attitudes towards the service quality level of the Jordanian telecommunication companies measured by the five dimensions of the SERVPREF scale jointly and separately. It also means that respondents' have positive attitudes towards the quality levels of the Jordanian telecom service measured by (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the light of the concluded results, the researchers recommend:

1) Conducting more studies in the future that the aim to measure service quality levels in other sectors.

2) Conducting more studies that aim to investigate service quality level in the Jordanian telecommunication sector, but with using other types of scales.

3) Exerting more efforts by managers in all service companies to improve consumers' attitudes towards these dimensions in order to improve service quality.

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