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Prioritising SERVQUAL Dimensions to Improve Trade Show Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the suitability of SERVQUAL for trade shows. The objective is to identify the significant SERVQUAL dimensions and their relative importance to increase the purchase intention of visitors to a trade show. The study uses a survey of 400 visitors to a big trade fair. Structural equation modelling was used to determine the relative importance of the dimensions. Results suggest that SERVQUAL is well suited for assessing the service quality of trade shows. The tangibility and assurance are the two most significant factors influencing the purchase intention of trade show visitors. Exhibitors should enhance tangibility in trade shows by methods such as display of product or product prototypes, brochures, and screens. Further, they should increase assurance by displaying medals and awards won, quality certifications achieved, testimonials of past satisfied consumers, and experienced salespeople at the trade show counters. Trade show organisers should attract big brands for the exhibition to enhance assurance. The present study contributes to the ongoing debate on the relevance of SERVQUAL in the trade show context. The study demonstrates that SERVQUAL is a decent measure to study service quality in trade shows even though the majority literature claims otherwise. Further, the present research prioritises the SERVQUAL dimensions, helping managers to design customer-oriented sales strategies.

Keywords: trade show, service quality, purchase intention, visitor, performance, tangibility, assurance.

Prioritising SERVQUAL Dimensions to Improve Trade Show Performance

Existing literature cites Carman (1990) to infer that SERVQUAL is inappropriate to measure the service quality of a trade show (Chen & Mo, 2012; Jung, 2005; Wu et al., 2016). Contrary to this, Carman (1990, p. 40) indicated that SERVQUAL dimensions remained stable across various contexts. He only found some variable loadings on factors to be inconsistent. He suggested using the original 34-item SERVQUAL scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) to overcome the inconsistencies. Most studies (Chen & Mo, 2012; Jung, 2005; Wu et al., 2016) in the trade show context have used Brady and Cronin's (2001) hierarchical service quality model and cited Carman (1990) incorrectly. Even Brady and Cronin (2001) have used SERVQUAL dimensions to define their sub-dimensions of service quality. No researchers made any effort to check SERVQUAL's applicability for trade shows before rejecting it and developing new scales. The present study bridges this gap in the literature by utilising SERVQUAL to measure the service quality of trade shows.

The existing literature provides new scales to measure service quality in trade shows (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Chen & Mo, 2012; Gottlieb et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2016). Based on Brady and Cronin's (2001) framework, at least three studies proposed six dimensions of service quality (Chen & Mo, 2012; Jung, 2005; Lin & Lin, 2013). The stability of these dimensions across similar studies indicates good validity of the new scale. However, Brady and Cronin (2001) suggested that the dimensions of their scale were modified versions of the SERVQUAL scale. Hence, the stated facts necessitate examining the service quality of trade shows by using SERVQUAL.

Measuring the service quality of trade shows is crucial for managers. Managers allocate 20% of their marketing budget to trade shows. This proportion is higher than budget allocations

for digital advertising and content marketing (Tafesse & Skallerud, 2017). Though trade shows are critical for managers, research is still in the nascent stage (Sarmento & Simões, 2018; Tanner, 2002). Most of the literature has conceptualised trade shows as a tool of direct selling (Gopalakrishna et al., 1995; Gottlieb et al., 2011). Hence, the focus of the existing research is to increase purchase intention by improving the service quality. However, researchers have used different scales to measure the service quality of trade shows. Hence, SERVQUAL was used to measure service quality. The present study examines the validity of the SERVQUAL scale, though it can simultaneously establish the validity of other scales. If the present study results are similar to those of other studies using different scales, it will provide validity to both SERVQUAL and other scales.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: We first discuss the theoretical background and different models on service quality. Then we discuss the various scales developed in the trade context to measure service quality. We try to see the application of SERVQUAL as a measure of performance in a trade context and develop hypotheses. We then empirically test the propositions and discuss the theoretical contribution and managerial implications. Finally, we discuss limitations and future research directions.

Conceptual Background

Service Quality

Existing research indicates that service quality lowers cost and increases customer satisfaction and retention, profitability, corporate image, and positive word of mouth (Newman, 2001; Silvestro & Cross, 2000; Sureshchandar et al., 2002). Gronroos (1984) and Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the initial scales. Gronroos (1984) defined service quality as technical and functional quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988) identified five dimensions of service quality. The

dimensions were reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibility. Since then, researchers have used the SERVQUAL scale of Parasuraman etal. (1988) in a variety of settings. Buttle (1996, p. 8) reported that SERVQUAL was used in varied contexts such as hospitals (Carman, 1990; Kilbourne et al., 2004); hotels (Johns, 1993; Saleh & Ryan, 1991); travel, tourism, and ecotourism (Ban & Ramsaran, 2017; Rezaei et al., 2018); business schools (Rigotti & Pitt, 1992); business-to-business channel partners (Kong & Mayo, 1993); accounting firms (Freeman & Dart, 1993); architectural services (Baker & Lamb, 1994); recreational services (Taylor et al., 1993); airline catering (Erdil & Yildiz, 2011); banking (Lam, 2002; Lau et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2002); convenience store (Sharma, 2015); festive and sports events (Biscaia et al., 2017; Lee & Beeler, 2009; Park et al., 2011; Thrane, 2014; Tkaczynski & Stokes, 2010) and local government (Scott & Shieff, 1993). Researchers have also used SERVQUAL in areas such as information systems and telecommunications (Jiang et al., 2000; van der Wal et al., 2002). In 2001, Brady and Cronin integrated the Gronroos service quality model (1984) and the SERVQUAL scale to develop a new model. They defined interaction, environment, and outcome as three primary dimensions of service quality. Each primary dimension had three sub-dimensions. Brady and Cronin (2001) recommended managers use Parasuraman et al. (1988) to improve the quality of any of their primary dimensions. Based on Brady and Cronin's (2001) recommendation, we propose that SERVQUAL should be used to measure the service quality of trade shows.

Measuring Service Quality of Trade Show

Munuera and Ruiz (1999) conceptualised trade shows as services. They argued that trade shows were intangible, inseparable, heterogeneous, and perishable services. Many others also recognised trade shows as a service-intensive offering (Geigenmüller & Bettis-outland, 2012;

Jung, 2005; Sarmento et al., 2015). Existing studies indicate that trade show organisers (Munuera & Ruiz, 1999), exhibitors (O'Hara et al., 1993), and visitors (Konopacki, 1996) consider trade shows as services. Konopacki (1996) studied more than 300 executives visiting trade shows. He found that more than 78% of executives use hands-on demonstrations or presentations to gain product knowledge. The intangible knowledge gained in trade shows makes them a service-oriented experience (Konopacki, 1996). Therefore, researchers tried to measure the service quality of trade shows. Jung (2005) tried to understand the various dimensions of service quality from the attendees' perspective. He empirically tested and proposed six dimensions of exhibition service quality. The dimensions were booth management, accessibility, layout of booth and functions, attractiveness, registration, and content. Jung also found that attendees gave more importance to the number and quality of exhibitors. The attendees also considered the quality of seminars and conferences at the exhibition. However, citing Carman (1990), Jung argued that SERVQUAL was ineffective and relied on multiple scales to measure the service quality. Following the same approach, Chen and Mo (2012) used multiple scales, including Jung (2005), to identify the service quality dimensions. Chen and Mo (2012) examined the attendees' perspective on the service quality of an exhibition organiser. They found six dimensions of exhibitor's service quality, similar to Jung (2005). However, the relative importance of the dimensions was different. These dimensions were booth management; booth layout and function; content; registration; access; and exhibition and booth attractiveness. Lin and Lin (2013) also used Jung's (2005) six dimensions to measure service quality from the perspective of exhibitors. They identified six dimensions of service quality. These include exhibition marketing, exhibition design, surrounding environment, service personnel, booth management, and service information. Gottlieb et al. (2011) studied the service quality in trade shows from Brady and

Cronin's (2001) perspective. They identified three dimensions of service quality as interaction, environmental, and outcome quality. Interaction quality referred to the attitude, behaviour, and expertise of the participants. Environmental quality comprised ambient conditions, design, and social factors. The outcome quality meant the waiting time, tangibles, and valence. Wu et al. (2016) added one more dimension to the three provided by Gottlieb et al. (2011): access quality. Theodorakis et al. (2015) further used the dimensions recommended by Wu et al. (2016) in measuring the service quality of a sports event. Lin (2016) also utilised Brady and Cronin's (2001) framework to measure the service quality of a trade show. Kim and Lee (2010) found nine dimensions of service quality of trade shows. The dimensions include the host and public relations, security, reputation and reliability, access, customer service, exhibition program, physical facilities, convenience facilities, and attendance costs. SERVQUAL dimensions are similar to many dimensions of the scales mentioned above. For comparison, please refer to Table 1.

The above discussion indicates that most scales on trade show service quality utilise Brady and Cronin's (2001) work and cite Carman (1990) to conclude that SERVQUAL is inappropriate. However, researchers have used SERVQUAL in varied contexts such as industrial, commercial, and not-for-profit, as discussed earlier (Buttle, 1996). Therefore, in line with the majority literature indicating a broad application of SERVQUAL, the present paper examines its applicability in trade shows hitherto not studied.

<<Insert Table 1 about here>>

Propositions

The services marketing literature suggests that service orientation leads to satisfied customers, which in turn results in positive customer behaviour (Johnson, 1996). Service

effectiveness is believed to be a critical organisational objective that can provide organisations with a competitive advantage (Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). Jung (2005) concluded that attendees give importance to participating exhibitors, quality of products, and conferences/seminars organised at an exhibition. Kim and Lee (2010) examined the relationship between trade shows' service quality and performance. Apart from the nine dimensions of service quality, they identified five types of performances. These included sales performance, information collection, networking, image building, and motivation. Kim and Lee (2010) found a positive influence of a trade show's quality on its performance.

Lin and Lin (2013) used the analytical hierarchy process (AHP) to prioritize the dimensions of service quality from the exhibitors' perspective. They found that exhibition marketing was the most critical dimension. It referred to various strategies employed by trade show organizers to attract visitors and exhibitors to the shows. Gottlieb et al. (2011) evaluated the influence of service quality and trade show effectiveness on post-show purchase intention. They concluded that overall service quality positively influenced visitors' perceptions and post-purchase behaviour. In related research, Gottlieb et al. (2014) developed a model to measure consumer perceptions of trade show effectiveness. They used factor analysis and identified three dimensions of trade show effectiveness. The three dimensions were operational, research (information gain), and entertainment. Gottlieb et al. (2014) study indicates that the perception of the effectiveness of a trade show depends upon the factors which are indicative of the service quality of trade shows.

The above literature review indicates that most researchers have devised specific dimensions of service quality for trade shows. However, no one had applied SERVQUAL for measuring trade show service quality. An examination of dimensions identified in the literature

indicates that they are closely related. Therefore, SERVQUAL can parsimoniously represent these dimensions. However, we agree that the relative importance of these dimensions may vary, as suggested by the trade show literature. Next, we discuss the similarities between the dimensions of SERVQUAL and other scales identified in the literature.

Tangibility

Parasuraman et al. (1988) suggested that physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of sales personnel indicate the tangible components of service quality. Gopalakrishna and Williams (1992) also emphasized the appearance of booth personal. They suggested that salespersons' appearance and proficiency improve the lead conversion efficiency of exhibitors. Kim and Lee (2010) found the physical facility to be one of the tangible dimensions of service quality. This dimension refers to designing booths with appropriate signage and product display, as well as booth layout. Jung (2005) also indicated that spatial environment, physical layout, and functionality of the physical layout are essential constituents of service quality. Gottlieb et al. (2011) proposed a holistic environmental quality of trade shows which includes sub-dimensions such as ambient conditions, design, and social factors. The environmental quality included ambient conditions such as lighting, colour, sound, design, and spatial layout, which facilitates exchange among attendees and exhibitors. Their study results further indicate that the effective use of the environment leads to better performance. Lin and Lin (2013) recognized that the physical environment is a crucial component of the service quality of an exhibition. Lin and Lin (2013) also noticed that exhibitors were concerned about the comfort and cleanliness of the physical environment.

The service marketing literature emphasises that marketers should promote 'intangible dominant' services using tangible evidence (Shostack, 1977). According to Lovelock (1983),

trade shows are services with intangible actions directed at people's minds. Visitors possesses nothing tangible after the trade show visit is over. They develop networks and gain intangible knowledge. Therefore, the literature recommends marketing 'intangible dominant' trade shows with tangibles (Lovelock, 1983; Shostack, 1977) such as the physical layout, ambience, and salespersons' appearance. To summarise, the tangibles should be one of the most critical components of the service quality of a trade show. Therefore, we propose that

P1: The factor 'tangibles' will contribute significantly higher than other factors towards the service quality of a trade show.

Assurance

Parasuraman et al. (1988) merged the credibility, competence, communication, courtesy, and security dimensions of the original SERVQUAL scale and labelled it as assurance. The tangibility dimension measured the appearance of the service providers while the assurance dimension measured their knowledge, courtesy, and ability to gain consumer trust. Other researchers have also considered similar attributes of salespersons in developing dimensions for their scale. For instance, Jung (2005) considered booth personnel knowledge as one of the items of the booth management dimension.

Similarly, Gottlieb et al. (2011) named expertise as one of the sub-dimensions of interaction quality. They argued that stakeholders consider interaction as a crucial motive of trade shows. Hence, sales personnel's expertise will have a significant impact on the service quality perception of visitors (Bitner et al., 1994; Jap, 2001). Wu et al. (2016) identified four sub-dimensions of interaction quality. One of the sub-dimensions included expertise and problem-solving ability. Parasuraman et al. (1988) included security as one aspect of assurance dimension. However, only a few researchers (Kim & Lee, 2010; Lin & Lin, 2013) have

considered safety to be important in service quality. For instance, Lin and Lin (2013) considered safety and control to constitute booth management quality. Kim and Lee (2010) also mentioned security as one of the dimensions of trade show service quality. As information and knowledge gathering is one of the prime motives of visitors, competence, expertise, and courtesy of salespersons will play a crucial role in a pleasant experience. Hence, assurance is likely to be one of the most critical factors in the service quality of a trade show. Therefore, we propose that P2: The factor 'assurance' will contribute significantly higher than other factors towards the service quality of a trade show.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of performance and dependability (Wels-Lips et al., 1998). Reliability is the ability to deliver the promised service dependably and accurately. It is about keeping the promises related to specification, pricing, delivery time, and complaint handling (Bloemer et al., 1999). While assurance is a pre-sales phenomenon, reliability is a post-sales phenomenon. Reliability is "relationship intensive". The reliability dimension becomes important when service encounters are frequent (Keaveney, 1995). For example, Bloemer et al. (1999) found that reliability is vital for the retail industry. Customers expect retail shops to be consistent in deliverables such as inventory, opening hours, offers, and other services.

On the other hand, trade show visitors are heterogeneous (Getz et al., 2001). Secondly, trade shows are often an annual event, reducing service encounters. Munuera and Ruiz (1999) also argue that trade shows are complex services and consumed infrequently. Hence, for infrequently consumed services, reliability may not contribute towards quality as much as tangibles and assurance. For many first-time visitors to trade shows, reliability may matter less, but assurance and tangibles may be of prime importance. Hence, we propose that,

P3: The factor 'reliability' may contribute significantly lower than other factors towards the service quality of a trade show.

Empathy

Empathy is defined as caring and individualised attention to customers by service providers. It comprises the dimensions of ‘understanding’ and ‘accessibility’ from the original SERVQUAL scale. Kim and Lee (2010) consider entry cost and public relations to fall under the accessibility dimension. However, Jung (2005) and Chen and Mo (2012) consider ‘access’ as a separate dimension. Munuera and Ruiz (1999) also consider strategic location and ‘accessibility’ as an essential aspect of service quality since it cannot be modified in the short term. According to Jung (2005), ‘accessibility’ involves approachability and ease of contact. Lin and Lin (2013) discuss ‘accessibility’ under the surrounding environment and ‘understanding’ under the service personnel dimension. Wu et al. (2016) consider ‘understanding’ as a part of the booth personnel’s ability and sociability. They posited accessibility as a separate dimension involving ease in navigation both within the trade show and in reaching the trade show. Service literature indicates empathy is necessary when the emotional content in service expectations is high. For example, empathy is vital in the health care industry (Bloemer et al., 1999). Trade show visitors have objectives such as gathering competitive intelligence and exploring market trends and new product opportunities. The visitors expect informational content to be high and emotional content to be lower. Hence, empathy may not feature high in service quality perceptions of trade shows. Though accessibility and location are important, these are often taken care of by the organisers. Most trade shows are organised at places which are easily accessed, and that have a large area to allow for easy navigation within the trade show (Tafesse & Korneliussen, 2012). Hence, we propose,

P4: The factor 'empathy' will contribute significantly lower than other factors towards the service quality of a trade show.

Responsiveness

Parasuraman et al. (1988) define responsiveness as providing prompt service. The trade literature discusses responsiveness as a part of booth management (Jung, 2005); trade show interaction quality (Gottlieb et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2016); customer service (Kim & Lee, 2010); and service information (Chen & Mo, 2012). Responsiveness becomes essential when customers have clear expectations about waiting time, waiting line, and opening hours. However, trade shows have multiple booths involving varying visitors. Also, visitors can switch booths and visit timing to manage their expectations. Hence, responsiveness may not be a critical service quality attribute. We propose

P5: The factor 'empathy' will contribute significantly lower than other factors towards the service quality of a trade show.

Methodology

Sample

The data was collected from the India International Trade Fair (IITF). The IITF is one of the premier annual events organised by the India Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO). IITF is an integrated trade fair targeting both the business and customer segments. In 2014, IITF was spread across 94,300 square metres and attracted 6,800 exhibitors, including 299 foreign companies from 25 different countries (ITFF, 2019). The magnitude and diversity of exhibitors indicate that the trade show was apt to study service quality. Enumerators used the intercept method of data collection. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the participants were asked to fill out a structured questionnaire. The enumerators informed the respondents that the

survey was conducted by an independent researcher who had no connection to the organisers or exhibitors of the trade show.

The exhibitors target both business and end customers. Therefore, the visitor profile varied from senior managers to trade delegates to the general public. For this study, a total of 400 visitors filled the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics suggested that the sample represented almost equal proportions of males and females. Nearly half (49.5%) of the sample population was female, and the rest 50.5% was male. A binomial test was conducted to examine if the proportion of the two genders can be considered equal. The p-value of 0.789 indicated that the sample represents both genders equally. Of the respondents, 22.3 % were first-time visitors to the ITPO trade fair. A large percentage (78%) of repeat visitors indicated the success of the trade show. Most of the visitors (97%) had visited at least one trade fair before the ITPO trade fair. Their age ranged from 23 to 62 years, and the mean age was 32. Most of the visitors in the sample were professionals with a mean experience of 9.50 years. However, out of 400 respondents, 16.8% had no professional experience. The sample description indicates a varied mix of respondents representing different motives to attend a trade show (Gottlieb et al., 2011). Hence, the sample was appropriate to study trade show service quality.

Further, non-response bias was also checked since it can be a threat to the criterion validity of the study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). An ANOVA was conducted with gender as the grouping variable and “Purchase Intention” as the dependent variable. The result indicated no significant difference in purchase intention between the genders. A multi-group analysis was also conducted to see if the relationships between SERVQUAL dimensions and purchase intention differed based on gender. No significant difference was observed in any path, indicating that gender does not affect the model (Sharma et al, 2010).

Measure

We used SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985) to measure service quality. The scale consisted of 34 items and ten dimensions. Following Carman's (1990) recommendation, we used the original SERVQUAL scale. To measure purchase intention, we used Morwitz and Schmittlein's (1992) three-item scale. SPSS 24 and AMOS 24 were used to analyse the data. Missing values and outliers were treated before data analysis. Mahalanobis distance was used to identify and treat the outliers (Byrne, 2013). Multivariate normality was checked using Mardia's coefficient. The rule of thumb suggests that it should lie within ±2.0 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). A Mardia's coefficient of 157.07 suggested that the data was not normal (Byrne, 2013). However, we use the maximum likelihood estimation method to tackle the problem of multivariate normality (Ladhari, 2007; Das, 2014). Next, we performed exploratory factor analysis using the OBLIMIN procedure as followed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) to purify the scale.

The process resulted in the deletion of thirteen items. The remaining twenty-one items resulted in five factors. As the common method variance could pose a problem in questionnaire-based studies with similar scales, we conducted the Harman single factor test. All variables were loaded on a single factor. The single factor explained 38.5% of the total variance, indicating common method variance is not an issue (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the five factors to check for internal consistency reliability of the summated dimensions. Six items were further deleted, as the factor loadings were low (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998), leaving only fifteen items in the final scale. Table 2 provides the factors and corresponding variables in the final solution. Table 3 provides the details of the dropped variables.

<<Insert Table 2 about here>>

<<Insert Table 3 about here>>

Findings

Measurement Model

We first analysed the measurement model of the final scale with seventeen items (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Sethi & King, 1994). The adequacy of the individual items and the composites were assessed by measures of reliability and validity (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). We tested the reliability of each construct by using Cronbach's alpha (Santos, 1999). All Cronbach's alpha values were higher than the minimum acceptable value of 0.70. For convergent validity of our measures, we examined the significance of factor loadings (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988) and composite reliability. Further, discriminant validity was assessed by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) with the square of the correlation between the latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 4 provides the convergent and discriminant validity of scale items.

<<Insert Table 4 about here>>

The convergent validity seemed acceptable, as all the factor loadings were significant. The composite reliability of each construct was higher than the cut-off value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). The discriminant validity was also established, as the AVE of each factor exceeded its correlation with any other factor. The results indicated a good model fit: x2 = 301.287 (p = .0), df = 111, x2/df = 2.714, RMSEA = .066, CFI = .983, standard RMR = .05 GFI = .927. All the fit indices were better than the recommended ones (RMSEA ≤ .06, CFI > .95 stdRMR < .05).

Structural Model

After checking the measurement model fit, the structural model was tested. The structural model also indicated an acceptable fit: fit: χ 2 = 264.885 (p 0.000), df = 101, χ 2/df = 2.623,

SRMR = .05, RMSEA = .064, CFI = .984, GFI = .931, with most of the fit indices in line with the recommended values. The results obtained are as per our propositions.

The results supported our propositions of tangibility β (0.400**) being the most critical factor which influences purchase intention. Assurance with β (0.152*) was also found to have a significant effect on purchase intention. However, other factors were not found to be significant.

<<Insert Figure 1 about here>>

Discussion

Existing trade show literature (Chen & Mo, 2012; Jung, 2005; Lin & Lin, 2013) cited Carman (1990) to infer that SERVQUAL was inappropriate for measuring service quality in trade shows. They further used Carman (1990) to justify developing new scales for trade shows without actually testing the reliability and validity of SERVQUAL. The present study establishes that SERVQUAL is apt for measuring service quality in trade shows. It was illogical to assume that a scale which has been successful in varied contexts (Buttle, 1996; Kilbourne et al., 2004; Erdil & Yildiz, 2011, Lam, 2002; Lau et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2002) will not work for trade shows without checking once. However, in line with Carman (1990), the present study also found weak factor loadings of some scale items, which resulted in their being dropped. It is perhaps for this reason that Carman (1990) advised researchers to use the original SERVQUAL scale with thirty-four items and not the revised one with 22 items.

The dimensions derived by others in the literature (Jung, 2005; Gottlieb et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2016) and SERVQUAL were similar (refer to Table 1). The results provide credibility for Brady and Cronin's (2001) framework, wherein they suggested that their dimensions were the modified versions of the SERVQUAL scale. As the underlying structure of Brady and Cronin's (2001) framework was SERVQUAL, the scales developed using their framework resulted in

similar dimensions as SERVQUAL. The replication and similarity of dimensions across various scales indicate that SERVQUAL is apt to measure service quality even in trade shows. It also provides credibility to the new scales developed. However, given the popularity and broader generalisability of the SERVQUAL scale in varied contexts, the present study concludes that SERVQUAL should be preferred in a trade show context over other scales.

The present study examined the relationship of SERVQUAL dimensions with the purchase intention of visitors. Similar to studies using different scales, the current research also found that tangibility and assurance have a significant influence on the purchase intention of visitors (Kim & Lee, 2010; Jung 2005; Gottlieb et al., 2011). However, empathy, responsiveness, and reliability do not significantly affect visitors' purchase intention. The similar results obtained from the present study using SERVQUAL and other studies using different scales indicate the reliability and validity of the SERVQUAL scale in the trade show context.

Although gender is fundamental to market segmentation in consumer research, its use as a moderating variable in event management literature is scarce (Draper & Neal, 2018; Ramirez et al., 2013). It is scarcer in trade show literature. Most of the earlier studies have considered gender only as a demographic variable and not as a control variable (Chen & Mo, 2012; Theodorakis et al., 2015; Wong et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2016; Yi et al., 2018). The only notable study by Ramirez et al. (2013) with gender as one of the variable is exploratory in nature. Men and women respond differently to stimuli is a ubiquitous knowledge today (Palan et al., 2001). Therefore, to examine any difference between the gender, we conducted a chi-square difference test using multigroup analysis for each of the proposed relationships between the SERVQUAL dimensions and the purchase intention. The results indicated no difference in any path coefficients between the SERVQUAL dimensions and purchase intention for the two groups.

One of the plausible reasons for this indifference between the two groups could be the large professional population in our sample. Usually, buying decisions in professional settings are rational and procedural. Also, as discussed earlier, the visitors have a specific objective while visiting a trade show. Sometimes the objective is to get insights into new products, market trends and competitors. Other objectives can be to identify potential vendors and clients. Some others visit them with the aim of networking and image building. Therefore, the gender-specific differences usually found in the business to consumer context was not found in the trade show context.

Theoretical Contribution

The present study has several meaningful theoretical contributions. It empirically corrects a wrong notion held widely in the trade show literature that SERVQUAL is inappropriate for measuring the service quality of trade shows (Gottlieb et al., 2011). The present study further reduces the heterogeneity of a variety of different scales by showing that most scales have similar underlying dimensions. Finally, the present study also provides validity to other scales, as the results obtained from most studies are similar.

Managerial Implications

The present study provides several managerial implications for improving visitors' willingness to purchase. First, the parsimonious framework using SERVQUAL model helped in identifying different facets of service quality in a trade show. More specifically, the results suggest that tangibility followed by assurance are the two most crucial variables influencing the purchase intention in a trade show. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we will discuss the managerial implications based on the results.

The existing literature indicates that intangible services should be marketed using tangibles (Shostack, 1977). The prominent motive of visitors to trade shows is networking and gaining knowledge (Tafesse & Skallerud, 2017). Accordingly, our study indicates that managers should enhance the tangibility of their offerings in trade shows. Managers can increase the tangibility of their offerings by displaying product or product prototypes and providing brochures and on-screen displays (Munuera & Ruiz, 1999). Product prototypes, products and brochures provide knowledge but with an ability for visitors to touch and feel the same. Therefore, such displays have more chances of remaining in the memory of the visitors. Tangibility is important because more than 50% of trade show visits are triggered by environmental stimuli (Gottlieb et al., 2011). Tangibles, such as free samples, free show merchandise presented as a sign of appreciation to visitors may have a direct impact on their perception.

Further, networking and knowledge sharing can be enhanced by 'booth layout and function' as well as 'booth management'. These two elements are also a part of tangibility of the service. Booth layout may facilitate a friendly interaction and networking need of the visitors. Booth layout may be designed as per customer segments to further facilitate networking and sharing knowledge. A good graphical or animated representation of the brand inside the booth may help managers to register the targeted brand in the minds of the prospective customers (Lin & Lin, 2013).

Booth management includes aspects such as the location of the booth and management of crowding inside it. Exhibitors should avoid putting booths in less desirable locations or dead zones. Very few visitors visit such dead zones. Location of the booth also influences the product, product prototypes and on-screen displays. Booths at dead zones also limits the social exchange among the visitors. At the same time, too much of a crowd can also result in a negative outcome.

It may limit quality interaction and result in dissatisfaction of prospective customers. Therefore the booth management should have an appropriate crowd control (Gottlieb et al., 2011). To manage crowd for an optimal interaction, managers may use some intangible components of booth environment such as music and lightening. The managers should provide a spacious layout which facilitates not only a large crowd to enter but also to have a good interaction and networking. As already stated, trade show visitors consider networking and gaining knowledge to be of prime importance (Tafesse & Skallerud, 2017).

The present study also indicates that visitors need assurance of quality before committing to a purchase. Exhibitors should increase this assurance by displaying medals and awards won, quality certifications achieved, testimonials of past satisfied consumers, and experienced salespeople at the trade show. Service marketing literature indicates that customers perceive quality on the basis of the service delivery process (Parasuraman et al., 1994). Assurance also includes aspects of visitors interaction. Therefore, the exhibitors should have trained staff for interactions. Hiring and deployment of staff at the booth should be done keeping the customer interactions in mind.

Different visitors have different objectives, such as identifying vendors, finalising purchase decision, collecting information, networking and image building (Rai & Nayak, 2020; Wong et al., 2017). Managers should, therefore, train booth personnel to first understand the objective of the visitors. Then according to visitors objective booth managers may help customers to achieve their specific objectives.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

The present study is not without limitations. The existing research indicates that there may be a gap between purchase intention and actual purchases (Carrington et al., 2014; Nicholls

& Lee, 2006). Researchers may exercise caution in using the results for sales forecasts. The existing literature indicates that visitors have different motives to attend trade shows (Tafesse & Skallerud, 2015). The present study did not segment the respondents, and therefore, the results are indicative of the overall population.

Future studies may adopt a causal research design to quantify the effect of tangibles and assurance on purchase intention. Future researchers may also use actual sales, if available, instead of purchase intention. The result of the study may also vary based on factors such as the type of show. A trade show can be a general trade show or an industry specific trade show. Future studies should therefore conduct comparative studies for a different type of trade shows. Comparative study on type of trade show will help managers with a more nuanced understanding of the subject. Future studies may use segmentation based on motives (Pandey & Sharma, 2019). Results based on segments may better help managers in the areas of targeting and positioning.

Trade shows in developing economies have relatively not achieved maturity and professionalism as found in trade shows of developed economies. Therefore, a comparative study among developed and developing nations can further help in establishing the validity of the SERVQUAL scale (Sharma et al., 2018a). We also expect a probable variation in the prioritisation of SERVQUAL dimension in developed and developing economies (Sharma et al., 2018b). So, a work in this direction can inform current scholarship on the difference in importance of SERVQUAL dimensions, in two types of economies.

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Table 1

Comparison of Dimensions of Trade Show Service Quality

Author/Dimension										
Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985)	Reliability	Responsiveness	Tangibles	Competence	Communication	Courtesy	Security	Credibility	Understanding	Access
Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988)	Reliability	Responsiveness	Tangibles	Assurance					Empathy	
Jung (2005)	Booth management, Contents	Booth Management, Registration	Contents, Booth Layout and Function, Exhibition and booth attractiveness	Booth Management	Booth Management	Booth Management, Exhibition and booth attractiveness		Booth Management, Contents	Booth Layout and Function, Registration, Booth Management	Registration, Access, Booth layout and Function
Chen and Mo (2012)	Booth management, Contents	Booth Management, Registration	Contents, Booth Layout and Function, Exhibition and booth attractiveness	Booth Management	Booth Management	Booth Management, Exhibition and booth attractiveness		Booth Management, Contents	Booth Layout and Function, Registration, Booth Management	Registration, Access, Booth layout and Function

Lin and Lin (2013)	Exhibition Design, Service Personnel	Exhibition Marketing, Service Information	Booth Management, Surrounding Environment	Service Personnel	Exhibition Marketing, Service Personnel, Service Information	Surrounding Environment, Service Personnel	Booth Management, Surrounding Environment	Exhibition Design, Service Information	Service Personnel	Surrounding Environment
Gottlieb, Brown and Drennan (2011)	Outcome Quality	Trade Show Interaction Quality	Environment Quality, Outcome Quality	Outcome quality	Trade show Interaction Quality	Trade Show Interaction Quality		Environment Quality, Outcome Quality		Environment Quality
Wu, Cheng and Ai (2016)	Outcome Quality	Interaction Quality, Outcome quality	Physical Environment	Physical Environment, Interaction Quality	Interaction Quality	Interaction Quality		Physical Environment	Outcome Quality	Access Quality
Kim and Lee (2010)	Reputation and Reliability	Customer Service	Physical Facility	Host and Public Relation	Host and Public Relation	Host and Public Relation	Security	Convenient Facility, Reputation	Attendance Cost, Public relation	Access

Table 2

SERVQUAL Scale Items for Trade Show

Scale Items	Empathy	Reliable	Tangibility	Assurance	Responsive
I feel that the appearance of the support personal is professional	0.96				
I get enough personal attention	0.91				
I think that IITF's reputation is positive in the market	0.95				
The Fair is present at a convenient location.	0.99				
Waiting time to receive service is not extensive	0.86				
Cronbach Alpha (α)	**0.97**				
My record is being kept correctly.		0.95			
The transaction slip is mailed to me directly		0.73			
The customer call back is done quickly		0.97			
Cronbach Alpha (α)		**0.88**			
The hours of operation are convenient for me.			0.96		
My confidential information is safe with IITF			0.70		
The physical facilities provided by the IITF were good			0.97		
Cronbach Alpha (α)			**0.891**		
The personnel organizing the fair are considerate about customer's property				0.99	
I believe putting a stall in IITF will bring more business				0.98	
Cronbach Alpha (α)				**0.998**	
IITF is performing the service at the designated time.					0.98
The services are given promptly (e.g., setting up appointments quickly).					0.89
Cronbach Alpha (α)					**0.95**

Table 3

Dropped Item from SERVQUAL (1985 Scale)

Dropped Item
The business lead information obtained is accurate
My record is being kept correctly.
The knowledge and skill of the contact personnel is commendable
The knowledge and skill of operational support personnel is satisfactory
The research capability of the organization is commendable
The information regarding fair service is easily accessible by telephone (lines are not busy and they don't put you on hold);
The public contact personal appear neat and clean
I am satisfied with the explanation given by the contact person about the IITF's services
The costs of services were explained clearly by the contact person.
I am satisfied with the explanation provided by the contact person about the services being provided at the given cost
I am sure that my problems will be addressed properly by IITF personal
I think that IITF brand name is credible
I think that IITF's reputation is positive in the market
I think the contact personnel of IITF are trustworthy
I feel that the contact person was honest
I feel physically secure at the IITF premises
I believe putting a stall in IITF will bring more business
I feel that contact personnel tried to understand my specific needs
I get enough personal attention
The regular clients get recognized and valued by IITF
The tools or equipment given by IITF for participating organisations are good
The physical representations of the service by IITF are appealing
The participating stalls are from reputed companies

Table 4

Convergent and Discriminant Validity Table

	CR	AVE	MSV	Reliable	Tangibility	Assurance	Responsive	Empathy	Purchase Intention
Reliable	0.897	0.749	0.475	**0.866**					
Tangibility	0.914	0.783	0.582	0.045	**0.885**				
Assurance	0.998	0.997	0.023	0.150**	0.048	**0.998**			
Responsive	0.999	0.998	0.475	0.689***	0.038	0.089†	**0.999**		
Empathy	0.971	0.872	0.582	0.149**	0.763***	0.056	0.093†	**0.934**	
Purchase Intention	0.864	0.687	0.44	0.06	0.664***	0.136**	0.045	0.548***	**0.829**

Figure 1

*Structural Model of Relationship between SERVQUAL and Purchase Intention (Sig. level * 0.10, **0.05)*