User Satisfaction and Service Quality of the University Libraries in Kerala

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ABSTRACT
In university libraries user satisfaction and perceptions of quality depend on the extent to which customer expectations are matched by information products and services delivered by the library. They also expect that the library should be equipped with good resources and consistent services. Understanding users' references along service quality dimensions reveal their priorities and addressing the same would reduce the gaps in service quality. The present study is an attempt to evaluate the service quality and the extent of user satisfaction of the university libraries from the perspective of respondents from different user groups. The data for the study was collected from 842 users from the university libraries in Kerala through a well-structured questionnaire. The quality of services assessed through RATER analysis based on the seventeen variables suggested by Parasuraman and Zeithaml. The study found that the quality of services rendered by the university libraries is moderately good. The users of the university libraries in Kerala are largely satisfied with various aspects of service quality except responsiveness and are moderately satisfied with the physical facilities, collection, services, staff behavior etc.

Key words: Service quality; user satisfaction, RATER analysis: information products and services; marketing.

INTRODUCTION
Libraries are facing serious competition from commercial information services providers which essentially use the resources available from libraries and analyze and repackage the same for customized use by the clients. Also, online resources are emerging in a big way that will question the role and form of libraries in future. In the competitive information environment, information is being recognized as critical resource for socio-economic development. Scientific and technical information growth is exponential and the users are confused with the right information at the right time. Thus, libraries have been putting considerable efforts in the design information products and services in distributing the same effectively and efficiently. In view of the social, economic and technological changes libraries and information centers begun to realize the need for good quality information products and services as an integral part of its administration and existence.

Library and information providers have recognized the need for a customer focused service. The provider focused policies in fact have enhanced the gap between acquisition and utilization of services. Libraries need to eliminate unnecessary, expensive and non-value added process and have to limit to identify the quality and quantify their information services and to compare with similar other libraries. In this context it is very important to develop a mechanism to identify the latest potent and dormant need of the users.

In the digital environment university libraries should keep abreast with the information need of the time. In light of this reality, it is imperative for university libraries to improve the quality of their services and seek means to ensure that their services meet and preferably exceed user expectations. This study examines the overall service quality of university libraries in Kerala from users' perspectives, as well as identifies the dimensions that determine the customers' evaluation of service quality.

BACKGROUND
In Kerala there are eight major universities viz. University of Kerala, Mahatma Gandhi University, Cochin University of Science and Technology, University of Calicut, University of Kannur, Kerala Agricultural University, Sree Sankaracharya Sanskrit University and Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod. Of these, University of Kannur and Central University of Kerala are newly established universities and have only just started to building up their library. Kerala Agricultural University and Sree Sankaracharya Sanskrit University are specialized universities. Hence the study is limited to four university libraries viz. Kerala University Library (KUL), Mahatma Gandhi University Library (MGUL), Cochin University of Science and Technology Library (CUSATL) and CH Mohammed Koya Library of
University of Calicut (CHMKL). The university library system normally consists of one central library and several department libraries. But the span of this study is restricted to the central library only. Though the users of the university library represent a cross section of the society, priority has been given to teachers, research scholars, students, non-teaching staff and public on the ground that they form the core target group of the university library system.

OBJECTIVES
The purposes of the study are:

- To assess the overall service quality of university libraries in Kerala from the users' perspectives.
- To identify the problems users had encountered in the university libraries.
- To evaluate the extent of user satisfaction in the university libraries in Kerala.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY
The sample consists of different types of users with different characteristics and are grouped into five, based on the type of membership such as:

- **Students**- consisting of students of colleges affiliated to the universities in Kerala and university teaching departments.
- **Research Scholars**- consisting of those doing research in the university teaching departments, affiliated colleges and centers recognized by the universities.
- **Teachers**- Teachers and Research Guides of affiliated colleges, university teaching departments and research centers recognized by the universities.
- **Non-Teaching Staff**- consisting of administrative staff and other officials of the universities.
- **Public**- those who cannot be included under the above categories. This includes graduate members, personal working in the nearby offices, and members of the senate, syndicate, and other statutory bodies.

Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed in each of the four university library. Multi stage stratified random sampling technique is used to ensure representation of all the categories. Out of the 1000 questionnaires distributed, 842 were selected as baseline data for the study.

The quality of services assessed through RATER analysis based on the seventeen variables suggested by Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1983). The questions were designed to be responded on a five point Likert scale to measure both respondent satisfaction and perception of service quality. Level of user satisfaction measured in a five-point scale. The scoring is done by giving weights to the responses. The scoring pattern for the responses are Strongly Agree (SA)-5, Agree (A)-4, Not sure (NS)-3, Disagree (D)-2 and Strongly Disagree (SD)-1.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Martey studied the importance of the quality of service with a focus on the customers of Ghanaian Library. It was found that the library was not capable of providing quality services to users because of the serious problems of funding. Mahesh (2002) examined the barriers that have prevented libraries from implementing marketing programmes, when libraries and information centres were recognized as potential sources of revenue generation. The study pointed out that poor quality of services and lack of trained personnel was the major inhibiting factors for efficient information services. Rajesh Singh (2003) discussed the shifting paradigms and emerging issues in the library and information service profession, which influence the services provider- customer relationship. It was suggested that for long-term survival and growth, libraries and information centers need to build, develop and maintain a relationship with their customers. Broad-Preston et al (2006). analyzed the result of two surveys conducted at the University of Malta Library, and Lanchester Library and discussed about the marketing concept of today's library and information centers covering various topics such as management of libraries and commitment to customer's satisfaction. Zabed Ahmed (2009) scrutinized service quality in academic libraries in the Northern Region of Malaysia and gave a useful insight to the academic libraries and other related bodies on the extent of the quality service provided to the users. Das and Karn (2008) discussed customer/user's topic such as customers’ priorities, customers' expectations, individuality, responsiveness, relationships, quality of services, professional skills and competencies and value added services. It is revealed that the services should be value added according to the current requirement of the users.

QUALITY OF SERVICE
The needs and expectations of the consumers are critical factors in assessing service quality. Customer orientation throughout the organization can ensure that service providers get close to the customers, thus ensuring that service delivery meets customer expectations. The customer, in terms of their expectations of the benefits, may judge the actual output of the service. This leads to an important idea in assessing quality from a service perspective. The statements and percentage of responses received for the statements in the five point Likert scale is presented in the Table 1.

Regarding reliability, responses show that the university libraries have the ability to perform promised services, agreed by 70.5% of which 16.6% strongly agreed and it clearly indicates that users are more satisfied with the information services. More than 60% agreed that university libraries provide information service at the right time of which 15.6% strongly agree. The working hours of the libraries are convenient to 73.4% of respondents. Responses of the users show that the ability of the libraries to provide information services dependably and accurately.
It is obvious from the analysis that university libraries are reliable to the users and majorities are satisfied with the demand delivery service of the university libraries in Kerala. More than 60% of the users are satisfied with the knowledge and courtesy of employees in providing information services. Among the statements maximum number agreed that staff members of the library are knowledgeable to answer the queries of the users. It shows that the staffs of the university libraries have the ability to convey trust and confidence in the users. The ability and attitude of the staff members in providing information services in the university libraries are well appreciated by most of the users.

Tangibles refer to maintenance of physical facilities and quality of equipments. The response received for the statements on tangibility shows that most of the users are satisfied with the physical facilities and equipments. 56.9% of the users are satisfied with the modern equipments of the library. Maximum number of users have the opinion that the staff members are neatly dressed but less than 50% satisfied with the physical facilities. The analysis clearly indicates that
majority of the users are satisfied with the appearance and physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and communication materials.

Empathy refers to caring, individualized attention etc. given to users by the library staff. The responses show that majority of the respondents moderately satisfied with the caring and individual help given by the staff. Among the statements, maximum number (68.9%) agreed that staff members of the library tell exactly when library services will be performed followed by prompt services offered by the staff (68.6%). Nearly 50% of the users satisfied with the willingness of the staff to provide personalized services. Some members have negative opinion regarding the problem solving ability of the staff.

USER SATISFACTION

User satisfaction is an important measure of service quality in libraries. User's perceptions about libraries seem to have been largely ignored by library management in developing countries. The assessment of service quality provides an important feedback for libraries to assess and improve its service to the users. This was an attempt to know the level of satisfaction of the users about the adequacy of collection, physical facilities of the library, information products, and services of the library, behavior of the staff, functional organization of the library, electronic resources of the library and marketing activities of the library.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of score regarding level of user satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Services and Resources</th>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Quite Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Quite Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collection of library (Books, Journals etc.)</td>
<td>27 (3.2)</td>
<td>101 (12)</td>
<td>338 (40.1)</td>
<td>236 (28)</td>
<td>140 (16.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic resources</td>
<td>31 (3.7)</td>
<td>118 (14)</td>
<td>295 (35)</td>
<td>270 (32.1)</td>
<td>128 (15.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness of the library</td>
<td>86 (10.2)</td>
<td>121 (14.4)</td>
<td>311 (36.9)</td>
<td>241 (28.6)</td>
<td>83 (9.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting and ventilation</td>
<td>65 (7.7)</td>
<td>173 (20.5)</td>
<td>296 (35.2)</td>
<td>222 (26.4)</td>
<td>86 (10.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating arrangement of the library</td>
<td>58 (6.9)</td>
<td>191 (22.7)</td>
<td>270 (32.1)</td>
<td>223 (26.5)</td>
<td>100 (11.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and networking facilities of the library</td>
<td>33 (3.9)</td>
<td>132 (15.7)</td>
<td>280 (33.3)</td>
<td>266 (31.6)</td>
<td>131 (15.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information services and products of the library</td>
<td>55 (6.5)</td>
<td>134 (15.9)</td>
<td>273 (32.4)</td>
<td>269 (31.9)</td>
<td>111 (13.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional organization of the library</td>
<td>21 (2.5)</td>
<td>91 (10.8)</td>
<td>331 (39.3)</td>
<td>254 (30.2)</td>
<td>145 (17.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior of the staff members of the library</td>
<td>26 (3.1)</td>
<td>92 (10.9)</td>
<td>201 (23.9)</td>
<td>322 (38.2)</td>
<td>201 (23.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing orientation of the library</td>
<td>95 (11.3)</td>
<td>252 (29.9)</td>
<td>349 (41.4)</td>
<td>122 (14.5)</td>
<td>24 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The level of satisfaction of the users about the collection including books and journals, 40.1% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 28% are quite satisfied and 16.6% very satisfied. In the case of electronic resources, 35%, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 32.1% quite satisfied, and 15.2% very satisfied. Majority of the users are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the physical facilities of the library. Regarding the networking facilities in the university libraries in Kerala, 15.6% of the users are very satisfied, 31.6% are quite satisfied and 33.3% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Only 9.9% of the users are very satisfied, 28.6% are quite satisfied and 36.9% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the cleanliness of the libraries.

Lighting and ventilation is very much appreciated by 10.2% of users, 26.4% are quite satisfied and 35.2% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The seating arrangement is very good for 11.9% and moderately good for 26.5% of the users. Regarding the information services and products, 31.9% are moderately satisfied and 13.2% very much satisfied. Only 17.2% of the users are highly satisfied and 30.2% moderately satisfied with the functional organization of the libraries.

Behavior of the staff members are highly rated by 23.9% and moderately rated by 38.2% of the users. It reveals that more than 60% of the users are satisfied with the behavior of the staff in rendering services. Majority of the users have no opinion (41.4%) and 41.2% of the users are dissatisfied with the marketing activities of the university libraries in Kerala. This indicates the need for marketing orientation in the university libraries in Kerala.

Table 3 Library-wise Score regarding quality and user satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Library</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>User Satisfaction</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>User Satisfaction</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KUL</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>20.09**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGUL</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>12.38**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUSATL</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHMKL</td>
<td>59.9</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>206</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Significant at 0.01 level

The service quality evaluation with respect to the university libraries is given in Table 3. It is obvious from the Table that the mean score of user's attitude towards quality of information services in the university libraries vary in range of 59.9 to 66.4. Among the university libraries, CUSATL has the maximum mean score (66.4). This implies that the quality of service rendered by CUSATL is better than other university libraries and the lowest score recorded in CHMKL. The mean score of all university libraries in Kerala for the seventeen statements in a five-point scale considerably exceeds 42.5. It indicates that the users of the university libraries in Kerala are satisfied with the services rendered by the respective university libraries.

Table 3 also shows the users satisfaction based on collection, physical facilities, information products, and services, behavior of the staff, functional organization, electronic resources and marketing activities of the university libraries, CUSATL has the maximum mean score (30.6) followed by MGUL (30.3). The lowest score recorded in CHMKL (26.8). The mean score of all university libraries in Kerala for the ten statements in a five-point scale exceeds 25. It indicates that the users are moderately satisfied with the physical facilities, collection, services, staff behavior etc. by the respective university libraries. From the analysis of variance (ANOVA) it is observed a significant difference in both service quality and satisfaction level of users in different libraries at 1% level of significance.

The category-wise analysis of users response presented in Table 4, shows that the mean score vary from 68.4 to 61.8. Among the members, highest mean score of 68.4 and lowest standard deviation is shown against non-teaching staff followed by public. It shows that the users other than academic community rated the service quality as very good. It may be due to the fact that the non-teaching staff and public who take membership are potential users of the library and they are more satisfied with the services of the library. Among the academic community teachers are more satisfied than others. Students are the least satisfied group with mean 60.2. However, the mean score of all categories for the seventeen statements in a five-point scale well exceeds 42.5 and it indicates that the users of all categories are generally satisfied with the services offered by the university libraries in Kerala.
The membership-wise analysis of user satisfaction regarding other aspects shows that the mean score vary from students (27.8) to non-teaching staff (30.5). It implies that the non-teaching staffs are more satisfied with the physical facilities, collection, information products and behavior of the staff. The second highest mean score recorded against public and students are the least satisfied group.

The ANOVA carried out to test the statistical significance indicates that different categories have different level of satisfaction at 1% level of significance.

**FINDINGS**

The major findings of the study are:

- Quality of services rendered by the university libraries is moderately good. The attitude of the staff in rendering information service and personalized service is appreciated by most of the users. The users of the university libraries in Kerala are largely satisfied with various aspects of service quality except responsiveness. Some of the members give negative responses regarding the problem solving ability of the staff members in the university libraries in Kerala and it may be due to the lack of proper leadership quality.

- Quality of service rendered by CUSATL is better than other libraries. Based on the service quality, CHMKL is ranked last by the users. But users from all libraries are moderately satisfied with the information services and products.

- Non-teaching staff are more satisfied followed by public with the services rendered by the university libraries. Among the academic community teachers are more satisfied and students are the least satisfied group.

- Less than 50% of the users are satisfied with the collection, physical facilities and more than 50% satisfied with the information products and services and functional organization of the libraries. Behavior of the staff is highly appreciated by most of the respondents. The marketing activity is moderately appreciated by most of the members.

- Non-teaching staff are more satisfied with the physical facilities, collection, information services & products, behavior of the staff in the university libraries in Kerala. The second highest mean score is recorded by public. Students are the least satisfied group.

**SUGGESTIONS**

- The users of the university libraries in Kerala are only moderately satisfied with the physical facilities, collection, services, staff behavior etc. Hence, it is suggested that the physical facilities including modernization, air-conditioning, digitization of rare materials, building digital repository, application of IT in rendering services, motivating the staff are the ways in which the libraries can position in a better way to market their products and services.

- Library web 24/7 (24 hours 7 days in a week) access, initiating information desk with liaison librarians, information literacy programmes are the major ways to increase the marketing orientation in the university libraries in Kerala.

- All university libraries in Kerala can develop (automated) personalized services, e.g. virtual reference, e-mail and chat reference systems. The
expected benefits are an improvement in the service quality and improved accessibility of literature by students and researchers. The development of such services benefits from the established network infrastructure and the large number of current users. This service can be offered with relatively small investments in additional infrastructure, hardware, software, and with small incremental operating costs.

The information products and services offered by the university libraries in Kerala are rated as above average. Among the libraries, the information products and services offered by MGUL are ranked high followed by CUSATL. So it is suggested to enhance the quality of services and products offered by KUL and CHMKL.

With the increased prevalence of cell phones and handled devices such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), smart phones, and laptops coupled with the nearly ubiquitous connectivity of Wi-Fi and cellular service in every area of life of the people in Kerala, university libraries should take necessary steps to format the information content for the mobile devices and provide access to catalogue, databases, information products etc. Also it is possible to provide information to their patrons about circulation records, book due dates, overdue notices, membership due date etc.

Some of the members give negative responses regarding the problem solving ability of the staff members in the university libraries in Kerala can be rectified through in-service training for the staff in leadership and management. The appointment of a permanent university librarian in all the university libraries in Kerala is also a measure to improve the quality of services. A dress code for the staff in all the university libraries is also being appreciated.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the study that the university libraries in Kerala need to resort to imaginative design of services and products, and develop communication methods and feedback mechanism to improve the overall functioning. Effective utilization of the resources, services, products can be achieved through the marketing approach.

REFERENCES


