

## Investigating the quality of Service in chain stores using SERVQUAL approach (Case Study: Refah Stores on Alborz Province)

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### Abstract

In Today's competitive environment, organizations must evaluate the quality of their products or Service. If it is so bad, they enhance their quality of service and they maintain their customers and competitive position. This is more important in service organizations. One of these methods is the use of SERVQUAL model. The aim of this study was to assess the quality of Service with the goal of determining the quality of Service provided to customers in chain stores Refah Alborz Province and enhancement of quality of the customer's perspective. The results can be used in the Stores Refah and other similar stores.

The data collection tool was questionnaires that for its reputation, the comments of experts, professors, experts, and consultants have been used. Cronbach's alpha was used in relation to the reliability that its rate was 0.923. The population of the research includes all customers in chain stores is being Alborz province that was an unlimited number. The sample is 384, which randomly selected through a Crejeci and Morgan Table. However, for more accurate and more confident calculations, researchers distributed 500 questionnaires, of which 428 questionnaires were referred to, and hypotheses are based on 428 questionnaires. The designed questionnaire evaluates qualities of Service in six dimensions (physical environment and tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, availability and responsibility).

The results suggest that there is a gap between customer expectations of service quality and their comprehension of this matter. There is a positive and significant relationship between quality of Service and Service.

**Keywords:** service quality, servqual, chain stores

### INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive environment, the organizations need to comprehend the provision of high and propitiate quality Service in order to maintain their current position, to enhance their competitive capability, and to satisfy the customers' needs, and to see it as a key factor for organization's success. The Service' quality is a main and critical issue, and it is an efficient tool to improve the competitive feature and the organization's performance, whose size and direction determines the difference between the customers' perception and expectation from the Service (Aneesh et al, 2014). Service Marketers are constantly busy to develop the strategies for high quality Service and customers' satisfaction (Shaemy Barzaki et al., 2012). The perceived quality of Service resulting from the evaluation procedure is what the customers compare their expectation from the received Service or the perceived Service (Suffizadeh er al., 2011). The impact of quality on business success cannot be ignored. In the past, the quality added to products as a particular advantage, however, today it is a part of the product, and just

superior quality products can enter the competitive markets. Without it, there is no place even on the sidelines (Mansouri and Nejati, 2009). Creating a high level of service quality brings on the service quality, and the customer's satisfaction and loyalty, and in turn, this has led to increasing market share and profitability (Pourhasomi et al, 2013). Evaluating quality of service is a key tool used to recognize the available condition of Service, and to enhance the service quality. The quality of Service affects organization improvement and customer's satisfaction (Igaz & Ali, 2013). Viewing to the Service, they want to demand, the organizations notice the parameters that are not important for the customers, or even they are in contrast to the customers' expectations (Jafarnejad and Rahimi, 2005). Unfortunately, despite of the significant importance of Service quality, many managers are not aware how to measure it, there is a little agreement on the evaluation of Service quality (Shaemy Barzaki et al., 2012). To measure customer's satisfaction with the quality of service, there are different tools that SERVQUAL model is one of these tools (Che rusuli et al, 2013). This model determines gap between expectations (what should be) and perception (how to be) of customers about the Service provided by the organization (Sufi-Zadeh et al., 2011). In developing countries, less attention is paid to the quality of Service. In fact, in developing economies, studies associated with Service are neglect. A part of this neglecting is for this fact that in the past, there is little awareness of the differences between Service management and the management of manufacturing organizations. (Faryabi and Mahmoudi, 2013).it is clear that in the past decades, the people who were employed in Service organizations consist a third of labor force; however, today these people consist three quarter of the labor force in developing countries, and this rate has been rising (Jafarnejad Rahimi, 2005). Thus, due to increasing growth of the role of this organization in economic development, this study evaluates the Service quality in Chain Stores of Refah on Alborz Province. The main question of the research is how the quality of Service in Chain Stores of Iran (Case study: Refah Stores on Alborz province) using SERVQUAL approach?

## STUDY LITERATURE

### Service Quality, significance and dimensions

To meet Customers' expectations and their satisfaction is the most important issue in today's competitive situation. Service marketers are constantly looking for developing strategies to deliver high quality Service and to satisfy the customers (Shaemy Barzaki et al., 2012). No matter the activity, the success of any organization significantly depends on the customers' satisfaction. To increase the customers' satisfaction, not only the organization can enhance the activity extent, it can enlarge its lifecycle, so it can stay in national and international competition (Sufizadeh et al., 2011). Before defining "the quality of service", first we must define what is meant by "quality" and "service". There are many definitions of quality. For example, the quality is defined as the characteristics of the product or service that is able to meet express or implied needs of customers (Abbasi et al., 2013). In another definition, the quality has a wide concept, which the various parts of organization oblige it. Its target is to enhance the efficiency of whole system; in a way that it prevent from emerging the disturbing factors of quality, finally, with the least expense, and at aim to increase the competitive capability, it adapt the whole system to specifications of the customer(the Arabs and Esfandiari, 2003). As an option and a distinct competitive advantage, quality can distinguish the companies in a way that it would be difficult or impossible for competitors to emulate it. The quality-oriented companies are deeply developed in both internal culture and external reputation (Shahin and Jannatin, 2011). Greunrus (1983) believes that the quality divides into two categories, the first category is technical quality (what is delivered) and the second is functional quality (how is delivered). The functional quality is more important. Reselhetinen (1983) believes that quality evenly divides into two categories, process quality, and output quality. Customer delivers the process quality during service, and the output quality is for

customer after the service. The purpose of all this definitions and classifications is that the customer's satisfaction occurs in a long-term relationship (Prasad & Jha, 2013). Service is also provided with many definitions that we briefly mentioned some of these definitions.

Service is the operation or performance that one side delivers to the others. In other words, service to customer includes all activities that an organization accomplishes, along with customer's satisfaction and helping (Sufi-Zadeh et al., 2011).

Service is a set of obvious and hidden advantages creating using the facilitating and supporting products (Abbasi et al., 2013).

Stanton (1981) introduces Service as something separately identified and invisible, and necessarily it is not for sale. Service is suggested as a vital force to move into the global economy, and it has certain characteristics. For example, it is intangible, it cannot separate, it is incongruent, and it is not destroyed. These factors make customer's satisfaction with the service quality difficult to be measured (Prasad & Jha, 2013).

Service to customers involves all the items an organization carries out for the customers' satisfaction and help in order to receive the most value of products or service sold. Designing the service should be based on customer's satisfaction (Aneesh et al, 2014).

Generally, services have three features including:

1. Services are invisible and intangible, i.e. you cannot see, hear, touch, or taste them before buying. The buyers are always looking for physical evidences that the show quality of the services.
2. Services are inseparable, which unlike goods, first they are sold, then produced and consumed simultaneously with production. Therefore, the services are not removable from their providers (human or machine).
3. Services are indestructible, i.e. Services cannot be stored for next sale or consumption (Arabi and Esfandiari, 2003).

Intensifying competition and accelerating the adoption of new marketing concepts make many service businesses and retails search for the strategies to differentiate themselves from competitors. One of the strategies that have been associated with the success of these businesses is to provide high-quality services. In fact, providing service quality, as a prerequisite for success, is the prerequisite for survival in service organizations from the 1980s onwards (Faryabi and Mahmoudi, 2013). Unfortunately, despite the importance of high-quality Service, many managers do not have full knowledge of how they should measure it (Shaemy Barzaki et al., 2012). With regard to service quality, definitions and different opinions are expressed, as we referred to some of them. However, what is important is that each of the claimants, define the quality in their point of view (Areffi, Zandi and Shohudi, 2011). The quality of service is different in the eye or the mind of the consumer. Based on the mind or attitudes of individuals, their goals and perceptions, they have different viewpoint. Therefore, the definition of quality of service depends on the individual. There are many different definitions for different people, most of them are customer-oriented, and it is specified as a received function for customer satisfaction. The orientation of definition of service quality is consistent with the received customer service and his needs and expectations. Quality of service is a comparison of sense of what the customers expect the service should be moved (expectations) to judgment of what they received from the service (perception). If the expectations received from the performance of service quality is lower, it results in customer

dissatisfaction (Zavar et al., 2007). The quality of Service means being high quality available to final users and focus on standards provided the promised Services (Prasad & Jha, 2013). Parasuraman believe the quality of service, size, and orientation of the difference between the perceptions and expectations of customers play an important role in creating a competitive advantage, improving organizational performance, and success of the organization (Ho et al, 2013). According to Greunrus (1984), the received quality from the service results from evaluation process in which the customer compares his expectation from the service to the received (perceived) service. In fact, Greunrus considers expectations in opposite to perceptions and he compares them. Due to the common point of definitions, there is an overall agreement, and it is that service quality must be defined in the customers' perception. For this reason, there are extensive research to learn how customers perceive the quality of Service and how it could be measured. Different research has pointed to the importance of service quality in organizations, some of which include:

1. Quality is an important factor for the growth, success, and sustainability of the organization, and should be placed on the management's agenda as a strategic, effective, and comprehensive matter (Sufi born et al., 2011).
2. According to various studies show that there is a positive relationship between service quality and financial performance of the organization. In fact, companies that have better Service, greater market share, higher return on capital and circulating assets are better (Kumar & Dash, 2013).
3. In long-term period, the most important factor affecting business performance is high quality goods and Services that the organization offers to its competitors. This is always associated with the reliability and performance of Service (Schalkwyk & Steenkamp, 2014).
4. The quality of service and satisfaction are considered as factors influencing on buying. Positive impact of customer's satisfaction and perceived quality on the company's profits and market stock cannot be ignored (Prasad & Jha, 2013).
5. High quality Service provision is not a competitive strategy choice; however, today the quality of service is a vital factor in the survival and profitability of an organization. Recent studies showed that the quality costs could be between 30 and 50 percent of sales revenues of service companies. In fact, improving the quality of Service turns to a organization's key strategy to increase the competitive power (Faryabi and Mahmoudi, 2013).
6. Quality of service is an essential component in a customer marketing relationship. Creating a high level of service quality causes customer's satisfaction and loyalty as well, and this in turn will lead to increase market share and profitability. Competitive environment is effective in improving quality of service (Kazemi et al, 2013).

In different studies, different aspects of service quality are stated. For example,). According to Greunrus (1988), quality of Service includes business and professional skills, attitude and behavior, availability, flexibility, reliability and trust, the restore ability, and the reputation. He acknowledges that the quality of Service include technical quality, functional quality, and corporate image (Prasad & Jha, 2013). In his discussion of the quality of service, Greunrus implies to the technical quality, and continues that quality is a task facing service and a mind image of the company (Abbasi et al., 2013). According to Lehtinen (1991), the dimensions of service quality include physical quality, interactive quality and company or organization quality. Parasuraman et al. (1991) suggested that reliability, accuracy, suitability, availability, security, reputation, and communication all are of customer perception of service quality attributes (Prasad & Jha, 2013). In summary, the dimensions of service quality have been determined in Table 1 (Shahin and Jannati, 2011).

**Table 1. Two levels of quality of service**

The first level	The second level
1. Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 1. Performance (service on time)</li> <li>2. Accuracy (in service)</li> <li>3. adaptation (Service equally to all)</li> <li>4 completion (taking all committed Service))</li> </ul>
1. Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The desire to help customer</li> <li>2. Preparation</li> <li>3. Comfort</li> </ul>
3. Security and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Security</li> <li>2. Safety</li> </ul>
4. Availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Simple contact</li> <li>2. timeliness available</li> </ul>
5. Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Verbal Communication</li> <li>2. Information</li> </ul>
6. Consumer perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Perceptions</li> <li>2. Paying special attention to customer</li> </ul>
7. Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Trusteeship</li> <li>2. Honesty</li> <li>3. Reputation on service provision</li> </ul>
8. Intangibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vision</li> <li>2. Equipment and tools for Service</li> <li>3. Availability of physical facilities</li> </ul>
9. Courtesy and respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect</li> <li>2. Empathy</li> </ul>
10. Competency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. skills of personnel</li> <li>2. Knowledge of Personnel</li> </ul>
11. Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Volume and Service provided</li> <li>2. Speed of Service</li> </ul>
12. Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Discount</li> <li>2. The value of (cost)</li> </ul>

Assessment and measurement of the Service provided is necessary to determine the level of customer's satisfaction (Saghir & Nathan, 2013). however, since the satisfaction of service delivery, due to its intangibility, need the special tool to be measured and evaluated, noticing the customer presence in service location to observe his weakness and poorness, noticing the quality improvement of services to determine the value of customer satisfaction(Sufizadeh et al., 2011). Evaluating the service quality provided is a main tool to recognize the current condition of services. It is used to enhance the service quality. According to Zytaml (1981) unique features of Services, such as being intangibility, non-standard, and non-experience make evaluation of service difficult. That is why a way should be provided to measure the Service (Prasad & Jha, 2013). Viewing to the Service, they want to demand, the organizations notice the parameters that are not important for the customers, or even they are in contrast to the customers' expectations (Jafarnejad and Rahimi, 2005). One way to measure the quality of service is SERVQUAL model. This model is standard, and it realizes the following conditions:

1. Identify sources of quality
2. Discovery the quality problems
3. Identify the problem viewed
4. Provide practical solutions (Abbasi et al., 2013).

### **SERVQUAL model**

The word SERVQUAL consists of two words “service” and “quality” (Arabs and Esfandiari, 2003). SERVQUAL is a model that consists of two parts of 22 tests by Parasuraman et al to assess the quality of an organization. The basic model has 10 dimensions and secondary model has 5 dimensions. 10 dimensions of basic model are reliability, sensitivity, reliability, competence, availability, courtesy, security, communication, tangibility, and understanding of customer. This evaluation is run on a 7-disagree scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The first 22 tests evaluate customer’s expectations, the next 22 tests ask for the customer opinion about quality. The distance between both 22 tests considers the gap between the expected service and company service in the eyes of customer (Abbasi et al., 2013). After a while, the researchers found a link between some of these dimensions, and they attempted to combine them. Therefore, in the current SERVQUAL model, aspects such as communication, availability, and customer understanding combined, and they were categorized as dimension of empathy. The aspects such as competence, courtesy, safety, and reliability were considered as the dimension of assurance and assurance (Saghir & Nathan, 2013). A summary of 10 dimensions SERVQUAL model is as follows:

1. The physical dimensions; are such as physical facilities and appearance, equipment, staff appearance, documentation of service quality (brochures, etc.).
2. Reliability; is the ability to provide reliable and consistent service as promised to customers.
3. Responsibility; is the desire to help customers and provide prompt service.
4. Capability (knowledge) is skills and knowledge to perform service.
5. Desirable behavior; is such as politeness, respect and consideration, staff’s friendly relationship with customers.
6. The reputation and reliability; are such as trusteeship, reliability, honesty of Service operators.
7. Safety and security; are such as away from risk, the probability of loss or doubt, uncertainty and ambiguity.
8. Availability; is availability and ease of communication.
9. Communication; is such as listening to the customer and verify his comments, maintaining contact with customers informed in a language understandable to them.
10. Understanding of customers; is such as trying to understand the customer and identify his needs (Arabs and Esfandiari, 2003).

In the second model, these dimensions are summarized and combined as follows:

1. Reliability; is the ability to perform the promised service to customer carefully, and related to customer demands the reliable implementation of service to the customer as expected
2. Responsibility; is desire to help customers, and provide Service to him, without wasting time or keep the customer waiting, especially, If there is no clear reason, dissatisfaction and negative perceptions are created about the quality of Service provided
3. Assurance; is knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to build customer assurance and trustful, while serving. This dimension includes the ability to provide service, respect for the customer, and being polite. The general principle is that the desire and assurance of customers to the servant is best advantage and benefit for him.
4. Empathy; is specific attention and service to each organization customer. Empathy includes these features: ability to let the consumer close to (warm and welcoming), sensitive to customer needs, and trying to understand them.
5. Tangibility; is special attention to physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of staff, and means of communication in the service (Sulisworo & Maniquiz, 2012).

The advantages of this model are that it is easy to understand, acceptable and agreeable versatility, attractive, conceptual, multi-dimensional, and adaptive to the views of customers in service quality assessment (Assarian Nejad and Shirazi Romanan, 2011).

### **Research Background**

In a study called "integration model of SERVQUAL and Kano," to enhance customer's satisfaction in standard hotels, Lee Hessing Hu et al concluded that the quality of Service plays an important role in customer satisfaction. A sense of satisfaction experiences after satisfying a need. To increase the quality of service should determine the priorities for improvement. Understanding of customer's specific needs, catering services, and respect to the customer's rights are very important as early priorities. Quality of service can include marketing (advertising and websites), the sale of goods such as souvenirs, and innovation in this field. Due to their limit resources, the hotels must create competitive advantage, and continuously improve their strategic and creative decisions. Features of service quality of the hotel include the unique decoration, landscape with good view, low-power modern and diverse devices, and fame of hotel. When the distance between the customer's perceptions and his expectation of service is low, improvement in the quality of service is not of great importance. The attractiveness of the target market and the amenities are of creative resources. To improve service quality, a standard hotel can run different policies by separating market and target customers. Differentiation strategy can be useful to isolate the issue. The importance of human resources in the creation of competitive advantage is very important because employee's behavior can be strategic. Hotel owners should immediately improve the capabilities of their personnel so that they can meet the needs of customers and provide a competitive advantage (Ho et al, 2013).

In another study on the quality of service in banks, Purhasomy et al expressed quality plays a major role in banking and customers are at the core of it. Knowledge about customer needs can be led to his satisfaction. Location of bank and the customer relationship with the bank is important. Income, friendly relationship of staff, good loans, and counseling to customers are important factors of the quality of service. To find different customer standards, geographic, cultural, economic, and political condition of community should be considered. In Iran, the needs of customer for Service quality include the real time in different parts to see about the customers, the staff responsibility, using the bank technologies such as telephone bank facilities, ATM and online bank services, special attention to customer time to decrease his waiting time, the interest rate for the deposit, following the rules and regulations by executives and employees of the bank, the bank convenient location for easy availability and parking space, balancing the time needed to get restitution banking facilities, friendly and polite behavior of staff, knowledge and expertise of bank employees and managers in response to customers' needs. Providing superior customer service quality and quantity can attract the customer. In this regard, Bank managers should hold training courses for staff to educate the principles of attracting customer. Since the interests and expectations of customers are altering, the process of identifying the needs of the customers should be periodically modifies (Pourhasomi et al, 2013).

In a study called "measuring the quality in High Education" by Prasad & Jha using SERQUAL Model, they stated that high education can be an appropriate action to reach a sublimity in global level. Without its human capital, no country can reach a sustainable development. Educational quality is an invisible factor on competition in economic and social development of the country. Quality is a weapon to compete in attracting shareholders. Service industries play an important role in economic development (Prasad & Jha, 2013).

In a study conducted by Mikulic & Prebezac, it was found that customer's perception is highly dependent on time, and with the passage of time the customer's expectations alter. Introducing a new product or service and innovation are the factors influencing it. If managers identify the key features of products or Services that lead to customer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction, they will achieve many benefits (Mikulic & Prebezac, 2011).

A study conducted by Shafiee & Cliquet, it is expressed that in the discussion of the quality of service in banks, manager and employee impression on customer and communication skills is very important in customer's satisfaction. That is why quality is important. According to the SERVQUAL model, bank staff plays a main role in increasing customer's satisfaction and understanding of their quality. The operation of the SERVQUAL model can reduce a lot of dissatisfaction. Managers should create long-term relationships, make customer loyal, and improve customer relations (Shafiee & Cliquet, 2010).

In a study called providing a designed model of effective educational Service using SERVQUAL and Kano approach by Sheikh Abu Masoudi et al at Azad University of Lenjan, it was found that only in tangibility, Islamic Azad University Lenjan could meet needs and expectations of graduate students. The university authorities should make more efforts to improve service quality in empathy, responsibility, and reliability, and assurance. The priorities of the needs indices (essential, one-dimension, and attractive) revealed that in the indices related to the essential needs, the high quality educational programs should be held. The university authorities should behave to the students impartiality and equally. There should be the appropriate real-time research resources, and 24-hour availability for further research. There should exist feedback system to improve the quality of teaching service, the faculty board with academic degree and related work experience outside the university. Theoretical and practical training for the future jobs of the students is necessary. In the one-dimensional needs, it is advised that there would be professors and counselors available to students when needed, the standard approaches, adequate consultation hours, quite timely delivery of service by the university, fulfilling the promised practices, informing students of the result of the evaluation carried out by his duties, presenting each sessions of class session so interrelated regular, and appropriate training of staff dealing with students, facilitating discussion by professors on the subject in class, communicating between teachers and students. In relation to the attractive needs, In the one-dimensional needs, it is advised that there would be resolving the specific needs of each student privately, behaving of the professor with respect to students, diversity in training programs and extra-curricular course, flexible educational structure, easy availability of students to management to transfer their comments on educational issues, appropriate drills relevant to each lesson (Abumasoudi et al., 2013).

In another stud called "the limitation of using SERQUAL model in part of service quality of University Centers" conducted by Rezaian et al in PUN University of Fasa, it revealed that there are a ranking among the dimensions of service quality. They ranked in order of their importance as assurance, physical appearance, responsibility, reliability, and empathy (Rezaian et al., 2011).

in another study called "satisfaction of customers from the service quality " using Kano-SERVQUAL Model in the agency branches of Iran Insurance of Semnan, it is indicated that no customer was satisfied from the provided quality, no one of service features are recognized as essential.(Moradi and Hemati, 2010).



In a study called “comparing the guests’ perceptions and expectations to five dimensions of service quality in Homa Hotel oh Mashhad, it is manifested that although hotel could declared the provided service time to guests, and the services were offered promptly, the hotel staff were not desirable to assist the guests, and they do not have free time to meet the guests. Concerning the assurance, the hotel failed to express the sense of assurance to the guests, the guests believed that the hotel personnel are not courteous; in other dimensions of assurance, hotel could succeed in creating the sense of security in guests while serving them, the staff’s awareness of answering the questions, and personnel’s skills to service.

In the empathy dimension, criteria that were considered included the special attention of the employees to each of the guests, competent behavior of staff with the guests, desiring best wishes to guests by the staff, understanding the specific needs of guests by employees. Homa Hotel 2 Mashhad could fulfill all these expectations of guests and even surpassed expectations. Viewing to tangibility (physical factors) hotel could have a good performance. Indices that were studied in this dimensions showed that hotel had advantages such as possessing the modern facilities, stylish facilities and eye-catching view, arranged professional staff, applying classy materials, goods and commodities, comfortable hotel facilities, easiness and comfort of the facilities, the clean and tidy equipment, the variety of foods and drinks, on time services (Karroubi and Yousefi, 2010).

In another research called “the various measuring methods of customer’s satisfaction,” it introduces the different models of customer’s satisfaction, and compares their indices. It showed that SERVQUAL model presents only a general image of service quality, based on the provided service quality, using the questionnaires and evaluation of customer’s satisfaction (Maleki & darabi, 2008).

### **Refah Chain Stores**

No doubt, the efficient management of urban is basic prerequisite for any success in the implementation of development programs to improve the welfare of citizens. In general, the mechanisms effecting on management desperately are creation and development of distribution modern and concentrated systems in chain stores. This group of modern distribution centers has extensive social and economic benefits such as reducing distribution costs, delivering goods at affordable prices, greater precision in controlling quality, reducing costs of urban traffic, savings at the time of purchase for citizens, reducing the volume of traffic, reducing environmental pollution, ease of monitoring on the retail sector's performance. Refah Chain Stores Company is a service company that meets customers' needs through the supply of goods and Service.

This company (LLP) incorporated in 1995 and began its activities in March 2013 with 749 stores in different cities of Iran to supply consumer goods to customers. The last branch of these Stores was started March 2013 in Tehran. The missions of these Stores are to outstand leading in distribution and sale of all goods in high quality and fair price in offered customer place and time, to improve the customers’ life quality by means of creating the positive and sustainable relationship with customers, to create the competitive fortunes in sales network by providing superior products and service, and to facilitate and improve urban management through the store network.

### Research Hypotheses

1. Viewing to the physical environment and the tangibility dimension of service quality, there is a gap between the perceptions and expectations of customers in stores of Alborz Province.
2. Viewing to the empathy dimension of service quality, there is a gap between the perceptions and expectations of customers in stores of Alborz Province
3. Viewing to the assurance dimension of service quality, there is a gap between the perceptions and expectations of customers in stores of Alborz Province
4. Viewing to the reliability dimension of service quality, there is a gap between the perceptions and expectations of customers in stores of Alborz Province
5. Viewing to the responsibility dimension of service quality, there is a gap between the perceptions and expectations of customers in stores of Alborz Province
6. Viewing to the availability dimension of service quality, there is a gap between the perceptions and expectations of customers in stores of Alborz Province
7. There is a gap between customer expectations from service quality and their perceptions in the Refah Stores in Alborz Province.
8. There is a relationship between the dimensions of the service quality using SERVQUAL model in Refah Stores in Alborz Province.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, statistical information is quantity type, and they are collected through library and field method. The type of the research is based on purpose and application. The method of research is analytical, inductive, and descriptive. Data were collected by questionnaire. To determine the validity of questionnaire, reputation of the experts, professors, experts and consultants have been applied. The final questionnaire was prepared during four stages including identifying and grouping the dimensions of the service, finalizing the dimensions, preparing the primary questionnaires and surveys provided by experts, and preparing the final questionnaire. With regard to reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used, and Cronbach's alpha value was 0.923, indicating high reliability.

The population of the research includes all customers in Refah Stores in Alborz province, that it is an infinite number. Sample is 384 people, which it is selected randomly, using Krejcie and Morgan Table. However, due to be calculated more accurate and more reliable, researcher distributed 500 questionnaires, of which 428 questionnaires were sent back to him. The research hypotheses were analyzed by these 428 random questionnaires. Questionnaire made by the researcher investigates six dimensions of service quality including "physical environment and tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, availability, and responsibility." To check to see whether the data are normal or abnormal, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. Since the significance level of the factors was 0.005, the distribution was abnormal; therefore, the non-parametric sign and correlation of Spearman Tests are used for analysis. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results are presented in Table 2. The results and findings of research are presented in both descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Table 2 Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for the dimensions of service quality  
One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test**

	Physical and tangible	Empathy	Security	reliability	responsibility	availability
N	428	428	428	428	428	428
Normal Mean	2.0928	2.3700	2.1633	2.1306	2.2710	2.2652
Parameters <sup>a,b</sup> Std. Deviation	.53073	.65595	.52193	.60544	.64847	.72998
Most Absolute	.100	.083	.089	.127	.099	.138
Extreme Positive	.100	.083	.089	.127	.099	.138
Differences Negative	-.046	-.046	-.050	-.065	-.049	-.087
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	2.065	1.713	1.839	2.637	2.046	2.863
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.006	.002	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data

## HYPOTHESES TEST AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Demographic Results

The results showed that 52.1 percent of those questioned are men and 47.9 percent women. The lowest age group is under 16 years old with 2.0%, and the highest age group is 26 to 35 years with a 41.5 percent (19.3% of 16 to 25 years, 25.2% of 36 to 45 years, 4.10% of 46 to 55 years, and 3.3 of 56 years to the top). The lowest group of doctoral education belongs to PhD Degree and to the top with a 2.9 percent, and the highest rank belongs to Bachelor Degree with a 31. Percent (9.8% of the under diplomas, 30.5% of diplomas, 13.4% of Upper-diploma, 12 % M.A. Degree). The lowest rate of service users is between 26 to 30 years with 3.0%, and the highest is for 1 month to 5 years with a 63.1 percent (22.9 percent between 6 and 10 years, 7.5% of 11 to 15 years, the 5.1% of 16 to 20 years, 1.1% of 21 to 25 years). Most occupational group is related to employee with a 7.54%, and the lowest belongs to unemployed people with a 7.0% (37.7 percent is free, 5.6 percent is students).

### Research Hypotheses Tests

Analysis Hypotheses 1 to 7 of this research- to examine research Hypotheses, sign test was used. Since the significant level (sig) of all dimensions of quality, including "the physical and tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, responsibility and availability" is less than 0.05, it can be said that first to seventh research hypotheses are confirmed and in the mentioned variables, there is a gap between perceptions and customer expectations. Given that in all hypotheses, amount of the difference between perceptions and expectations (Quality of Service) is negative, it can be said that the services that the customer understands is less than that he has expected. Hypotheses analysis results and tables of them has been identified in the following.

**Table 3 - Analysis of the 1st theory- The gap of physical environment and tangibility variable**  
Frequencies

		N
group – fizmalmos	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	339
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	52
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	37
	Total	428

a. group &lt; fizmalmos

b. group &gt; fizmalmos

c. group = fizmalmos

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

		group – fizmalmos
Z		-14.464
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

a. Sign Test

As it is seen at significant level of 0.000, there is a gap between expectations and perceptions of the customer in the dimension of physical environment and tangibility with a 14.464 percent, that the number shows the gap and it is obvious that due to the negative that customer perception is lower than they expected. Analysis of hypotheses 2 to 7 is expressed in a similar way.

**Table 4 - Analysis of the 2nd theory- The gap of empathy variable**

Frequencies

		N
group - hamdeli	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	376
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	18
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	34
	Total	428

a. group &lt; hamdeli

b. group &gt; hamdeli

c. group = hamdeli

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

		group – hamdeli
Z		-17.985
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

a. Sign Test

**Table 5 - Analysis of the 3rd theory- The gap of security variable**

		N
group – etminankhater	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	367
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	25
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	36
	Total	428

a. group &lt; etminankhater

b. group &gt; etminankhater

c. group = etminankhater

**Test Statistics<sup>a</sup>**

		group – etminankhater
Z		-17.223
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

a. Sign Test

**Table 6 - Analysis of the 4th theory- The gap of Reliability variable**

Frequencies		N
group – etebartazmin	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	320
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	42
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	66
	Total	428

- a. group < etebartazmin  
 b. group > etebartazmin  
 c. group = etebartazmin

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>		group - etebartazmin
Z		-14.559
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

- a. Sign Test

**Table 7 - Analysis of the 5th theory- The gap of responsibility variable**

Frequencies		N
group - pasokh	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	367
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	24
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	37
	Total	428

- a. group < pasokh  
 b. group > pasokh  
 c. group = pasokh

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>		group – pasokh
Z		-17.296
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

- a. Sign Test

**Table 8 - Analysis of the 6th theory- The gap of availability variable**

Frequencies		N
group - dastresi	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	352
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	33
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	43
	Total	428

- a. group < dastresi  
 b. group > dastresi  
 c. group = dastresi

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>		group – dastresi
Z		-16.207
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

- a. Sign Test

**Table 9 - Analysis of the 7th theory- The gap of quality variable**

Frequencies		N
group - quality	Negative Differences <sup>a</sup>	419
	Positive Differences <sup>b</sup>	5
	Ties <sup>c</sup>	4
	Total	428

- a. group < quality  
 b. group > quality  
 c. group = quality

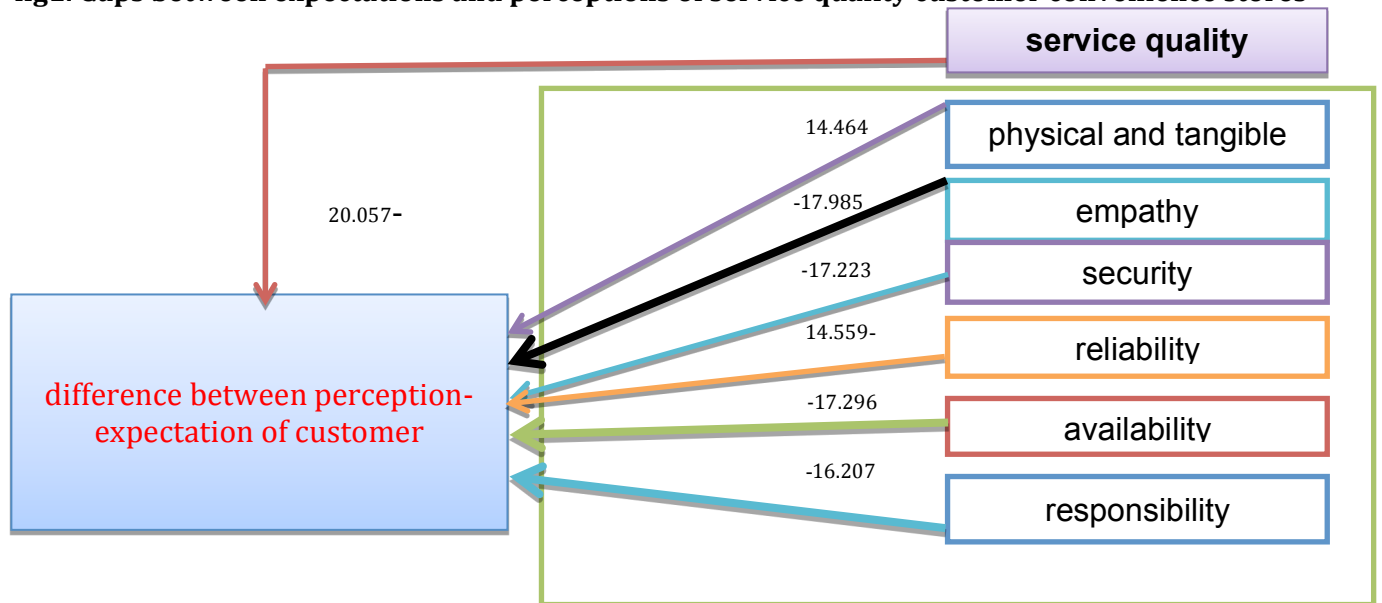
Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>	
	group – quality
Z	-20.057
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Sign Test

**Table 10. The mark test results (analysis hypotheses 1 to 7 of research)**

Variable	difference between perception-expectation (quality of service in terms of percentage)	Significance level	Test results
Physical and tangible	14.464	0.000	gap
Empathy	17.985	0.000	gap
Security	-17.223	0.000	gap
Reliability	14.559	0.000	gap
Responsibility	-17.296	0.000	gap
Availability	16.207	0.000	gap
Quality	20.057	0.000	gap

**fig1. Gaps between expectations and perceptions of service quality customer convenience stores**



Hypothesis8- There is a relationship between the dimensions of Service quality using SERVQUAL model in Refah Chain Stores in Alborz Province. To investigate this relationship, the mutual Spearman Correlation Test was used. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between all dimensions of the service quality to each other, and between the service quality and service. Table 11 shows the extent of this correlation. Therefore it can be said each of these dimensions play a role in the perceived quality of the customer and gaps in each one of them can lead to a reduction in perceived quality by the customer.

**Table11- correlation coefficient matrix between the dimensions of service quality and Service at significant level of 1%**

Correlations			Physical and tangible	Empathy	Security	reliability	availability	responsibility	quality
Physical and tangible	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	.575**	.600**	.575**	.530**	.563**	.756**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428
Empathy	Correlation Coefficient		.575**	1.000	.773**	.549**	.555**	.718**	.846**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428
Security	Correlation Coefficient		.600**	.773**	1.000	.680**	.593**	.792**	.890**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428
Reliability	Correlation Coefficient		.575**	.549**	.680**	1.000	.532**	.621**	.789**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428
availability	Correlation Coefficient		.530**	.555**	.593**	.532**	1.000	.590**	.772**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428
responsibility	Correlation Coefficient		.563**	.718**	.792**	.621**	.590**	1.000	.865**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428
quality	Correlation Coefficient		.756**	.846**	.890**	.789**	.772**	.865**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
	N		428	428	428	428	428	428	428

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, the market can play an important role in the development of their economy, as a service sector. For this reason, quality of service and evaluation of customers can be a major factor in the growth and development of this market. Viewing to the importance of the evaluation of customers' satisfaction in determining the service quality and recognizing the perceptions and expectations level of the quality provision, this study tries to investigate the service quality in

Iran Chain Stores using SERQUAL Model in Refah Stores in Alborz Province. The difference between customer expectations and perceptions shows his satisfaction. The results showed that there is a gap between expectations and perceptions of the customer in the dimension of physical environment and tangibility with a 14.464 percent, which indicates that the physical facilities, equipment and staff's appearance and some factors such as these are lower than customers' expectation. In the dimension of assurance with a 17.223 percent, Shows that the services promised to customers are less than level expected of them. In the dimension of the reliability with a 14.559 percent, indicates that the service operators have not been able to fully absorb the trust of customers. In the dimension of responsibility with a 17.296 percent, shows that the customer feels in some cases he lost the time and employees do not show a desire to help him. The results Ghobadi et al. (2014) which was conducted at a clinic in the Ardabil city is consistent with results and shows that in these dimensions ,there are significant differences between the perceptions and expectations of customers. In the empathy dimension, there is a gap with a 17.985 percent that shows the staff does not have special attention to their customers. These results are correlated to ones that Rezaian et al. (2011) found, in their study. The gap in empathy can result in customer dissatisfaction, that it is consistent with what the results of Suffizadeh et al. (2011) shows. The findings also indicated that in the availability, there is a gap between the customer's expectation and perception with a 16.207 percent, that it is correlated with the research results of Georgi et al. (2013). Finally, it is manifested that in all the dimensions of service quality, there is a gap between the expected level and perceived level of customer. This gap in the service quality is 20.057, In other words, with regard to the negative gap between perceptions and expectations achieved in different dimensions of quality variables, it was found that the quality of service provided that customers perceived is lower than what they expects. Finally according to the correlation table (11) understand that there are relationships between the dimensions of quality with each other and among them with quality. The most relationship related to security dimension which shows that should be pay more attention to what the customer expects and provide better services to be able to trust him drew better. The relationship between other dimensions shows that given these factors and improving them, in providing services, can improve quality and reduce gaps and ultimately lead to greater customer satisfaction. Therefore, Store operators and management must identify all processes related to the provision of service in all dimensions of service quality, and try to solve the existing problems. In this study, there is highest gap is related to the dimensions of responsibility and assurance. It shows that desire to assist and serve the customer promptly is low, and the services expected by the customers and the store is obliged to do is not performed well. The research conducted by Bahraini et al (2009) to assess the quality of Service at the Islamic Azad University using SERVQUAL and QFD model is consistent with the results of this research. It expressed that the quality of service at the Islamic Azad University of Aliabad, is weaker and lower than expectations of students. Research conducted by Rezaian et al (2011) also suggests the poor level of student satisfaction with the quality of service in PNU Fasa University is consistent with the survey results. The available gap that shows low level of customer satisfaction of the service quality can be an alert for Refah Stores; because their rivals may trade on this gap. Since there is no loyalty to their stores by customers, the stores exit outside the scope of competition. To solve these problems the following suggestions present:

- Fulfill services when promised. So that the customer does not lose a lot of time to shop, and be able to purchase needed items in a short time.
- Conduct periodic and ongoing evaluations in respect of service provided in the store, and check the results.
- Evaluate the quality of other models to access further results.



- Hold courses of training in order to raise awareness of employees on how to deal with customers, and create a friendly atmosphere and civic behavior.
- Staff pays more attention to customer service, and provides the necessary information to the customer.
- Better arrangement of the store so that customers can easily and quickly access desired items.
- Create a right climate for the rest of customers, parking space, recreation, and welfare facilities for more easiness of customers around the store.
- Assess the customers' satisfaction of other stores such as Shahrvand, Hammi, and HyperStar and so on, and compare to this store in order to use the achieved results in improving the current situation.

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