

5.1.11: Introduction to the Gap Model of Service Quality

What you'll learn to do: Discuss the gap model of service quality

In the London Underground, “Mind the Gap” signage is ubiquitous, warning passengers of the gap between the platform and the train’s entry/exit stairs. In the retail environment, the danger zone is the gap between customer service expectations and customer perceptions of service. In order to effectively manage the customer experience, retailers need to have that same front and center focus on minding the gap. The framework used to identify and address potential service gaps is the Gap Model of Service Quality, also referred to as the 5 Gap Model. As the second reference indicates, the model involves 5 different gaps.

Originally proposed in a 1985 Journal of Marketing article titled “A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Further Research,” the Gap Model of Service Quality is framework for analyzing common customer satisfaction issues. In the following sections, we will drill down into each gap individually, identifying root causes and actions to address customer satisfaction issues and close the corresponding service gap.

In the Gap Model of Service Quality, the first gap is the gap of knowledge, reflecting the difference between customer expectations and management’s understanding of those expectations. That is, management doesn’t know what customers expect. Common reasons for this disconnect include and ineffective transfer and analysis of available information. For example, this gap might occur if management fails to solicit and factor in information and insights from front-line employees, field personnel and customer surveys. In a big data world where customers have free access to rating platforms and the inclination to share their experiences, this gap is sometimes referred to as a “listening” rather than information gap. That is, in many cases, the information is there. The key challenge is prioritizing information sources, making sense of and acting on the available information.

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