DISPARITIES BETWEEN SERVICES DEMANDED AND SERVICES RECEIVED IN TAIWANESE RESTAURANTS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to evaluate the service quality performance of Taiwanese foreign restaurants. After a review of the literature on service quality and discussions with managers of Taiwanese foreign restaurants, we decided to use the DINERSERV questionnaire. The methodology, an Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA), is used to categorize whole service items into four dimensions: 1) "keep up the good work", 2) "possible overkill", 3) "low priority", and 4) "concentrate here", all in accordance with the service performance of each service item. The critical findings indicate that Taiwanese foreign restaurants should improve upon the following seven service items: the parking lot around the restaurant (I2), regular updates to the menu (I8), comfortable seating (I11), fast service (I18), waiters' problem-solving ability (I20), waiters' understanding of customers (I27), and always putting the customer first (I28). The results of the study are discussed, along with the implications for managers of Taiwanese foreign restaurants.

JEL: C10; M10; M31

KEYWORDS: Taiwan; SERVQUAL

INTRODUCTION

Service quality is the major driving force for business sustainability, and in today's competitive global marketplace, it is recognized that high quality service is essential for the success of the firm (Ismail et al., 2006). Furthermore, service quality measurement plays an important role in assessing service performance, diagnosing service problems, managing service delivery, and determining employee and corporate rewards (DeMoranville & Bienstock, 2003). Therefore, evaluating quality performance and searching for ways to improve is critical for service-oriented businesses, especially those operating in a foreign country.

In Taiwan, an increasing number of people have begun to emphasize health and privacy (Chen & Chen, 2008). Therefore, more and more service-oriented businesses have developed, both domestic and foreign alike. Recently, a number of foreign restaurants have appeared in Taiwan, especially in Taipei City. Thus, how to become more attractive and survive in such a competitive market has become a critical issue for them. In this regard, we chose the most famous night market in Taipei City, known as the Shida night market, to conduct our research; it is also the site of a large cluster of foreign restaurants.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The literature review is discussed in Section 2. Data and methodology are discussed in Section 3. Results are detailed in Section 4. Concluding comments are discussed in the last section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality and Its Measurement

Service quality is an interaction between customers and service providers, with service providers trying to influence customers' perceptions and the image of the carriers (Gursoy et al., 2005). Therefore, service quality can be defined as a consumer's overall impression of the efficiency of the organization and its services (Park et al., 2004) or as a chain of services in which the entire service delivery is divided into a series of processes (Chen & Chang, 2005) (although definitions vary from one study to another.)

The importance of service quality to the overall performance of an organization has been well established in various industries (Wilkins et al., 2007). A review of the literature indicates that high service quality leads to customer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1994; Caruana, 2002), and that customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty (McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Wilkins et al., 2007). In addition, research has increasingly focused attention on customer service and how to upgrade the quality of external service encounters between contact employees, such as waiters, and customers (Stanley & Wisner, 2002).

A huge body of literature is based on the concept of service quality as perceived and evaluated by customers (Berry et al., 1988; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Gronroos, 1990). Some studies point out that service quality is difficult to quantify due to the very nature of service itself (Stanley & Winsner, 2002). The most used customer-perceived service quality model is SERVQUAL, which was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). SERVQUAL has five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Detailed information regarding the five dimensions is presented in Table 1, which was summarized by Ismail et al. in 2006.

Table 1: Descriptions of the Dimensions of SERVQUAL

Dimensions	Description
Reliability	The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
Responsiveness	The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service.
Assurance	Employees' knowledge and courtesy, and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
Empathy	The caring individualized attention given to customers.
Tangibles	Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials.

This table shows the detailed definitions of five measurement dimensions of SERVQUAL.

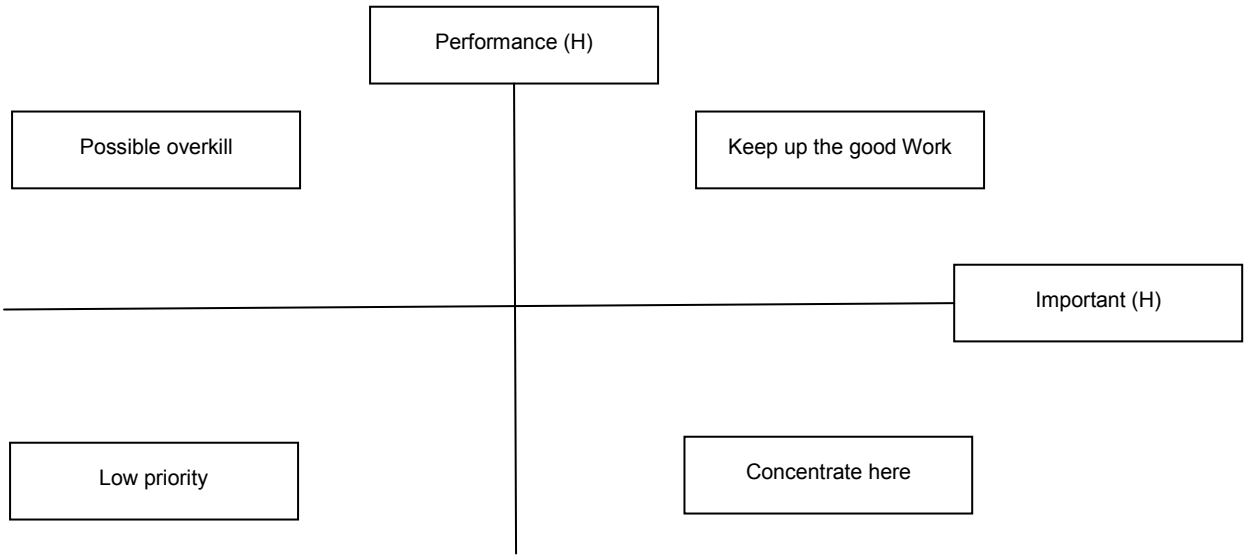
Nonetheless, there is a recent and growing body of literature that argues that the dimensions identified are not transferable from one industry to another; hence, there is a lack of support for the applicability of the SERVQUAL dimensions to a restaurant, especially a foreign one. A specific application for the restaurant, called DINERSERV, has been adopted to fit the characteristics of restaurants based on SERVQUAL, and uses similar dimensions (Steven et al., 1995). In order to present more accurate results, DINERSERV was used in this research.

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA)

The methodology, IPA, is mainly used to evaluate the competitive advantages of an organization in the market, identify improvement opportunities, and guide the development of strategic projects for a firm (Deng, 2007). IPA was first proposed by Martilla and James in 1977 to identify which product or service items are more beneficial to a firm and which items should be improved to increase customer satisfaction (Matzler et al., 2004). Data from customer satisfaction surveys or service quality surveys are used to develop a two-dimensional matrix, where importance is depicted along the x-axis and performance (some have also used the term "satisfaction") is depicted along the y-axis. Importance is measured using some form of explicit statements of importance, such as rating scales or constant sum scales. It is also measured implicitly through multiple regression weights, structural equation modeling weights, or partial correlation weights (Deng, 2007). The mean values of performance and importance separate the matrix into four parts, as shown in Figure 1.

In accordance with each dimension, performance (customer satisfaction) can be seen as a major or minor strength or weakness. The dimensions where both performance and importance are high, called "keep up the good work", represents those opportunities for maintaining a competitive advantage and are therefore major strengths. The dimension where performance is high and importance is low, called "possible overkill", represents those areas where additional business resources committed to these service items would be overkill and should be deployed elsewhere and are therefore minor strengths.

Figure 1: Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) Model



This figure shows the model of Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) which proposed by Martilla and James in 1977 to identify which product or service items are more beneficial to a firm and which items should be improved to increase customer satisfaction.

The dimension where performance and importance are low, called "low priority", represents those areas that are minor weaknesses and do not require additional effort. Lastly, the dimension where performance is low and importance is high, called "concentrate here", represents those areas on which the organization needs to focus immediate attention for improvement and are therefore major weaknesses. A firm that cannot identify these dimensions may threaten its competitive advantages in the market and develop low customer satisfaction (Deng, 2007).

Due to the rising competition between foreign restaurants in Taiwan, how to fulfill Taiwanese customers' needs plays a critical role in determining the success or failure of restaurants that are also facing domestic restaurants. Thus, IPA was adopted to identify Taiwanese customers' perceptions of the importance of service items and to measure the level of satisfaction toward existing foreign restaurants.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study was to measure the quality performance of foreign restaurants in Taiwan. After reviewing the literature and interviewing managers of foreign restaurants, we decided to use the most famous questionnaire that focuses on the service quality of restaurants, DINERSERV (shown in Table 2). We then constructed an appropriate sample, with a total of 1000 questionnaires sent to customers who enter foreign restaurants to have their meals. Of the 1000, 503 were returned and after discarding 192 questionnaires for statistical reasons, the overall response rate was 31%, or a total of 311 questionnaires used for analysis.

Seventy percent of the respondents are male and 30% were female; 33% of the respondents are between 31-40 and 28% are 41-50; more than half (56%) of the respondents have a Bachelor's degree and about 29% have a Master's degree or above; 31% of respondents are public servants and 26% serve in the business industry; about 33% of respondents received 60001-80000 NT dollars each month and 27% of respondents received 40001-60000 NT dollars each month. Detailed demographic information is given in Table 3.

Before proceeding with the factor analysis, we calculated the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkim (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy to be 0.821 for DINERSERV measurement items. The results of the Bartlett test of sphericity are shown in Table 4. Major factor analysis was also conducted with orthogonal rotation, and the results are provided in Table 4. Generally, the overall Cronbach's α should be above 0.7 and each dimension's Cronbach's α should be above 0.6; the study's inner and outer Cronbach's α for both dimensions are above this standard, which suggests that the sampling results are reliable (see Table 5). As to validity, we went through the interviews with managers of foreign restaurants to adjust items for use in DINERSERV; thus, the study fits the content validity requirement (Kaiser, 1974). Besides, because the significance of the correlations of most of measurement items with respect to the overall measurement are above 0.5, it reveals that the study has high construct validity (see Table 6).

In addition to this analysis, to assess the importance and satisfaction perceptions of customers, the study adopted a paired t-test analysis, the results of which are presented in Table 7. The *p*-values of all measurement items are significant ($p < 0.05$), which indicates a huge gap between the perception of importance and satisfaction in customers' mind. Thus, foreign restaurants still have room to improve their service quality. Lastly, from the results of Table 7, we used IPA to explore the results of the combinations of importance and satisfaction as perceived by customers. We then made the total means (4.025, 3.371) of both dimensions a midpoint; further, we separated the area into four areas based on the midpoint of importance (x-axis) and performance (i.e.; satisfaction, y-axis) as shown in Figure 2.

Table 2: Research Structure

Goal	Measurement Dimensions	Measurement Items
DINERSERV for Taiwanese Foreign Restaurant	Tangible	The appearance of restaurant is conspicuous (I1)
		Parking lot around restaurant (I2)
		The eating area attracts customers (I3)
		Waiters' dress is clean and neat (I4)
		The restaurant's décor fits the price (I5)
		The content of the menu is easy to understand (I6)
		The design of the menu is attractive (I7)
		The content of the menu updates regularly (I8)
		The eating area is clean and comfortable (I9)
		The restroom is clean (I10)
		The seating is comfortable (I11)
	Reliability	Mistakes are corrected soon as they occur (I12)
		Service is reliable (I13)
		The bill is accurate (I14)
		Balance the books quickly (I15)
		Waiters rarely provide the wrong meals to customers (I16)
	Responsiveness	Waiters support each other when busy (I17)
		Timely service (I18)
		Timely response to unique requests from customers (I19)
	Assurance	Waiters have problem-solving abilities (I20)
		Waiters are reliable (I21)
		Waiters can introduce the content of the menu in detail (I22)
		Waiters provide security to customers (I23)
		Waiters are well-trained and experienced (I24)
	Empathy	Waiters do not ignore customer questions due to company regulations (I25)
		Waiters consider the needs of customers in advance (I26)
		Waiters show understanding for customers at all times (I27)
		Always put the customer first (I28)

This table shows our research structure for later utilization.

Table 3: Demographic Information

Variable	Item	Distribution	Percentage
1. Sex	(1) Male	217	70%
	(2) Female	94	30%
2. Age	(1) Under 20	66	21%
	(2) 21- 30	40	13%
	(3) 31- 40	103	33%
	(4) 41- 50	87	28%
	(5) 51- 60	9	3%
	(6) Above 61	6	2%
3. Educational	(1) Junior High or Less	18	6%
Degree	(2) High School	30	10%
	(3) Bachelor's	174	56%
	(4) Master's and Above	89	29%
4. Occupation	(1) Student	58	19%
	(2) Public Servant	95	31%
	(3) Industry	24	8%
	(4) Business	81	26%
	(5) Agriculture	0	0%
	(6) Freelancer	16	5%
	(7) Housekeeper	13	4%
	(8) Others	24	8%
5. Income	(1) Under 20,000	35	11%
(Monthly)	(2) 20,001- 40,000	42	14%
(NT Dollars)	(3) 40,001- 60,000	84	27%
	(4) 60,001- 80,000	103	33%
	(5) 80,001- 100,000	29	9%
	(6) Above 100,001	18	6%

This table shows the detailed demographic information of this study.

RESULTS

The questionnaire used in this study is based on DINERSERV, which focuses on measuring the service quality of restaurants. The original dimensions are Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. After using factor analysis, all dimensions remained the same (see Table 4). For all service quality measurement items, the analysis of the distance between importance and satisfaction reveals that in customers' minds, there exists a huge gap between those items that are important and those items that are satisfactory (see Table 7). Hence, there is room for foreign restaurants to improve their service quality.

To customers, the top three items of importance are: 1) the eating area is clean and comfortable (I9); 2) the restroom is clean (I10); and 3) the customer is always put first (I28). On the other hand, the top three items for which customers are most satisfied are: 1) waiters' dress is clean and neat (I4); 2) the bill is accurate (I14); and 3) waiters rarely provide the wrong meals to customers (I16) (see Figure 2).

The IPA results reveal that foreign restaurants may need to improve upon the following seven items: 1) the parking lot around restaurant (I2); 2) regular updates to the content of the menu (I8); 3) the seating is comfortable (I11); 4) timely service (I18); 5) waiters have problem-solving abilities (I20); 6) waiters show an understanding for customers at all times (I27); and 7) the customer is always put first (I28). However, the following nine are their competitive advantages: 1) the waiters' dress is clean and neat (I4); 2) the restaurants' decor fits the price (I5); 3) the eating area is clean and comfortable (I9); 4) the restroom is clean (I10); 5) mistakes are corrected as soon as they occur (I12); 6) each service is reliable (I13); 7) the bill is accurate (I14); 8) waiters rarely provide wrong meals to customers (I16); and 9) timely responses to unique requests from customers (I19). Detailed information is provided as Figure 2.

Table 4: Result of Factor Analysis

New Dimensions	Items	Variance explained (%)	Total variance explained (%)	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	Chi-Squared
Tangible	1	42.248	42.248	0.821	2741.580***
	2				
	3				
	4				
	5				
	6				
	7				
	8				
	9				
	10				
	11				
Reliability	12	6.898	49.146		
	13				
	14				
	15				
	16				
Responsiveness	17	6.816	55.962		
	18				
	19				
Assurance	20	6.519	62.481		
	21				
	22				
	23				
	24				
Empathy	25	5.808	68.289		
	26				
	27				
	28				

This table shows the results of the Bartlett test of sphericity and factor analysis of this study. *** $p<0.001$

Table 5: Cronbach's α for Importance and Performance of Each Dimension

Dimensions	Cronbach's α of Importance	Cronbach's α of Performance
Tangible	0.8356	0.8690
Reliability	0.8175	0.8643
Responsiveness	0.8186	0.8429
Assurance	0.8075	0.8015
Empathy	0.8777	0.8895
Total	0.9337	0.9452

This table shows the result of the reliability analysis of this study. It reveals that the study has high construct validity.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Due to rising competition, how to go about attracting more customers by improving service quality has been one of crucial issues for service-oriented businesses. In addition, more and more foreign restaurants have recently developed in Taiwan, particularly in Taipei City. Hence, for such restaurants, knowing which service items are more critical in Taiwanese customers' minds and how customers feel about their service quality in recent years is much more important for them to be able to improve service quality. After a review of the literature on service quality and discussions with managers of Taiwanese foreign restaurants, we decided to use the DINERSERV questionnaire. The methodology, an Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA), is used to categorize whole service items into four dimensions:

1) "keep up the good work", 2) "possible overkill", 3) "low priority", and 4) "concentrate here", all in accordance with the service performance of each service item.

Based on the results, the study provides three suggestions for top managers of foreign restaurants: increase the professionalization of waiters, improve customer-oriented operations, and increase the size of the parking lot. The first suggestions are for top managers to train his/her employees to support each other even while busy, or make many groups to promote work specialization. In doing so, the professionalization and speed of waiters will improve. The results reveal that waiters are not servicing in a customer-oriented way. Because customer satisfaction will lead to customer loyalty, waiters need to service in a customer-oriented manner. The study suggests that top managers need to empower waiters so they will know how to solve customers' problems when they arise. Alternatively, top managers can develop a "most welcoming waiter of the week" to motivate employees to service in a customer-oriented manner. When a waiter wins the contest, he or she can acquire a bonus.

Table 6: The Correlation List of Importance and Performance for Each Dimension

Dimensions	**Items**	**Important**		**Satisfaction**	
		Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Alpha if Item Deleted
Tangible	1	0.3244	0.7993	0.5061	0.8492
	2	0.1788	0.8287	0.2938	0.8662
	3	0.4235	0.8330	0.6343	0.8517
	4	0.6670	0.8045	0.5632	0.8592
	5	0.5810	0.8145	0.5598	0.8595
	6	0.5695	0.8159	0.6263	0.8526
	7	0.4516	0.8331	0.6040	0.8550
	8	0.3753	0.7966	0.4157	0.8553
	9	0.5489	0.8186	0.6544	0.8498
	10	0.7685	0.7899	0.6962	0.8444
	11	0.5557	0.8186	0.6395	0.8511
Reliability	12	0.6842	0.7612	0.6452	0.6495
	13	0.5777	0.7906	0.4353	0.7308
	14	0.7005	0.7005	0.3940	0.7427
	15	0.5442	0.5442	0.6135	0.6634
	16	0.5531	0.5531	0.4846	0.7142
Responsiveness	17	0.5179	0.1242	0.6722	0.8153
	18	0.5324	0.1091	0.7703	0.7194
	19	0.4139	0.2780	0.6855	0.8042
Assurance	20	0.6594	0.7167	0.5827	0.7643
	21	0.6599	0.7094	0.6637	0.7438
	22	0.3909	0.7957	0.5976	0.7618
	23	0.5863	0.7351	0.5515	0.7749
	24	0.5299	0.7545	0.5575	0.7730
Empathy	25	0.6359	0.8716	0.7044	0.8774
	26	0.7911	0.8109	0.7833	0.8481
	27	0.7271	0.8356	0.7951	0.8464
	28	0.7675	0.8194	0.7634	0.8579

This table shows the result of correlation analysis of importance and performance for each dimension.

The second suggestion reflects the result of the study that points to menu updates being too slow or even showing no change; in addition, some of customers feel that they are uncomfortable while eating. Thus, the study suggests that top managers send chefs out to learn new techniques or hire more chefs to be able to brainstorm and come up with new and innovative ideas. The third suggestion is that foreign restaurants can partner with surrounding parking lots and therefore increase the desirability of the restaurant for customers who drive their cars.

Although the study tries to make the content, structure, and method of this research detailed and objective, there are some limitations that we could not avoid. Outside of Taipei City, there are many cities in Taiwan that have foreign restaurants. Even within Taipei City, there are some outside of the Shida night market. Thus, the results of this study cannot represent the entirety of the foreign restaurant market in Taiwan. In addition, there are many kinds of foreign restaurants. The study is conducted based on several kinds that exist in the Shida night market; however, any one type may be represented by a small sample. Thus, we faced a dilemma when deciding the sample.

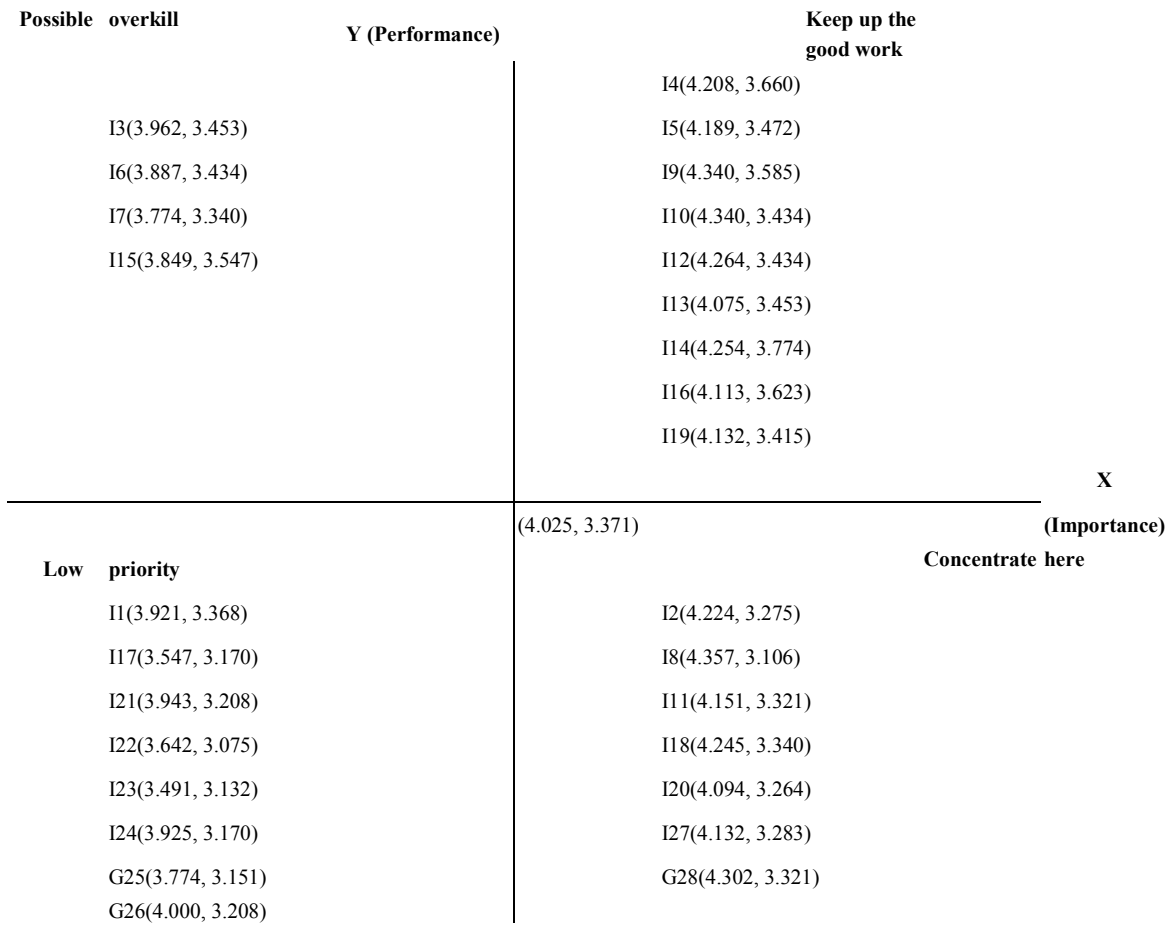
Given the limitations, the study suggests that future studies focus on certain types of foreign restaurants and extend the region within Taiwan to conduct their research. Future studies may result in more precise suggestions for foreign restaurants to improve service quality.

Table 7: The Result of Paired t-Test of Importance and Performance for Each Dimension

Dimensions	Items	Mean of Importance	Mean of Performance	t-Test	p-Value
Tangible	1	3.66	3.43	4.164	0.000***
	2	3.25	2.92	4.098	0.000***
	3	3.96	3.45	5.626	0.000***
	4	4.21	3.66	2.992	0.004**
	5	4.19	3.47	3.322	0.002**
	6	3.89	3.43	6.621	0.000***
	7	3.77	3.34	6.439	0.000***
	8	3.21	3.09	5.749	0.000***
	9	4.34	3.58	6.463	0.000***
	10	4.34	3.43	5.017	0.000***
	11	4.15	3.32	3.767	0.000***
Reliability	12	4.26	3.43	2.173	0.034**
	13	4.08	3.45	4.338	0.000***
	14	4.25	3.77	2.507	0.015*
	15	3.85	3.55	7.291	0.000***
	16	4.11	3.62	5.896	0.000***
Responsiveness	17	3.55	3.17	7.769	0.000***
	18	4.25	3.34	7.018	0.000***
	19	4.13	3.42	4.334	0.000***
Assurance	20	4.09	3.26	3.045	0.004**
	21	3.94	3.21	5.123	0.000***
	22	3.64	3.08	4.513	0.000***
	23	3.49	3.13	5.624	0.000***
	24	3.92	3.17	6.979	0.000***
Empathy	25	3.77	3.15	6.823	0.000***
	26	4.00	3.21	4.164	0.000***
	27	4.13	3.28	4.098	0.000***
	28	4.30	3.32	5.626	0.004**

This table shows the result of paired t-Test of importance and performance for each dimension of this study. The result reveals that there is a huge gap between the perception of importance and satisfaction in customers' mind. *: P<0.05; **: P<0.01; ***: P<0.001

Figure 2: The IPA Result of This Study



This figure shows the overall result of this study which presented based on Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) model.

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