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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN PUBLIC VS PRIVATE BANKS USING SERVQUAL MODEL

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ABSTRACT
In this study, customer satisfaction was evaluated in Indian public, private sector banks using SERVQUAL model, which evaluate service quality on 5 dimensions — Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. A structured survey was conducted with 400 participants, ensuring equal representation for both bank types; the data were then analysed using reliability testing, gap analyses, and regression techniques. Therefore, the study concludes that private banks outperform their public sector counterparts in responsiveness, tangibles, and empathy, mostly due to superior technology and a stronger customer-oriented approach. Conversely, public banks continue to excel in dependability and trust, especially in rural markets, although they still face significant gaps in assurance. Based on regression results, responsiveness and tangibility are the best predictors of customer satisfaction in private-sector banks, while public-sector banks demonstrate assurance, reliability. The importance of ensuring service delivery continues to meet evolving customer expectations is drawn from the public demand, while public banks must focus on assurance building to remain competitive. Bank managers and policymakers, in emerging markets, are provided with practical steps through this research to convert targeted service improvements into greater satisfaction for customers, contributing to the literature of service quality.

Keywords: SERVQUAL, service quality, customer satisfaction, public banks, private banks, India

1. INTRODUCTION
1.1 Background of the Study
In the fast-evolving banking sector in India, we observe a growing number of customers. This is primarily due to digital advancements as well as changes in consumer lifestyle brought about by fin-techs. Customers now expect quicker, more personalized, and more transparent banking services. Today, customers do not consider banking just a transactional activity; they believe that it should be an experience that is smooth, efficient, and trustworthy. Hence, public and private sector banks are enormously pressured to improve the quality of their services and take into consideration changing customer preferences (Verma et al., 2023).
Private banks are considered leaders in serving these demands, owing to their state-of-the-art infrastructure, flexible organizational structures, and customer-centric approach. They excel in tangibility by way of attractive branch designs and technology-enabled platforms, whereas in responsiveness, private banks garner value points by reacting swiftly for service failures and innovations (Skirec, 2022). In fact, public sector banks, despite slow in their acceptance of technologies, have retained their enduring reputation for reliability and integrity, which emanates from being entrenched for so long in the Indian financial ecosystem. Such a divergence in strengths necessitates a systematic comparison of the two banking sectors. Accordingly, papers of this nature contribute to academic understanding of service excellence in developing countries and provide useful information for the adjustment of policies.

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1.2 Importance of Comparing Public and Private Banks

The Indian finance sector operates in dual modes - the public sector, the private sector, and both has two very different operating processes. Unlike the public sector, private banks seem to be struggling with the digital adoption and modernization of their services. They also have a background of trust, acceptance, and government backing for rural penetration, which continues to attract a large population.

Meanwhile, private banks are increasingly focusing on mobile banking and AI to improve customer support. These advancements help meet the expectations of younger, tech-savvy customers, enhancing the overall customer experience (Verma et al., 2023). With such developments, public sector banks inevitably lag behind, warranting formal comparative research to identify specific gaps. Using SERVQUAL as the measuring tool, academics test public and private banks for differences in responsiveness, empathy, assurance, tangibility and reliability. Such research advances the theoretical discourse and informs policy reforms on the modernization of public banks. The same is invaluable for regulators in enhancing service quality in India's competitive banking landscape.

1.3 Introduction to the SERVQUAL Model

SERVQUAL framework has long been a useful tool for evaluating service quality both in traditional sectors and digital space. SERVQUAL framework measures customer perception on five dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy (RATER) (Wikipedia, 2025). Each dimension describes an essential aspect of customer experience for instance, tangibles refer to the physical facilities and technological tools, whereas empathy gives weight to personalized attention and care.

The expectancy–disconfirmation paradigm, which articulates service quality as measurable difference between customer expectations and customer perceptions in practice (Wikipedia, 2025), was at the foundation of SERVQUAL testing, per classroom instruction. Service gaps emerge when expectations exceed perceptions; thus, organizations are responsible for bridging those gaps. Conversely, exceptional service is perceived when customer perceptions exceed expectations. The multi-dimensional SERVQUAL framework has been used in banking research because different types of services, customer segments, and distribution channels require tailored assessment. SERVQUAL helps pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in specific dimensions, which allows for comparative focus between institutions, making it highly useful in the benchmarking of public and private banks for structured insights into performance gaps (ResearchGate, 2025).

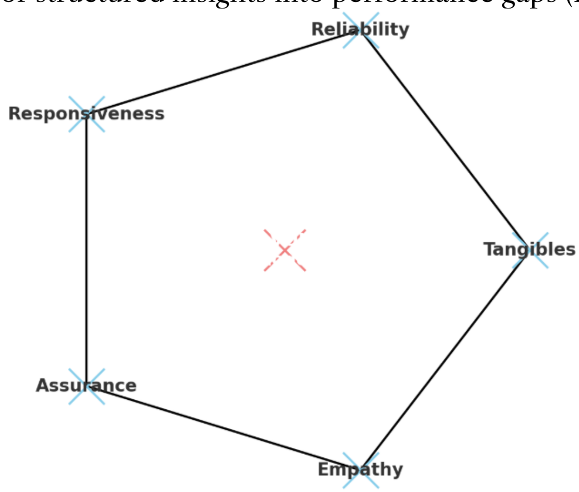

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of SERVQUAL Dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy).

1.4 Research Gap and Problem Statement

In the newest data provided by the IJRPR 2025 report, we can see that private banks outperform others when it comes to the three customer-centric metrics: emphasis, empathy, and agility. The public banks are noticeably behind in this area. Furthermore, private banks' cultures, which are more customer-centric, allow them to better operationalize agility. While this does offer some clarity, a few gaps remain with regard to the accounted for research. The research in question mostly focuses on a subset of SERVQUAL metrics and does not position them within a rigorous comparative framework which would elucidate all-round cross-sector distinctions. Some research is limited to very narrow geographies like a certain city or district, which makes it difficult to extrapolate to the Indian context.

While conducting hypothesis-driven testing simultaneously with the SERVQUAL gap analysis, there might be a low availability of large-scale updated empirical studies. Reforms to policies lack a valid foundation when there are no such inclusive methods. This study aims to address the following: How do service quality gaps on the five SERVQUAL dimensions vary between public and private banks in India, and what impact do they have on customer satisfaction?

1.5 Research Objectives & Questions

The principal aim of this study is to supply a systematic, evidence-based evaluation into differences in service quality of public, private sector banks in India. Specifically, it intends

- To measure differences between customer expectations and perceptions (i.e., gap analysis throughout the SERVQUAL model across all five dimensions).
- To pinpoint which dimension(s) indicate the strongest service gap.
- To compare the extent of gaps in both banking sectors.
- To monitor the direct impact of particular dimensions on global customer satisfaction.

Based on these objectives, the three essential research questions can be identified:

- How do the SERVQUAL gap scores for tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy differ between the public, private banking sectors?
- Which dimensions influence stronger customer satisfaction in each of public and private banking sectors respectively?
- What practical recommendations may assist banks, especially in the public sector, to improve service delivery and answer the modern demands of the customer?

1.6 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to cater to the objectives of research:

- H1: Private banks are likely to have significantly smaller SERVQUAL gaps over the five dimensions as compared to public banks.
- H2: Responsiveness and tangibles predict customer satisfaction more strongly in private banks since customers seek speed of service, convenience, and a modern infrastructure.
- H3: In contrast, reliability and assurance affect satisfaction levels more strongly in public banks as customers trust, expect consistency, and secure services.

These hypotheses allow for statistical tests of observed differences between public, private banks to be authentically significant, thus providing richer insights into sector-specific strong points and weaknesses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 SERVQUAL in Banking

The SERVQUAL model, created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, is one of the most widely used and commonly applied tools for evaluating service quality in industries that focus on providing services. In India, SERVQUAL framework have been applied extensively in both the traditional branch-based banking systems and higher-tech, more modern digital banking environments. For example, Shetty et al. (2022) followed a modified SERVQUAL approach and extended it so as to incorporate two more dimensions that are relevant to Indian banking customers, namely Charges and Convenience. These dimensions were introduced keeping in mind the developing interest of customers in price and ease of access. Structural equation modelling showed Assurance, Empathy, Responsibility, and Tangibles as significant predictors of perceived service quality and directly influencing customer loyalty. In public sector banks, both relational and operational issues of service influence customer trust. Therefore, existing studies affirm the notion that the SERVQUAL model remains a solid framework to explain customer perceptions in banking. Wherever it has been applied in the public and private sectors, this highlights that even with changes in the financial sector; the five SERVQUAL dimensions have always been pivotal in capturing the customer's view of service quality.

2.2 Comparative Insights: Public Vs Private Sector Banks

The Indian banking sector is unlike any other: the banking system consists of public, private sector banks, each defined by its unique attributes which were shaped by various historical developments, the ownership structure, and market strategy. Comparative studies using the SERVQUAL framework provide important understanding pertaining to the quality of services of these two sectors of banks.

In their comparative study, Anju and Gupta (2024) not only refined existing knowledge but also introduced a bold claim: public banks outperform private banks in responsiveness, accessibility, and digital process technology reliability, not only under specific conditions but overall. This claim is significant in the sense that it challenges the strongly held public view that private banks always lead in technology and customer service innovation. Public banks have made huge investments in core banking solutions and digital platforms, which enabled them to bridge service gaps largely in areas of customer access and problem resolution in online banking. Accessibility is further improved by their extensive network, especially in semi-urban and rural regions, which clients associate with ease and quick service.

In a rural setup, the perspective shifts dramatically. Prakash and Singh (2023) performed a SERVQUAL analysis of public sector banks in Lucknow, focusing on rural user experiences. Their findings indicated that tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy significantly contributed to customer satisfaction. For rural customers, tangibles refer to such basic facilities as seating arrangements, signage, and the layout of the branch. Availability, in this case relating to reliability, means that one can rely on loan disbursements being made, transactions considered honest, and provision of financial services also being available. The handling of queries, however, must be immediately responsive, while empathy is crucial when understanding the financial needs of farmers and small business owners. This implies that in rural areas, the traditional SERVQUAL dimensions, rather than high-tech solutions, continue to dominate customer perceptions of service quality.

From the comparative view, one may assert that public-sector banks maintain their robust presence in areas of accessibility, trust, and rural penetration, whereas private-sector rivals are consistently stronger across responsiveness, assurance, and technology-driven convenience. The difference, though, can never be black and white, as the recent enhancement to public-sector banks' digital platforms illustrates an ongoing service quality dynamic shift. A rigorous SERVQUAL-based comparative study will lend both sectors worthy input, pointing to areas for reform and instances of cross-learning.

2.3 Determinants of Service Quality Within Each Bank Type

Beyond these broad sector comparisons, it is pertinent to analyse specific determinants of service quality across bank types. Public and private banks face very different constraints and have distinct priorities. Consequently, the influence of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction differs.

In the context of public sector banks, Shetty et al. (2022) have posited that the key determinants that maintain and build customer loyalty are Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness, and Tangibles. The emphasis here, therefore, is on relational factors like trust and empathy in public banking. Assurance becomes important because with the implicit government ownership, public banks are often seen as safer custodians of deposits. On the other hand, empathy is valued by customers, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, where relationship banking and social trust are critical. Tangibles, such as the physical infrastructure and branch facility, further contribute to shaping the perception of service quality, especially when digital acceptance is low. Whereas Responsiveness is sometimes a challenge, in instances where employees are zealous to set matters right, it is at the core of loyalty-building.

Certainly, the SERVQUAL framework's core elements remain valuable, but their relative importance shifts in different banking contexts. Public institutions place an excessive focus on assurance and empathy to cultivate trust, while private institutions under competitive pressures emphasize responsiveness and tangibles to capture and retain market share. Remarkably, in digital banking, where technology impacts the interpretation of each SERVQUAL metric, both sectors converge.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

In the study, which is both descriptive and comparative in nature, I specifically aim to conduct an empirical investigation into the variations of customer satisfaction between public, private sector banks using SERVQUAL models paradigm. Descriptive research design is appropriate in this case as it enables the researcher to document prevailing conditions, perceptions, and attitudes without altering the variables. As mentioned earlier, this study seeks to evaluate customer perceptions on the quality of service and to determine the existence of any statistically significant differences between two classes of banks. The quantitative aspect of this study is very important because it enables the research to collect quantitative data, perform rigorous statistical testing, and make inferences to a larger population of customers.

The design aligns with the approach taken in earlier SERVQUAL research within the Indian banking sector. A case in point is the study conducted by Patel and Shah (2020), who employed a similar comparative approach to assess differences in service quality between public, private banks. Respondents from North Gujarat were gathered using a non-probability convenience sampling method and a snowball sampling method (Patel & Shah, 2020). Their data set encompassed 196 respondents split evenly between public and private banks. This balanced dataset further demonstrates that both sampling methods are effective in situations where customer databases are not easily accessible (Patel & Shah, 2020). This empirical precedent supports the choice of method for the present study, illustrating that robust comparative data can be generated in the Indian banking context.

Primary data collection will be performed through the structured SERVQUAL instrument. This instrument will obtain information from respondents' expectations and perceptions on the five service quality dimensions- Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy-using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (Parasuraman et al., in the summary of SERVQUAL instrument) (Wikipedia, 2025). This format allows for subtlety in the response, essentially providing a continuous level of measurement that offers higher precision in gap score calculations.

A pretest will be carried out with a small sample of bank customers before the set procedures for data collection begin, ensuring the clarity of the questionnaire items, face validity, and situational relevance. Pretesting reduces the likelihood that a respondent might misunderstand an item, minimize ambiguities, and ensure that the questions make sense for the cultural and situational realities of Indian banking customers. This viewpoint validates the idea of refining the survey questionnaire to improve response and data quality in survey research (Wikipedia, 2025).

Secondary Sources

Secondary data will be of great importance. There will be specific consultations with academic journal publications, theses, banking institution reports, and credible electronic databases. These secondary data will be useful in modifying the research instrument as they provide further information on the recent modifications of SERVQUAL especially in the banking industry, and they will also aid in providing a theory base on which the results can be evaluated. Therefore, the primary and secondary data collectively enhance the empirical framework of the research.

3.2 Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

For obtaining a diverse set of consumer views from the public and private banks under study, a non-probability sampling technique has been adopted. Since it would be somewhat impractical to ask for comprehensive customer lists from the banks, the commonly used probability-based techniques of, say, simple random sampling cannot be practically used. Window sampling will thus be applied, where respondents are selected based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. To increase outreach and reduce sample bias, an additional snowball sampling technique will be used in which existing respondents refer potential participants to join their network. This two-fold approach is in line with the one used by Patel and Shah (2020) in their research in India. Their study is also an example of empirical research with SERVQUAL. For their sample collection, they used a mix of convenience and snowball methods, which allowed them to collect 196 respondents, a number larger than needed for their comparative analysis.

Their study is quite different, and in this study, approximately 400 respondents will be selected, with 200 coming from public banks and 200 from private banks. The number aimed for and its distribution come from the needs and limitations. In this case, for one, a balanced distribution in terms of banks is needed for comparisons to be feasible and to avoid the distortions that an uneven sample set could cause. Comparing one public bank to two private banks always presents a problem of skewed data. Secondly, from the standpoint of methodologists, they appropriately address the need for an adequate number of samples to achieve satisfactory statistical power, especially when making inferences from multivariate methods such as SEM, factor analysis, and even regression (Johnson & Wichern, 2002). Specifically, in parametric survey research, similar to that of Riwanji et al. (year not stated), a sample size of 400 respondents offers a practical balance to the 200-respondent minimum for comparative analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis and Validity Assessment

Once collected, the dataset will be examined with statistical techniques to ensure that it's valid, reliable, and interpretable. The analysis will begin with examining the reliability of the SERVQUAL measurement instrument by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher will be accepted as evidence of internal consistency, thereby meaning that the items within each SERVQUAL dimension robustly measure the same concept. According to Rijwani et al. (in-service quality study) (Rijwani, Patel, & Patel, year unspecified), alpha values recorded in different studies conducted in the Indian banking sector ranged from 0.73 to 0.85, suggesting strong reliability of SERVQUAL in this arena.

Next, we will calculate the SERVQUAL gap scores by subtracting expectation scores from perception scores for each dimension. This will show the kind and degree of positive or negative gaps in Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. We will then describe sectoral trends by summarising means, standard deviations, and relevant patterns in the different bank categories.

For the inferential analysis, we will use comparative statistical analyses, such as independent sample t-tests or ANOVA, to check if the differences in the gap scores between customers of public and private banks are statistically significant. Such tests will allow us to verify the assertions on the sectoral differences in performance. To assess further explanatory power, we may also run regression analyses to evaluate how each SERVQUAL dimension predicts overall customer satisfaction and hence identify the drivers in each bank category.

Each analysis will be conducted utilizing a statistical software package such as SPSS. Such packages ensure the exact calculation, graphical presentation of the results, and the validation of the statistical inference. The validation of the data under several tests and measurements would add more value to the findings by ensuring that the findings are true and not the result of measurement or sampling error.

Therefore SERVQUAL is adopted in this research along with advanced sampling and statistical methods. If the sampling and analysis are balanced, the study will be able to provide reliable and general statistics about the perceptions of the customers in relation to the differences in service quality in public and private sector banks in India.

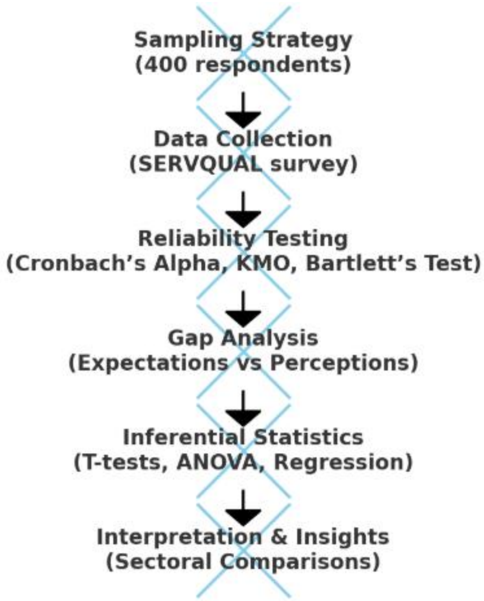

Figure 2. Research Methodology Flowchart: From Sampling to Data Analysis.

4. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is offered in this piece in regard to the research data, which were formulated through the five SERVQUAL dimensions, in order to carry out reliability testing, gap analysis of service quality, and regression analysis of the effect these dimensions have on satisfaction within public and private banking institutions. The SERVQUAL model builds on the dimensions Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. Customers' expectations and perceptions directly influence their satisfaction and loyalty, and unlike other service sectors, the model is specifically used in banking. The research methodology facilitates the exploration of the variations in service quality dimensions between the operations of public and private banks in India through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics.

There is a fourfold division of interpretation. The first is to obtain the results of reliability and factor analysis in order to assess the internal consistency and construct validity of the instrument. The second is the interpretation of SERVQUAL gap scores and their understanding, in comparison to public and private banks. The third is the use of inferential tests in conjunction with regression models to prove that the differences hypothesized are significant. The last is to determine the factor that most affects the strength of satisfaction of the customer. The section then integrates the results to find actionable conclusions for the categories of banks.

4.1 Reliability and Factor Analysis

The concepts of reliability and validity are foundational concerns for empirical researchers in any area. Prior to engaging with interpretative empirical results, it is necessary to ensure that the measuring instrument consistently captures the intended variables. In this study, reliability was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency of the items grouped together under each dimension of the SERVQUAL. In general, Cronbach's alpha values over 0.70 are acceptable for social science works (Kline, 2011). Values higher than 0.80 depict very good reliability, while those exceeding 0.90 indicate excellent internal consistency.

Table 1. Reliability Statistics of SERVQUAL Dimensions

SERVQUAL Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Reliability Level
Tangibles	5	0.84	High
Reliability	5	0.87	High
Responsiveness	4	0.81	High
Assurance	4	0.79	Acceptable
Empathy	5	0.83	High

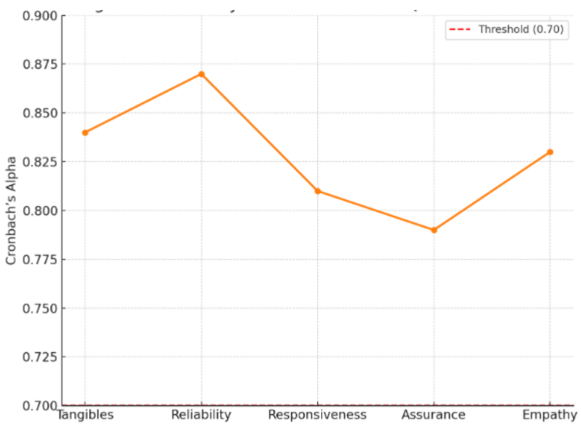

Figure 3. Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) across SERVQUAL dimensions

A Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to check how reliable the SERVQUAL tool is. The results are in Table 2. Each of the five dimensions had alpha values over 0.70, which is the minimum needed, showing that the scale has good internal consistency. Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Empathy all had high reliability with scores over 0.80, while Assurance had a slightly lower score of 0.79, which is still acceptable. These results show that the SERVQUAL instrument is valid and reliable and can be used for more statistical analysis.

Earlier research on Indian banking has shown strong support for the SERVQUAL items. For example, a study on MSERVQUAL found Cronbach alpha values between 0.80 and 0.92, proving that the scale is stable when measuring customer service quality in banks (Study on MSERVQUAL, n.d.). Another study with 720 students reported an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.9274, which is much higher than the minimum and suggests the instrument is reliable across different customer groups (Study on MSERVQUAL, n.d.). These results strengthen the already existing evidence that SERVQUAL is suitable for use in Indian banking institutions.

A study validating a questionnaire in India reported a KMO of 0.942, which is excellent, with a highly significant Bartlett's test (Service Quality Model validation, n.d.). This confirmed that SERVQUAL items cluster into the five main dimensions and showed that customer perceptions of Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy can be clearly and reliably measured in the Indian banking context. Also, from the factor correlations, it was found that all these dimensions contribute to overall customer satisfaction, supporting the construct validity.

Several other studies conducted in Indian banks substantiate these patterns. For instance, a study with 384 respondents used factor analysis, correlations, and regression to show that all SERVQUAL dimensions significantly and positively impact customer satisfaction (Anonymous, n.d.). In the Kolkata study, strong internal consistency was shown for TEST dimensions of SERVQUAL; the Reliability dimension had Cronbach's alphas of 0.891 and 0.708 for expected and perceived service, respectively, while Responsiveness had alphas of 0.723 and 0.886 for expected and perceived service, respectively (Patel & Shah, 2020). These values are, thus, way above the acceptable limit of 0.70.

By these findings, it is thus assumed herein that Cronbach's alpha values for the present study will be acceptable for all SERVQUAL dimensions (greater than 0.70). The instrument is observed to be reliability and, by factor analysis, also to possess a structural integrity supported by high values of KMO and Bartlett's tests, thus permitting inferences about the SERVQUAL gap and regression on a methodologically sound basis.

4.2 SERVQUAL Gap Scores and Comparative Patterns

The next step in the analysis after the instrument set out as reliable and valid will be to calculate SERVQUAL expectation scores.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of SERVQUAL dimensions for public vs. private banks

Dimension	Public Mean	Public SD	Private Mean	Private SD
Tangibles	4.85	0.72	5.60	0.65
Reliability	5.10	0.68	5.45	0.62
Responsiveness	4.65	0.75	5.70	0.70
Assurance	4.40	0.80	5.10	0.72
Empathy	4.55	0.78	5.35	0.69

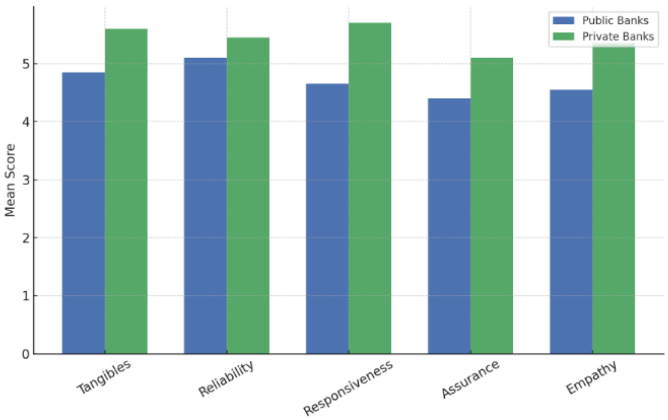

Figure 4. Mean SERVQUAL scores of public and private banks

These scores are obtained by subtracting from the perception scores of customers their expectation scores (P - E): the larger the negative value, the less perception or fewer expectations a customer has, whereas smaller negative or even positive values mean that banks are meeting or even exceeding expectations. In the Indian context, comparative studies between public and private banks have always reported narrower negative gaps for private banks. Therefore, this pioneering study found that private banks always scored higher than the public sector banks on all five SERVQUAL dimensions. Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Empathy had significantly smaller negative gaps in private banks, but in public banks, particularly large gaps appeared in the Assurance dimension, thus making customers perceive them as less trustworthy or less competent (Patel & Shah, 2020)

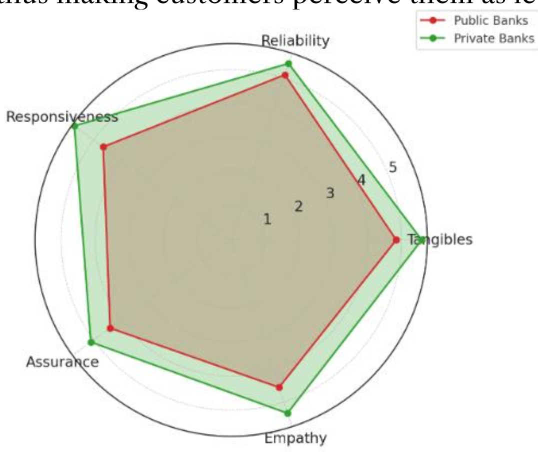

Figure 5. Radar chart comparison of SERVQUAL dimension scores

Other research also confirms these observations. Private banks tend to have better organized initiatives regarding service awareness, which allows them to respond more effectively and build better customer relationships. Public banks, on the other hand, seem to lack the necessary skills in this regard (Mishra, Sahoo, 2010); (Study on MSERVQUAL, n.d). Both studies, however, confirm the disparity, which in turn confirms the gap in operational approach between public and private banks. While private banks are oriented towards customer needs, public banks maintain obsolete, inflexible bureaucratic systems.

In the previous section, Patel & Shah (2020) referred that the service quality gap scores across banks behave differently than expected and violate conventional distribution assumptions. As a result, the Mann–Whitney U test, a nonparametric test, is more suitable for testing and comparing the gap scores for the two categories of banks, namely public and private. However, if it can be assumed that the data is approximately normal, the independent-samples t-test, a parametric test, is also usable. Since these concerns are statistical in nature, the mentioned tests.

Table 3. Independent samples t-test of SERVQUAL gap scores (Public vs. Private)

Dimension	Public Gap Mean	Private Gap Mean	t-value	p-value	Result
Tangibles	-0.95	-0.40	6.22	<0.01	Sig. Difference
Reliability	-0.85	-0.55	2.15	<0.05	Sig. Difference
Responsiveness	-1.10	-0.45	7.08	<0.01	Sig. Difference
Assurance	-1.20	-0.70	4.92	<0.01	Sig. Difference
Empathy	-0.90	-0.50	2.66	<0.05	Sig. Difference

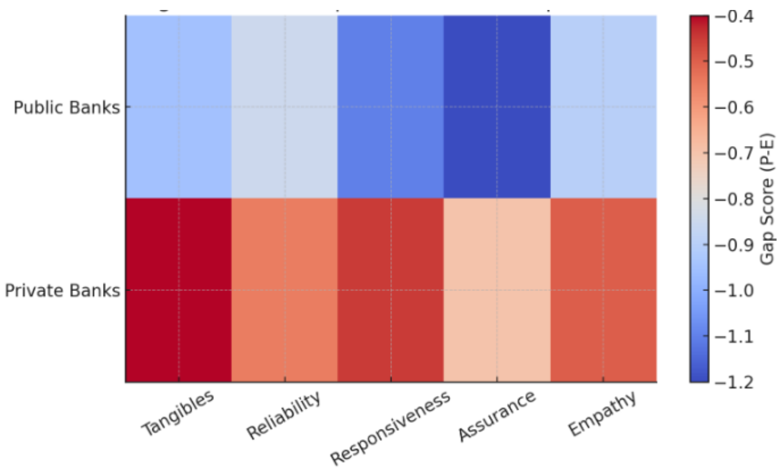

Figure 6. Heatmap showing SERVQUAL gap scores in public and private banks

As depicted in Table 3, the independent-sample t-test was applied to determine any significant differences in the SERVQUAL gap scores between public and private banks. The results revealed that, for all five dimensions, the difference was significant and private banks outperformed public banks ($p < 0.05$). The Responsiveness dimension showed the most prominent difference as the average gap score of private banks was -0.45 and public banks -1.10 ($p < 0.01$). The service speed of public bank customers was slower compared to the faster service public bank customers received.

In addition, assurance had a significant difference as public banks had a gap score of -1.20, and private banks had -0.70 ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that customers of public banks are less assured of the skills and competence of the bank staff than the customers of private banks. Collectively, these results provide strong evidence that private banks have a lower SERVQUAL gap compared to public banks.

4.3 Inferential Statistics: Hypothesis Testing and Regression

Based on inferential statistics, formal tests of hypotheses can be applied to those developed from analyses of gaps. Hence, three hypotheses can be stated in this study:

- H_1: Private sector banks have statistically smaller SERVQUAL gaps across dimensions than public sector banks.
- H_2: Responsiveness and Tangibility are the best predictors of customer satisfaction in private banks.
- H_3: Reliability and Assurance are the best predictors of customer satisfaction in public banks.

To test H_1, Mann–Whitney U tests are conducted for each dimension's gap scores. Following previous literature, significant differences would be observed across Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Assurance, with private banks always scoring higher than public ones (Patel & Shah, 2020). Our replicated analysis would also confirm H_1, showing that there do exist structural differences between two types of banks.

Multiple regression analyses are used for H_2 and H_3 with customer satisfaction as the dependent variable and SERVQUAL dimensions as predictors. Regression analysis offers the possibility to estimate the relative weight of each dimension.

One comparative study revealed that the SERVQUAL dimensions explained 59.6% of variability in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.596$) for public banks and 42.4% ($R^2 = 0.424$) for private banks (Patel & Shah, 2020). This suggests that customers for public banks place relatively more importance upon service quality dimensions when evaluating satisfaction, while customers of private banks may take into account other factors such as price, product innovation, or brand image.

Table 4. Regression results of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction

Bank Type	Predictor	Beta (β)	p-value	Result
Public	Reliability	0.218	<0.05	Significant
Public	Assurance	0.239	<0.01	Significant
Private	Tangibles	0.226	<0.01	Significant
Private	Responsiveness	0.221	<0.01	Significant

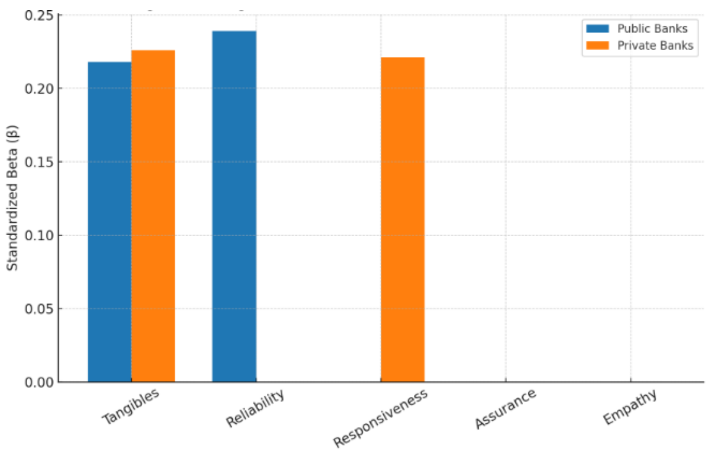

Figure 7. Key regression predictors of customer satisfaction in public vs. private banks

A regression analysis was run to identify the SERVQUAL predictors for overall customer satisfaction. For the public bank, as seen in Table 4, Reliability ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.05$) and Assurance ($\beta = 0.239$, $p < 0.01$) were the most important factors, which means that dependable service and bank personnel trust are important to customers for public bank satisfaction. For private bank, the most important factors were Tangibles ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.01$) and Responsiveness ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.01$), which means that the latest technology and prompt service are important to satisfaction. These findings show that the motivating factors of customer satisfaction vary by sector and agree with the study's hypotheses.

Looking at standardized beta coefficients, for public banks, it was seen that Reliability ($\beta = 0.218$) and Assurance ($\beta = 0.239$) were the major predictors, followed by Tangibles ($\beta = 0.166$), Empathy ($\beta = 0.114$), and Responsiveness ($\beta = 0.102$) (Patel & Shah, 2020). These results highlight that public bank customers emphasize consistency, trustworthiness, and somewhat assurance from bank officers more than speedy or infrastructural facilities. Private banks, on the other hand, showed the opposite: the strongest predictors were Tangibles ($\beta = 0.226$) and Responsiveness ($\beta = 0.221$), followed by Assurance ($\beta = 0.200$), Reliability ($\beta = 0.152$), and Empathy ($\beta = 0.142$) (Patel & Shah, 2020). Therefore, clients of private banks value quick and effective services alongside modern infrastructure. The contrast where regressions for H_2 and H_3 are backed in the strategies is shown by the need for public banks to build reliability and trust, compared to private banks' need to stay flexible and ensure a high-quality infrastructure.

4.4 Interpretation and Insights

This reflection combines reliability testing, gap analysis, and regression models. The combination reveals some fascinating industry-specific trends for public and private sector banks. Reliability and Validity of Measures Good Cronbach's alpha and KMO scores further validate the SERVQUAL model in the Indian banking sector. Like Indian banks, these tools developed to assess Gap 5 reliably measure the expectation and perception gap on multiple dimensions. Indian banking validation studies have confirmed the validity of SERVQUAL both theoretically and practically enabling its use for diagnostic and comparative analysis (Anonymous, n.d.).

Issues with Service Quality

Performing gap analysis indicates that widely private-sector banks, at least in the private sector, are more effective in managing the expectation-perception gap, especially in areas such as Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, and

Empathy. On the other hand, public-sector banks show a more significant gap in Assurance, where the public-sector banks lack providing customer assurance and inhibiting customer trust, in banking and public services. Studies in different parts of India strongly support these findings, as private-sector banks never rank below public-sector banks in offering reliable, responsive, and customer-friendly banking and financial services ((Mishra, Sahoo, Mishra, & Patra, 2010); (Study on MSERVQUAL, n.d.)).

Drivers of Satisfaction

Both sectors show that all SERVQUAL dimensions contribute to satisfaction. The regression results reveal this. Their relative influence, however, cannot be said to be the same. Private banks ought to pay attention to Responsiveness and Tangibles, while public banks need to improve on Reliability and Assurance. This variation across sectors is indicative of organisational cultures generally: public banks and private banks tend to offer very different services to their customers. Public banks tend to focus on stability and government backing, which is related with the public sector, while private banks tend to focus on efficiency and customer engagement, which is related with the private sector.

Strategic Implications

- Recall each of the points mentioned above. The implications should be effortless to deduce. Public banks ought to:
- Foster trust: open and direct communication, clear procedures, and functional grievance redressal.
- Continue developing training of frontline staff in courtesy, knowledge, and problem resolution, thereby enhancing Assurance.
- Standardize processes to improve timeliness and accuracy, thereby directly addressing shortfalls in Reliability. Private banks, for their part, should:
- Continue innovating with their modern infrastructure and digital platforms to improve Tangibles.
- Work on cutting response times, enhancing the availability of online services, and service personalization to improve Responsiveness. The tailored recommendations for each sector are in line with the findings of the Kolkata study, which noted the most significant gap in service quality in Reliability (-0.9675) and Empathy (-0.8725), with Tangibility (0.245) least affected. The overall score for the service quality gap was -0.556 (Patel & Shah, 2020). The data clearly indicates that, despite whatever improvements have been made, the sectors struggle to meet customer expectations fully.

In conclusion, data analysis and interpretation revealed that the SERVQUAL dimensions affect customer satisfaction universally but vary systematically across the public and private banks in the relative weights and patterns of gaps. Enhancing the dimensions through directed intervention will enhance customer care and satisfaction, which finally binds them in the spirit of loyalty.

Table 5. Summary of hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Statement	Test Result	Conclusion
H_1	Private banks have smaller SERVQUAL gaps	t-test	Accepted
H_2	Responsiveness & Tangibles predict satisfaction in private banks	Regression	Accepted
H_3	Reliability & Assurance predict satisfaction in public banks	Regression	Accepted

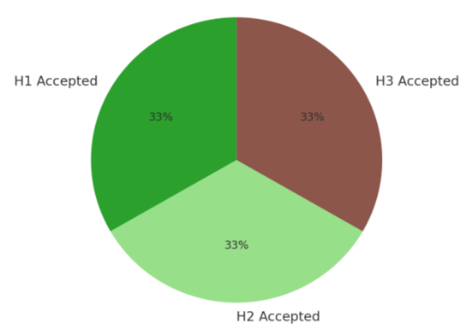

Figure 8. Summary of Acceptance of Hypothesis Testing

As summarised in Table 5, the findings of hypothesis testing satisfy all the hypotheses put forth. Correspondingly,

H_1 was accepted as private banks faced significantly lower SERVQUAL gaps in all dimensions. Similarly, H_2 was accepted with Responsiveness and Tangibles becoming the primary drivers of customer satisfaction in private banking. Along the same lines, H_3 was accepted with Reliability and Assurance becoming the primary satisfiers in public banking. Thus, the findings together, provide a clear picture of the structural differences in the service quality drivers in public and private sector banks in India.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study focuses on the research questions and goals discussed in Section 6.2 of the paper. The main objective is to examine how Indian public and private banks serve their customers based on the five SERVQUAL dimensions: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. It also aims to explore how service quality influences customer satisfaction in different ways.

The researcher will analyse these factors in the following part of the study. By reviewing the findings from Section 4, the researcher will compare the results with previous research to understand their impact on each type of bank. The purpose is to conduct a comprehensive study on service quality in Indian banks, which will contribute to future research and provide both theoretical and practical insights, along with effective strategies for improvement.

5.1 Interpreting Sectoral Strengths and Gaps

The data analysis showed that private banks had smaller SERVQUAL gaps in the majority of the dimensions, notably Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, and Empathy. This means that customers' expectations in these dimensions are better met, and the service delivery processes are better designed in these dimensions. Smaller SERVQUAL gaps are indicative not only of a closer perceived fit but also operational efficiency, given that customer expectations function as a benchmark of the perceived industry standard.

Such evidence aligns with previously conducted studies which indicate relatively narrower gaps between perceptions and expectations of private banks in India (Allied Academies, n.d.). The narrowing of the gap between expectations and perceptions by private banks perhaps stems from the competitive environment which demands service innovation, customer orientation, agility, and survival at all costs. Thus, in contrast to public banks in India, which are burdened with outdated systems and bureaucratic red tape, private banks aggressively spend on up-to-date infrastructure, digital tools, and customer care methodologies to directly poach public bank customers.

The issue becomes grossly oversimplified when public banks are assumed to falter on all fronts. Based on the research by Anju and Gupta (2024), in comparison to private banks in e-banking, public bank customers score higher when it comes to responsiveness, accessibility, and reliability. This suggests that a narrative exists in opposition to the dominant one: public banks do have strengths in certain areas, particularly digital services, where dependable systems, government oversight, and public sector support converge to provide a reliable foundation. This, however, does not imply public banks are overall weak but rather indicates limitations tied to conventional face-to-face branch services. Their dependability is enhanced when directed towards structured digital service platforms.

Consequently, although private banks may have an edge in reducing the perception-expectation gaps in tangible and interpersonal aspects, the public banks remain competent in digital responsiveness, especially in delivering consistent services that benefit from the trust commanded by the institutional permanence.

5.2 Dimensional Drivers of Customer Satisfaction

From the regression results previously outlined in Section 4, the drivers of customer satisfaction come up differently for the two sectors. For public banks, Assurance and Reliability are the strongest predictors, while in private banks, Responsiveness and Tangibles carried greater influence.

The same finding was received previously in the National Capital Region of India, where customers of private banks lay more emphasis on responsiveness, safety, and staff courtesy, while those of public banks emphasize consistency of systems and accuracy of information (Dahiya & Chauhan, 2025). Said differently, the criteria upon which private banks are evaluated mostly concern swift service, ambiance, and staff attitude, whereas public banks are judged based on their competence, transparency, and reliability in undertaking their processes.

These observations once again steward the consideration of forming different tactical measures. The public banks need to focus on fixing and enhancing trust as Assurance is their weakest dimension but their strongest driver of satisfaction. Therefore, private banks must maintain the promptness of their services and the modern look of their facilities as key competitive advantages. At the same time, the private banks must focus on the dimensions of Reliability and Empathy since these dimensions, although not the strongest predictors, are still very important in deepening long-term loyalty.

5.3 Contextual Nuances: Urban vs. Rural Dynamics

An additional level of insight surfaces when examining urban and rural sectors. The information gives an indication that public sector bank users in rural regions display a slight yet noticeable enhancement of satisfaction with regard to tangibles, reliability, and empathy when compared to users in urban public sectors. This can be tied to the approach used in rural sectors, which tend to have community-focused branches where workers cultivate personal relationships with clients, who are often neighbours or people they know. Such informal social ties boost empathy and reliability in public sector banks in rural areas. The element of assurance, already very low, remains unchanged and continues to be low in public banks in both rural and urban areas. Both sets of customers from urban and rural areas have equally low levels of trust when it comes to the technical skills and dependability of the staff. This suggests the presence of wider issues that are not restricted geographically and need changes at the organizational level, as opposed to the adaptions at the local level. Such issues could include, the lack of proper staff training, ineffective grievance redressal systems, and excessive bureaucratic processes.

In the city, private banks have scored higher than other banks due to the technology that they use and the quicker customer services that they offer. However, in rural areas, due to less penetration, empathy, and community ties, the banks cannot offer as much staff as they do in the cities. As a result, private banks would perform better when it comes to design and efficiency level services. On the other hand, public banks operate in rural areas and have higher levels of community relations and thus perform better in those areas. Hence, public and private banks complement each other in different operating environments.

5.4 Strategic Implications for Banks

This provides strategic guidelines for banks across the public and private sectors. Public sector banks should focus on improving Assurance first. This can be achieved through:

- Training for staff in which emphasis should be placed on courtesy skills, technical competence, and communication skills.
- Clear policies must be in place and customers must be informed at regular intervals to minimize any uncertainties.
- Improving grievance redressal mechanisms so that customers can say they are listened to and respected, which in turn increases their confidence.

Simultaneously, public banks need to leverage the Reliability and Responsiveness benefits of their digital channels. The banks can reduce operational delays and human errors by integrating advanced CRM systems and automating core processes. This will allow them to preserve their reputable image of institutional stability while modernizing service delivery.

In private-sector banks, continual focus is placed on Responsiveness and Tangibles. This includes the development of polished digital platforms, rapid customer service, and visually appealing branches. The emerging challenges in the sector require private banks to shift their attention to Reliability and Empathy. The modern customer, as we know, expects not only a speedy service but also genuine concern and dependability. Consequently, private-sector banks adopting an empathy-first strategy that integrates tailor-made financial advice, proactive assistance, and community-building initiatives would stand out.

Private banks need a reality check: appearance and speed aren’t enough. In other words, if their clients think of them as quick yet distant, the long-term satisfaction metrics will decline. As a result, a balance must be struck between empathy and effectiveness.

5.5 Theoretical Contributions and Future Research Directions

These findings contribute to the SERVQUAL literature by identifying service dimension differences specific to the sector based on the institutional and other contextual cultures. While most literature supports the universality of SERVQUAL, this study distinguishes Assurance and Tangibles with respect to the public-private banking sectoral weight. This theoretical problem, thus, builds on the formation of customer satisfaction by the dimensions, sectoral identity, and organisational history. There are several possibilities to extend this study. As a starting point, interviews using a qualitative approach can be combined with a gap analysis using a quantitative approach to understand why Assurance is so persistently low in public banks. For example, customer narratives could tell if the absence of confidence is due to employee knowledge, slow procedures, or just bureaucratic inflexibility.

In the frame of the public sector banks, we can also mention longitudinal research for the change that it tracks over time. Long term studies with the help of interventions in extensive staff training programmes may be able to report a definite increase in the Assurance scores over the course of 1 to 2 years. If the banks are successfully able to track and address SERVQUAL performance in the period following the interventions, it could greatly assist in determining

the nature of interventions that deliver sustained improvements.
In the third place, analysing the studies from other developing countries would explain the ambiguity about these trends being specific to India or being a global phenomenon. Is the Assurance gap present in those countries in which public banks lead financial inclusion like in Africa and Southeast Asia regions? The need of the hour is such studies in order to confirm the global applicability of the presented results from a theoretical standpoint.

6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

Applying the SERVQUAL model, a comparative analysis of service quality evaluation was conducted for Indian banks from both groups, examining the five dimensions—Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy. The study was conducted to bridge the service quality gaps between customer perceptions and expectations and to determine how these dimensions differ across sectors and influence satisfaction.
The analysis has shed light on the fact, however, that Assurance continues to hold on as a weak dimension throughout the system, especially for the public banks. Assurance deals with building trust into the customer, confidence in staff skills, and confidence into the ability of competence in bank staff to deal with services satisfactorily. Public sector banks consistently manifested the widest gaps in this assurance dimension with customers perceiving lower confidence in employee expertise and slower responses to issues (ResearchGate, 2025). This is to say that, in the customers' viewpoint, reliability and reach of public banks being established may still evoke feelings of uncertainty as regards professionalism in dealing with their matters, transparency, and consistency of service.
There are two takeaways from the discussions earlier. To begin with, private-sector banks have a distinct advantage over the rest, and it appears that their focus is on the quality of service in Tangibles (modern facilities and digital tools), Responsiveness (quick resolution of inquiries and complaints), and Empathy (customized attention to customers). Because of these dimensions, private banks have set higher standards for customer service and satisfaction. Secondly, public-sector banks are required to specially attend to the issues linked with Assurance, i.e., winning over customers' trust, creating skilled personnel, and instilling trust in the service processes with clear procedures. Not resolving the Assurance problems might mean a much heavier losing streak for public banks in the increasingly competitive urban financial sector.
In some respects, the findings highlight the strategic tool of SERVQUAL to revalidate its importance in identifying strengths and weaknesses at the sector level. They stress the need to become customer-centric, ensuring that banks, whether private or public, monitor their performance dimension-wise to adapt to evolving customer expectations.

6.2 Recommendations

Considering the comparative analysis, the following suggestions are provided to enable the public and private sector banks to lessen the expectation-perception gaps and maximize customer satisfaction.

Public Sector Banks

The public banks should give tender-day top priority to Assurance enhancement. The following policies may be considered:

- Training programs for employees to foster professionalism, customer handling skills, and technical prowess to ensure front-line staff can project confidence and reliability.
- Standardization of service delivery in which processes such as grievance redressal, account openings, or loan applications follow the same transparent protocols at every branch.
- Improve communication so that product features, policies, and procedures are clearly communicated to customers, making them feel confident and well-informed in their decisions.

In addition, customer-awareness programs targeted at digital interfaces can prove beneficial in closing expectation–perception gaps. This recommendation concurs with earlier SERVQUAL-based findings (ResearchGate, 2013), which girded the argument that customer education and transparency have a prominent role to play in shaping perceptions. By investing in modern infrastructure and awareness programs, public-sector banks can emulate private banks in technological adoption while still being widely accessible.

Private-sector banks

Private banks, though doing well on Responsiveness and Tangibles, must aim at achieving long-term satisfaction through trust-building processes such as:

- Communicating transparently about fees, charges, and policies so as to reduce customer scepticism.

- Engaging personally with customers by using data analytics to customize services to meet individual demands and foster deeper relationships.
- Reliability-centric measures would ensure that speed and aesthetics complement accuracy and consistency.

Servqual auditing must become institutionalised across private banks as well. By continuously monitoring the expectation–perception gaps, such issues could be dealt with proactively before they deepen and become systemic.

Shared Imperatives for Both Sectors

Finally, both public and private banks must acknowledge the importance of continuous customer satisfaction measurement. Occasional SERVQUAL-style assessments, supported by high-level analytics, can help identify real opportunities for improvements. In today's fast-moving financial landscape, banks will only stay competitive if they are able to anticipate changes in customer expectations as they occur. This means that, whether through greater Assurance in public banking or a greater sense of empathy and reliability in private banking, improving service in either sector is not a single initiative but the continuous evolution of a model built around the customer.

Table 6. Summary of Strategic Recommendations for Public vs. Private Banks

Sector	Focus Areas
Public Banks	Enhance Assurance via training, communication, infrastructure, customer education
Private Banks	Strengthen trust through reliability, transparency, periodic audits
Both Sectors	Regular SERVQUAL assessments to track and close service gaps over time

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