

# Systematic Literature Review of Research on Service Quality in Business-to-Consumer Markets

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## Article Info

### Article history:

Received 2026-06-23

Revised 2026-08-10

Accepted 2026-08-26

### Keywords:

Business to Consumer Markets

Service Quality

Systematic Literature Review

## ABSTRACT

Background: In an increasingly aggressive business environment, companies are compelled to deliver optimal service quality as a strategic effort to retain customers. This article aims to analyze the latest developments in service quality research through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 64 relevant articles sourced from the Emerald Insight database between 2016 and 2024. Theoretically, this review is anchored in the SERVQUAL model, which encompasses the dimensions of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy as the primary instruments for measuring customer perceptions and expectations. The analysis shows a significant upward trend in publications over the last decade, with peak productivity in 2023–2024, accounting for 29 articles. By industrial classification, e-service quality and the restaurant industry dominate the literature, with nine publications each. The managerial implications of this study emphasize that investing in service quality improvement is not merely an operational activity but an essential long-term strategy to build customer loyalty and gain a competitive edge in the market.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing intensity of competition in today's global business environment has fundamentally reshaped how companies create and deliver value to customers, particularly within business-to-consumer (B2C) markets. In the past, competitive advantage largely came from product differentiation and pricing strategies. However, as markets become more saturated and product offerings increasingly similar, companies must compete through more intangible aspects, particularly the quality of service they provide. In this regard, Service quality has evolved from being a supporting function into a core strategic element that plays a crucial role in sustaining business performance [1].

The growing importance of service quality is closely linked to changing customer behavior and expectations. Modern consumers are more informed, more selective, and more demanding than ever before. With easy access to digital platforms and online reviews, customers can quickly compare alternatives and share their experiences with a wider audience [2]. As a result, companies face constant pressure to deliver not only functional value but also a consistent, satisfying service experience. Failure to meet these expectations can lead to negative perceptions, reduced customer loyalty, and ultimately a loss of market share [3].

From a theoretical standpoint, service quality is commonly understood as the discrepancy between customer expectations and their perceptions of the actual service received. Booth et al. [4] define quality as a product's or service's ability to fulfill customer needs, whether stated or implied. This perspective highlights the subjective nature of service quality, as individual perceptions and prior experiences largely shape it. Consequently, understanding customer expectations becomes essential for organizations aiming to deliver superior service [5].

One of the most widely adopted frameworks for measuring service quality is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry. This model conceptualizes service quality through five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Researchers have applied these dimensions across industries such as banking, hospitality, retail, and tourism. The model has also served as a foundation for numerous empirical studies examining the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty. Nevertheless, despite its widespread use, the applicability of SERVQUAL in contemporary contexts remains debated, particularly given rapid technological advancements [6].

In recent years, digital transformation has significantly reshaped the service-delivery landscape. The emergence of e-service platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and automated customer interactions has introduced new forms of service encounters that differ substantially from traditional face-to-face interactions. For example, chatbots and automated systems increasingly handle customer support, raising questions about how elements such as empathy and assurance are perceived in digital environments. This shift suggests that traditional service quality frameworks may need to adapt to remain relevant to modern customer experiences [7].

Although the service quality literature is extensive, existing studies remain fragmented and context-specific. Many studies focus on particular industries or geographic regions, resulting in a lack of comprehensive understanding of broader trends. Additionally, previous research is dominated by empirical studies, with relatively few efforts to synthesize findings across contexts systematically. This fragmentation makes it difficult to identify consistent patterns, emerging themes, and critical research gaps within the field [8].

Moreover, the rapid evolution of business environments, particularly driven by digitalization and changing consumer behavior, has created new areas that remain underexplored. For instance, the integration of service quality with technological factors such as automation, personalization algorithms, and digital customer journeys has not been

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fully examined in a unified framework. Similarly, cross-cultural differences in service quality perceptions across regions such as Asia, Europe, and emerging markets require further investigation to enhance the generalizability of existing theories [9].

Given these conditions, a comprehensive and structured review of service quality research is clearly needed. A systematic literature review (SLR) is an appropriate approach, as it allows the identification, evaluation, and synthesis of relevant studies in a transparent and replicable manner. By consolidating findings from previous research, an SLR can offer a more holistic understanding of how service quality has evolved and where future research should be directed [10].

Therefore, this study aims to conduct a systematic literature review of service quality research in B2C markets from 2016–2026. By analyzing 64 selected articles from the Emerald Insight database, this research maps the development of service quality studies, identifies dominant research streams, and uncovers gaps in the literature. In doing so, this study not only enriches the academic literature but also provides practical insights for businesses designing effective service strategies.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes that service quality should no longer be viewed merely as an operational concern, but as a long-term strategic investment. Companies that consistently deliver high-quality service are more likely to build strong customer relationships, enhance customer loyalty, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly complex business environment.

## **2. METHOD**

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). SLR identifies, evaluates, and interprets all relevant research on a specific research question or topic area. It involves a systematic process of searching for, selecting, and analyzing research articles to provide a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on the subject [11]. An SLR aims to synthesize findings from existing studies to answer specific research questions [12]. This study adapts the methodology of Manoharan and Singal, as cited in Hair et al. [13], using a literature review approach with six main steps: period classification, database selection, journal selection, article selection, article classification, and analysis.

This approach ensures a structured and transparent review process. Each stage of the SLR is carefully designed to minimize subjectivity and enhance the reliability of the findings. By following a systematic procedure, this study provides a more comprehensive and unbiased synthesis of the existing literature on service quality [14].

Moreover, a structured SLR framework allows this research to identify patterns and trends across studies, including variations in research focus, methodology, and context. This is especially important because service quality has been widely examined across industries and geographical regions, resulting in a diverse body of literature. This method allows the study to organize and integrate these findings into a coherent overview [15].

Additionally, this approach helps identify research gaps that may not be immediately visible in individual studies. By comparing and analyzing multiple sources, this study highlights areas that require further exploration, particularly in evolving business

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environments and digital transformation. As such, the SLR method not only summarizes past research but also provides a foundation for future studies.

#### Step 1 – Period:

The analysis was conducted over a 10-year period, from 2016 to 2026. The year 2014 was selected as the starting point to facilitate the data collection process. The selection of articles from the past decade is generally done to ensure the relevance and novelty of the research findings in relation to the current context. Recent studies reflect changes in theory, methods, technology, or emerging phenomena [16].

#### Step 2 – Database Selection:

Database selection is a crucial step because it determines the scope of the review. Relevant articles were carefully selected from the Emerald Insight database.

#### Step 3 – Journal Selection:

Given the interdisciplinary nature of service quality, articles on this topic are spread across various journals. To broaden the search scope, multiple databases were used as initial sources to identify articles, which led to the identification of 31 journals in the business and marketing field, including prominent journals in these areas.

#### Step 4 – Article Selection:

Since the focus of this literature review is on service quality, to ensure no articles were overlooked, general terms such as service quality, SERVQUAL, and business-to-consumer were used during the initial search phase.

#### Step 5 – Article Classification:

To achieve the objectives of this review, 64 relevant service quality articles were obtained from the EmeraldInsight database.

#### Step 6 – Classification Analysis:

The final step aims to deepen understanding of how service quality research has developed over the analysis period. In the first phase, the articles were classified into 11 business categories: bank service quality, restaurant service quality, e-service quality, hospitality service quality, tourism service quality, manufacturing service quality, logistics service quality, distribution service quality, retail service quality, provider service quality, digital service quality, and Other. This classification identified eleven business categories, as shown in Figure 1.

In addition to the structured steps described above, this study also emphasizes the importance of maintaining consistency and objectivity throughout the review process. Each selected article was carefully examined to ensure its relevance to the research topic, particularly regarding service quality and its application in business-to-consumer (B2C) contexts. This screening process helps reduce bias and strengthens the reliability of the analysis.

Furthermore, this systematic approach enables the study to identify not only dominant research trends but also potential gaps in the existing literature. By organizing the articles into specific categories such as industry classification, geographical distribution, and methodological approach, this study provides a clearer overview of how service quality research has evolved over time.

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Another important aspect of this methodology is its ability to integrate findings from various contexts into a unified perspective. Because service quality research is widely dispersed across industries and regions, a systematic literature review approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. This is particularly relevant in the B2C context, where customer expectations and service experiences may vary significantly depending on technological, cultural, and economic factors [17].

Overall, this methodological approach ensures that the analysis is conducted in a structured, transparent, and replicable manner. As a result, this study's findings are expected to provide a reliable foundation for both academic research and practical application, particularly for understanding the development and future direction of service quality in B2C markets [18].

In addition, the structured nature of this approach allows future researchers to replicate the study using similar procedures and criteria. This enhances the transparency and credibility of the research process, which is essential in systematic reviews. The methodological rigor also supports consistent data interpretation across different categories of analysis. Consequently, the study not only contributes to the literature but also serves as a reference point for subsequent research in service quality.

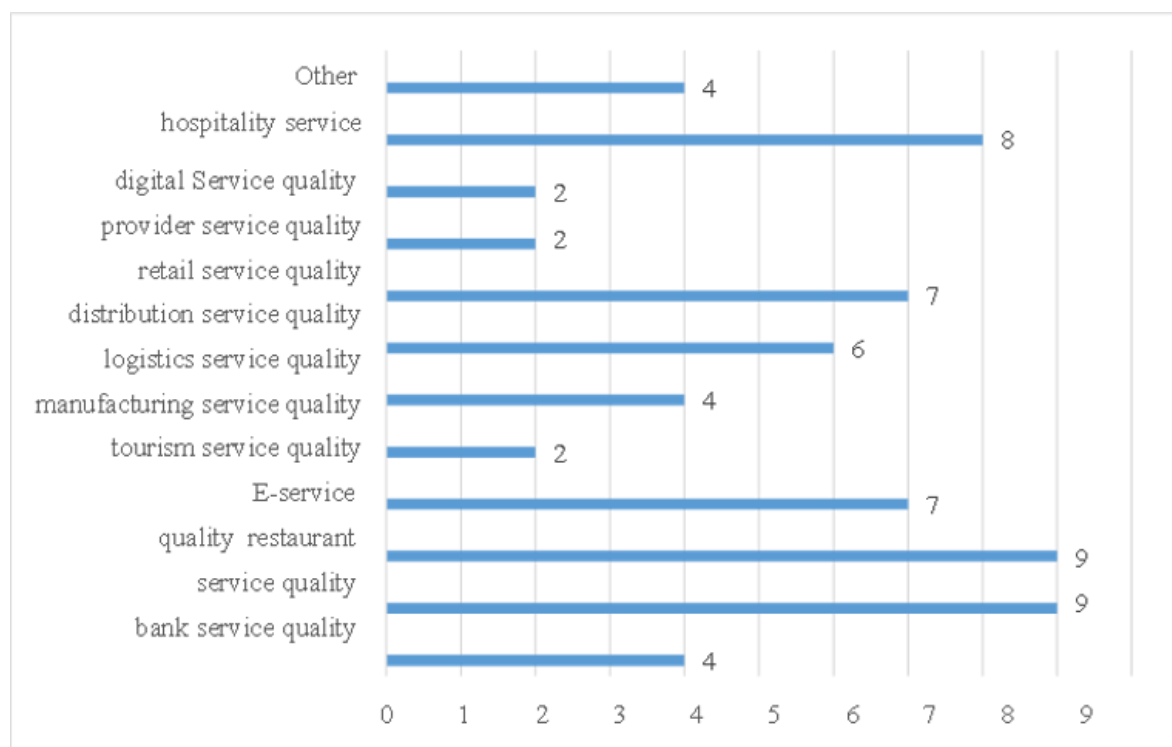


Figure 1. Business Classification

In the second phase, the articles were grouped by geographical region, such as Asia, the UK, and other European countries. Because the research spans countries worldwide, the reports were compiled separately rather than combined into a single classification, allowing the capture of each country's specific context.

This approach enables the identification of regions and contexts where service quality has become a focus of academic studies, while also revealing existing research gaps (see Figure 2).

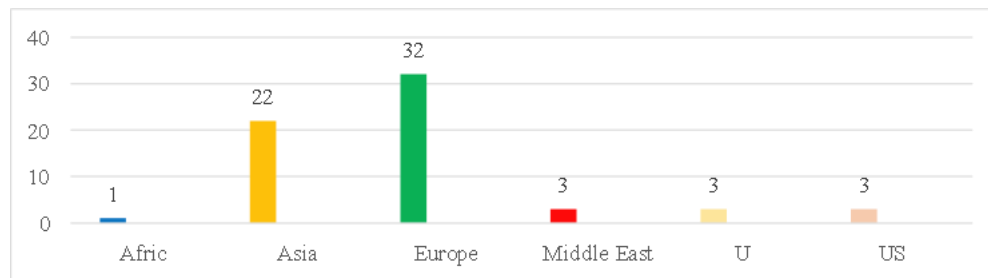


Figure 2. Research by Geographical Location

In the third phase, the articles were identified based on the methodological nature of the research. The articles were grouped according to whether they were empirical studies or literature reviews (see Figure 3).

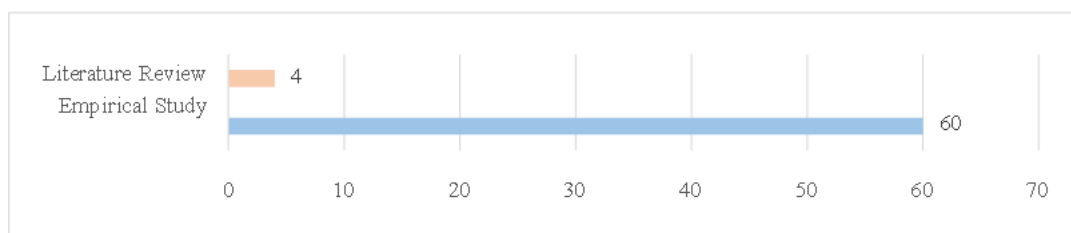


Figure 3. Research by Nature Study

In the final step, the articles were grouped by descriptive details such as year of publication, journal name, and other relevant factors. This analysis then guided the discussion of implications for future research (see Figure 4).

This step also enables clearer identification of publication trends and patterns over time, including the consistency and growth of research output in the field of service quality. By examining these descriptive elements, the study highlights which journals and periods contribute most to the topic's development. In addition, this analysis provides insight into the evolution of research focus and the shifting priorities within the literature. Consequently, it supports a more informed discussion regarding potential directions for future research.

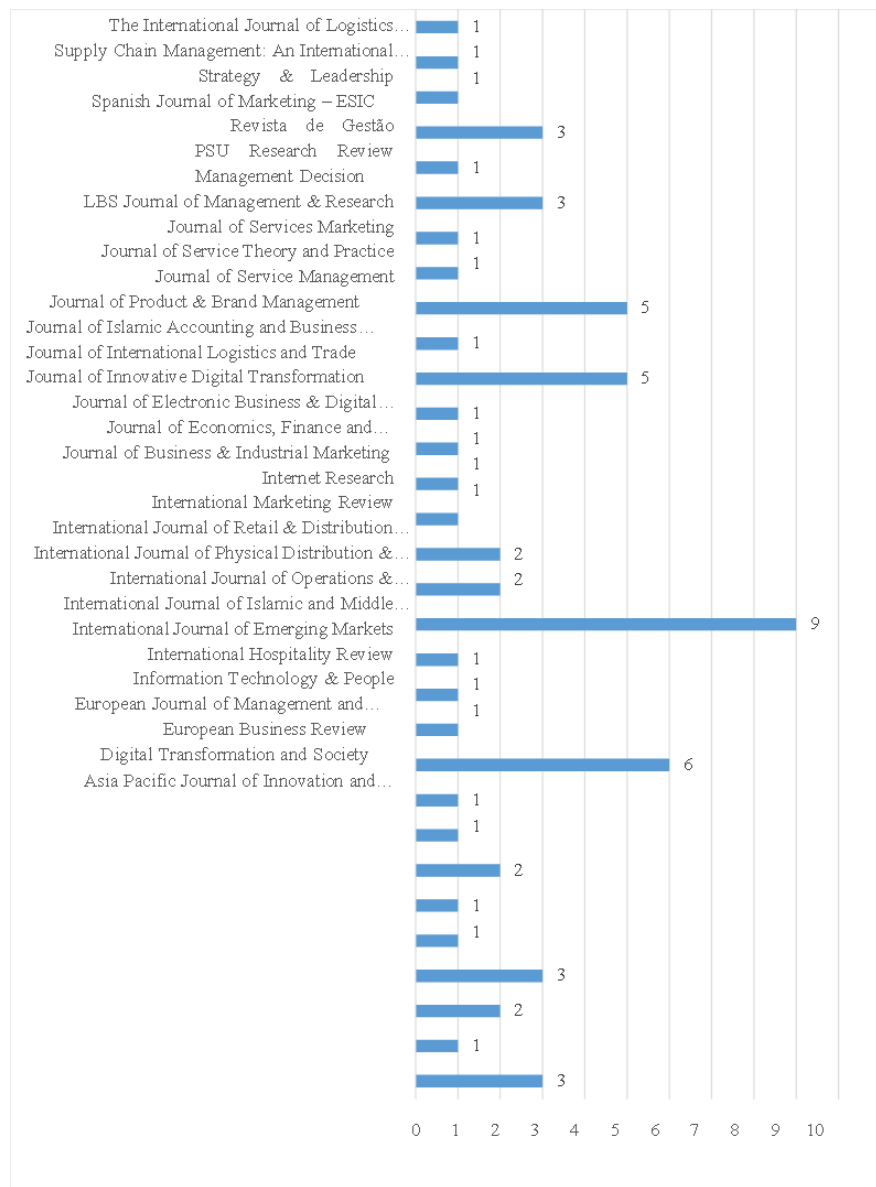


Figure 4. Research by Number of Publications

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Service Quality Articles Published by Year

Analyzing the publication timeline provides insights into publication trends over the past 10 years. Based on Table 1, the number of studies increased from 2016 to 2026.

#### Service Quality Articles by the Industry of Study

This study identified and classified 64 articles according to the selected categories. In the e-service quality industry, nine articles were identified (Awal Md. Rabiul et al., 2023; Giuffrida Maria et al., 2021; Drennan Todd et al., 2023; Ashiq Rubab and Asad Hussain, 2023; Vakulenko et al., 2024; Kalsbeek Robert van et al., 2020; Liu Caixia and Jinhwan Hong, 2016; Saoula Oussama et al., 2023; Rita Paulo et al., 2020). In the restaurant service quality industry, there were also nine articles (Rodriguez Rocio et al., 2022; Li Liangqiang et al., 2023; Ishii Ryuta and Mai Kikumori, 2023; Zeeland Eveline van and Jörg Henseler,

2018; Malki Djihane et al., 2023; Zaheer Muhammad Asif et al., 2024; Zaheer Muhammad Asif et al., 2024; Mansouri Hossein et al., 2022; Weiler Arissara Suratanon and Bhumiphat Gilitwala, 2023).

Following this, eight articles were found in the hospitality industry (Satti Zoya Wajid et al., 2020; Kim Leng Khoo, 2020; Cassia Fabio and Francesca Magno, 2021; Karpen Ingo Oswald et al., 2023; Elg Mattias et al., 2020; Lassila Elina et al., 2023; van der Burg Robbert-Jan et al., 2019; Oloveze Ambrose Ogbonna et al., 2021). Seven articles were identified in both the retail (Hao Jianliang et al., 2024; Sáez Daniel Espinosa et al., 2023; Salvietti Giada et al., 2022; Huma Sehrish et al., 2024; Tuominen Sasu et al., 2022; Shamsi Sheeraz et al., 2023; Malekpour Mehrgan et al., 2023) and tourism (Fang et al., 2020; Heinonen Kristina and Ogechi Adeola, 2024; Singh Shalini and Abu Bashar, 2021; Hauke-Lopes Aleksandra et al., 2022; Parris Denise Linda and Francisco Guzmán, 2022; Mntande Kebone Agnes et al., 2022; Parra-Lopez Eduardo et al., 2018) industries.

In the distribution industry, six articles were found (Butkouskaya Vera et al., 2023; Cortiñas Monica et al., 2019; Fernandes Daniel Winter et al., 2018; Park Minyoung, 2018; Cepeda-Carrión Ignacio et al., 2023; Gani Mohammad Osman et al., 2023). Four articles were found in the bank (Zhang Ruby Wenjiao et al., 2024; Sahhar Yasin et al., 2021; Gonzales Rolando and Jonathan Wareham, 2019; Roberts-Lombard Mornay and Daniel Johannes Petzer, 2024), logistics (Movarrei Reza et al., 2021; Lim Stanley Frederick W.T. et al., 2018; Kawa Arkadiusz and Justyna Światowicz- Szczepańska, 2021; Namagembe Sheila and Shamim Nantumbwe, 2024), and other industries (Nansubuga Brenda and Christian Kowalkowski, 2021; Noor Nurhafihz, 2024; Heinonen Kristina and Gustav Medberg, 2018; Bilro Ricardo Godinho et al., 2023). Finally, two articles were identified in the digital service (Kowalkowski Christian et al., 2023; Rabetino Rodrigo et al., 2023), provider (Wang Yi-Shun et al., 2019; Marrucci Anna, 2022), and manufacturing (Lin Fenfang et al., 2019; Ciasullo Maria Vincenza et al., 2021) industries.

Table 1. Research Published by Year

| Year      | Number of Publications |
|-----------|------------------------|
| 2014–2016 | 1                      |
| 2017–2019 | 11                     |
| 2020–2022 | 23                     |
| 2023–2024 | 29                     |

### Service Quality Articles by Region of Study

Most research was conducted in Europe (32), followed by Asia (22), the United States (3), the Middle East (3), the UK (3), and Africa (1) during the specified period.

### The Nature of the Research into Service Quality

Understanding the characteristics of service quality research provides insights into the methodologies used and ways to optimize existing research methods. Of the articles analyzed, 60 were empirical studies, while 4 were literature reviews.



### **Service Quality Articles by Journal Publication**

Analyzing articles by journal publication helps identify emerging research trends across journals. The majority of the articles were published in leading journals such as Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing (9), International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management (6), Journal of Service Management (5), Journal of Services Marketing (5), European Journal of Management and Business Economics (3), Asia Pacific Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (3), PSU Research Review (3), Spanish Journal of Marketing – ESIC (3), Journal of Electronic Business & Digital Economics (2), International Journal of Emerging Markets (2), European Business Review (2), Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Science (2).

Digital Transformation and Society (1), Information Technology & People (1), International Hospitality Review (1), International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management (1), International Journal of Operations & Production Management (1), International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management (1), International Marketing Review (1), Internet Research (1), Journal of Innovative Digital Transformation (1), Journal of International Logistics and Trade (1), Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research (1), Journal of Product & Brand Management (1), Journal of Service Theory and Practice (1), LBS Journal of Management & Research (1), Management Decision (1), Revista de Gestão (1), Strategy & Leadership (1), Supply Chain Management: An International Journal (1), and The International Journal of Logistics Management (1).

Various underlying complex factors influence the impact of e-service quality on trust and customer satisfaction in online shopping services [19]. Research on service quality remains significant and relevant, especially as the halal services sector continues to grow and drive the global Islamic economy. This review highlights the strong support the Islamic finance sector provides for service quality research [20].

Parris and Guzmán [21] state that service quality is the extent to which services exceed expectations and align with customer desires. The service quality a company provides reflects how well it meets customer needs and expectations. Companies must maintain service quality continuously to ensure customers have positive experiences. High service quality stays in customers' minds and helps the company outperform competitors. Rita et al. [22] suggest that service quality influences customer satisfaction, based on research in the tourism sector. Business continuity depends significantly on the level of service provided to customers [23].

### **FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

The primary goal of this systematic literature review is to examine service quality comprehensively, based on what the literature has already discussed. This research shows that service quality offers numerous opportunities for further exploration. Studies on service quality have utilized various perspectives to understand customer behavior. Based on a systematic review of 64 papers, this article advances knowledge of service quality, identifies and summarizes key topics in the field, contributes to the development of explanatory frameworks, and paves the way for future research directions. For future

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researchers, it is recommended to increase sample sizes to improve the generalizability of findings and meet accountability standards.

Based on the findings of this systematic literature review, several research gaps have been identified that provide significant opportunities for future scholarly investigation:

### **Integration of Artificial Intelligence and Automation**

Given the rapid digital transformation in the B2C sector, future research should explore how Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning, and automated service agents (such as chatbots) redefine the traditional SERVQUAL dimensions. Specifically, studies could investigate whether automated interactions can effectively replicate the "Empathy" and "Assurance" dimensions traditionally provided by human employees [24].

### **Sustainability and Green Service Quality**

There is a growing need to integrate environmental sustainability into service quality frameworks. Future studies could develop and test "Green Service Quality" metrics to understand how eco-friendly service practices influence customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty in sectors such as hospitality and retail.

### **Expansion of Database and Keyword Scope**

This study primarily utilized the Emerald Insight database and focused on the keywords "service quality" and "SERVQUAL." Future researchers are encouraged to broaden the bibliometric scope by including databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect, and to incorporate broader terms like "customer experience management" and "digital service touchpoints" to provide a more holistic view of the field [25].

### **Cross-Cultural and Regional Comparative Studies**

As the current literature is heavily concentrated in European and Asian contexts, there is a clear demand for comparative research across different cultural landscapes. Future investigations should examine whether the established service quality dimensions remain consistent in emerging markets within Africa and Latin America, where consumer behavior and expectations may differ significantly.

### **Longitudinal Methodological Approaches**

Most analyzed studies employed cross-sectional empirical methods. Future research would benefit from longitudinal designs to track how customer service expectations evolve, particularly in response to global economic shifts and changing consumption patterns in the post-pandemic era [26].

### **Customer Experience and Emotional Value Integration**

Future research should explore integrating service quality with broader customer experience (CX) frameworks, focusing on emotional and psychological value. While traditional service quality models emphasize functional performance, modern consumers increasingly evaluate services based on emotional engagement, perceived enjoyment, and

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memorable experiences. Therefore, future studies could examine how emotional value mediates the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, especially in digital and hybrid service environments [27].

### **The Role of Big Data and Predictive Analytics in Service Quality**

With advances in big data and predictive analytics, companies can now anticipate customer needs and personalize service delivery at a more granular level. Future research should investigate how data-driven decision-making enhances service quality and whether predictive models can improve customer satisfaction and retention. Additionally, studies could explore the ethical implications of data use in service personalization, particularly regarding privacy concerns and customer trust.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This systematic literature review study has several limitations. First, the review is limited to articles published in the Emerald Insight journals to ensure the quality and consistency of the sources used. This limitation avoids significant methodological variation across sources but excludes relevant articles from other journals. Second, the articles analyzed cover only research from the past ten years to maintain relevance to current trends and developments in service quality and SERVQUAL. However, this excludes older studies that could provide important theoretical foundations. Lastly, only articles with the keywords "service quality" and "SERVQUAL" were included in this review. This restriction focuses on measurable service quality using the SERVQUAL model, although it may overlook other relevant approaches in the field.

Good service quality can encourage customers to become more actively engaged in the relationship with the company, not just as passive consumers but also as partners contributing to mutual success. Investing in service quality improvement has positive long-term implications for companies, not only in retaining and enhancing customer loyalty but also in shaping favorable perceptions of the company. When customers are satisfied with their experiences, they are more likely to remain loyal, which in turn helps strengthen and expand the company's customer base. Service quality is a key factor in most companies' success. In modern organizational frameworks, efforts to improve service quality are considered essential strategies because they are directly linked to positive outcomes.

While this study provides a thorough overview, it has certain limitations, as the search was restricted to the Emerald Insight database within a ten-year timeframe (2014–2024) and focused specifically on the keywords "service quality" and "SERVQUAL." This restriction ensured a structured analysis of measurable service quality, but it may overlook relevant literature from other databases or studies using alternative terminology such as "customer experience" or "digital touchpoints." Furthermore, because most of the 64 analyzed articles were empirical studies conducted in Europe and Asia, the generalizability of these findings may be limited when applied to the unique socio-economic dynamics of other emerging markets.

In addition to the limitations mentioned above, this study acknowledges that classifying articles into specific industry categories may involve some subjectivity, as

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some studies could fall into multiple categories simultaneously. Furthermore, the reliance on keyword-based selection criteria may have excluded relevant studies that use alternative terminologies to describe similar constructs. Another limitation is potential publication bias, as the review primarily includes peer-reviewed journal articles, which may overlook valuable insights from conference papers, working papers, or industry reports.

Overall, this study reinforces the critical role of service quality as a dynamic, evolving construct in B2C markets, particularly amid rapid digital transformation. The findings highlight that service quality is no longer confined to traditional dimensions but has expanded to include digital interaction, personalization, and technological integration. By synthesizing existing literature, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of current research trends and identifies key gaps that require further investigation.

Moreover, this research emphasizes that organizations must adopt a proactive, adaptive approach to managing service quality by integrating both human-centered and technology-driven strategies. As competition intensifies and customer expectations continue to evolve, companies that successfully align service quality with innovation and customer experience will be better positioned to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all parties who contributed to this study, including the supervisor, the academic institution, and colleagues who provided guidance, support, and assistance throughout the research and writing process.

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