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INTRODUCTION

AIM: The aim of this report is to understand customer value, identify the dimensions of customer value as proposed by (Simch-Levi et al, 2008) using a known organisation as a case study, and two competitor organisations in comparison. There will also be greater understanding of service quality and SERVQUAL dimensions of service gaps still using the same organisation and two organisation competitors in the evaluation.

OBJECTIVES:

- To understand customer value by definition and explanation as (Maund 2018) suggests in this statement “Understanding customer preferences is extremely valuable for any business and the knowledge thus gained will serve as a vital ingredient for the success of its products and services”.
- To identify the five dimensions of customer value and how they relate to the chosen organisation and its competitors.
- To understand service quality, its dimensions and the gaps that can occur from not between the customer and the service provider, using my chosen organisation as an example.
- To identify and understand the practical evidence by summary tables, the effect of all of the above on my chosen organisations.

Q1. Critically analyse the factors that influence your Organisation's ability to maximise customer value.

Customer value defined:

It is pertinent to understand customer value in any organisation whose livelihood and existence depends on their customers. Customers have high assumptions of the value they receive for the cost or the experience. As Mansfield, D. (2018) pointed out, in order to have a better understanding of customer value from the customer's perspective, it must be measured. That is why customer value is very important to all organisations as it gives their business a competitive edge against others.

Therefore, when a customer is satisfied with the overall experience they receive, taking into consideration the cost as well, that is customer value.

My chosen Organisation is John Lewis Partnership where I will be concentrating on Waitrose Supermarket by critically analysing the factors that influence Waitrose's ability to maximise their customer value. Marks & Spencer Supermarket (M&S) will be used as a similar comparison whilst Starbucks will serve as a contrast Organisation.

To further understand this, Simchi-Levi et al, (2008) proposed

5 dimensions of customer value:

- Conformance to requirements
- Product selection
- Price and brand
- Value-added services
- Relationships and experiences

Conformance to requirements

This means the customer's desired stipulations have to be met by the organisation's products, processes and services (Alby, T. 2019). The organisation have to do this by providing value that meets their customer's expectations without breaking their company's internal procedure and as a result, loyalty from the customer is preserved. Simchi-Levi et al (2008) also further stated that Conformance to requirements is the ability to meet

customer's needs and wants, taking into consideration supply and demand structured on 3 Principles which are;

- 1. Closing the communication loop.** This is when unscientific and hard data information loop is monitored in order to track material and product as they emerge.
- 2. Holding on to a rhythm across the supply chain.** In order for the supply chain to be fast and reactive, the organisation is inclined to make funds available.
- 3. Aiding capital assets to increase supply chain flexibility.** This is when the supply chain is receptive to new and emerging demand from customers as a result of the organisation's investment in production and distribution facilities.

As published in the (2019) John Lewis Partnership annual report and accounts (Waitrose being the supermarket brand of John Lewis), there have been a lot of changes and positive movement in conforming to their customer's requirements in the bid to move with the current times of climate change awareness. A few of these are seen in the emergence of Waitrose & partners cookery school dotted around the UK and in August 2019 opened a food innovation studio where innovative food are developed to meet the demands of customers whose palette are progressively getting exotic. In April 2018, Waitrose & partners have also commenced the removal of disposable plastic cups and straws resulting in 52m+ less disposable cups used and have commenced their target of making their own brand packaging extensively reusable, recyclable and home compostable. They have conformed to more customers becoming vegan and vegetarian by launching their own labelled range of vegan and vegetarian products and introduced healthy eating specialists as part of their added value service.

Marks & Spencer supermarket also are conforming to their customer's requirements by their innovative move in the past 3 years. They realised that by their food products becoming too premium, they were losing customers to the low cost supermarkets like Aldi and Lidl so they decided

to hone in on their value for money character thereby customers are now having more access to their full M&S food range, still with quality.

In comparison, Aldi Supermarket as they are known for low cost groceries and household products, are concentrating on maintaining low prices for their groceries and opening new stores and distribution centres up to 1,000 by 2022 (Macdonald, G. 2019).

Ranking: Waitrose 8/10 M&S 8/10 Aldi 7/10

Product Selection

Simchi-Levi, D. et al (2008) Proposed that Product Selection is one of the dimensions of customer value. Evidence from my study organisation, Waitrose and Partners's food and drink report (2019) suggests that most of the population in Britain are seeking a simpler life and this is evident in their shopping habits of buying more produce for cooking rather than ready made food. They carried out a one poll research with about 2000 people of all ages asking in-depth questions about shopping, cooking and eating habits, backed up by millions of purchases throughout the year. Their findings are evident in their product selection for the store. The findings show that customers are favouring luxury frozen food like Keralan Cod ready meals, King Prawn, Mussel and Clam Tagliatelle and Italian slow-cooked Pork Belly to mention a few. Soba Noodles and Udon Noodles searches are up by 83% and 50% respectively. There are more vegetarian ready meals as well as Organic Celery juice which is up in sales by 30%.

M&S reports about a couple of food trends in plant based eating, taking into consideration vegetarians, delicious yoghourts and drinks which help the guts, plant based smoothies, granola for breakfast, frozen seafood and also Focusing on more recyclable and reusable packaging (Preston, A. 2019).

Aldi also have a good selection of healthy food selection, focusing on recipe suggestions, a great selection of wine and spirits and special buys on home appliances and gadgets.

From the information above, we can come to a conclusion that customers will shop around for groceries depending on their lifestyles and expectations.

Ranking: Waitrose 9/10 M&S 9/10 Aldi 6/10

Price and Brand

The 3rd dimension of customer value is Price and Brand. According to Simchi-Levi, and Chen (2010), there has been an explosion of dynamic pricing by retail and manufacturing companies for improving their operations. They stated that;

“Several factors contribute to the phenomenal growth of dynamic pricing. First, the development of sophisticated information technologies greatly facilitates the collection and communication of customer data. Secondly, costs associated with changing prices have been significantly reduced due to the reason above. Thirdly, active academic research provides analytical models and tools for price optimisation. Lastly, decision support systems for customer data analysis and price optimisation have been developed and successfully implemented in a number of industries”.

Below is a table showing an actual price comparison between my main chosen organisation (Waitrose) and my third comparator organisation (Aldi), and between them are the prices from Tesco

(Fig 1.1 by lovemoney.com) Price Comparison

Item	Aldi price (£)	Tesco price (£)	Waitrose price (£)
Beetroot (six-pack)	0.44	0.44	0.85
Cucumber (whole)	0.69	0.80	0.80
Tomatoes (six-pack)	0.89	0.75	1.00
Cherry tomatoes (300g)*	0.75	0.98	1.07
Carrots (1kg)	0.98	0.92	0.66
Avocado (individual)	0.79	0.99	1.29

Grapes (500g)	1.59	1.49	1.99
Bananas (kg)	1.21	0.68	0.68
Clementines (600g)	1.29	1.50	2.15
Pears (four-pack)*	0.69	0.69	2.00
Broccoli (500g)*	0.59	0.85	1.00
Potatoes (2.5kg)	1.69	1.65	1.50
Fresh fruit juice (one litre)	1.29	2.00	0.99
Cheddar cheese (250g)	2.39	1.70	2.66
Babybel (six-pack)	1.39	1.75	1.75
Milk (four pints)	0.98	1.18	1.18
Yogurt (individual 180g)	0.31	0.31	0.60
Butter (500g unsalted)	1.25	1.36	1.19
Eggs (six free range)	0.99	1.79	1.66
Ham (five slices)*	0.56	1.75	2.89
Chicken slices (eight slices)	0.89	2.00	1.59
Fusilli (500g)	0.49	0.95	0.95
Penne (1kg)	0.59	0.60	0.95
Chicken breast fillets (two free range)	3.49	3.75	4.73
Beef mince (500g)	2.69	3.75	4.19

Fish fingers (10)	1.29	0.60	1.91
Scampi (250g)	1.75	1.25	3.99
Baked beans (400g tin)	0.32	0.26	0.40
Bread (wholemeal loaf)	0.69	0.75	0.80
Milk Chocolate Digestives (400g)*	0.59	0.41	1.10
Wheat cereal (750g)*	0.69	0.88	1.17
Total	£34.20	£38.77	£49.49

The groceries shown in the table above were purchased over a period of three weekends for comparison of taste (quality) and prices (Ward, S. 2012). We can see from the total spent in each store that in terms of cost that the least was spent in Aldi while the most was spent in Waitrose. Having said that, Waitrose did best on quality after all the food had been consumed as there were faults found with the taste of some of the fresh produce from Aldi. It was also noted that Tesco did not rise up to the competition. This reinforces the notion that people would shop around store no matter how loyal they are with certain stores. However, some customers would stick with store that consistently meet their expectations of quality service.

Waitrose brand is known for its quality and freshness, consistently reliable, and their shops are clean, bright and are known for good service (Marketing Week, 2006). It was also noted that unlike M&S, a customer would be able to do a shopping for a whole week in Waitrose. M&S brands are also known for their quality in taste in their fresh coffee, in-store bakery and speciality food products like ready meals, salads, snacks and quality wine selection. Aldi on the other hand Avoid brand names as only 10% of their products are branded (Schmalbruch, 2018). She reported that 90% of

their products are private labelled so they avoid paying going through other companies to be able to offer their customers cheaper prices.

Ranking: Waitrose 7/10 M&S 7/10 Aldi 6/10

Value-added Services

The 4th dimension of customer value. To be able to achieve value added services, additional services are needed to improve profit. This differentiates the organisation from others. Waitrose has introduced a two-hour online delivery service which they are cascading outside London currently. They also now provide gift-food recipes in response to demands from customers who are increasingly making food gifts like festive biscuits, Jam or Chutneys and also home-made liqueurs. M&S are cutting down on unnecessary packaging just as Waitrose is doing. However, not much has been reported on added services in Aldi.

Ranking: Waitrose 9/10 M&S 8/10 Aldi 5/10

Relationships and Experience

The fifth dimension in Simchi-Levi's dimension of customer value. He pointed out that building relationships with customers makes it difficult to not remain loyal.

Experience:

- M&S sends invitations to their registered customers for a 'closed-door' events that is not open to the public. These customers are able to learn about new products all over the store including the grocery section and have a preview on their fashion brand. They are also given discount cards for purchases.
- Waitrose emphasises on brands over prices.
- Aldi emphasises on lower prices over brands.

Ranking: Waitrose 7/10 M&S 7/10 Aldi 4/10

Summary Table for 5 Dimensions of Customer Value
(Fig 1.2)

Dimensions	Evaluation ranking for Waitrose	Evaluation ranking for M&S	Evaluation ranking for Aldi
Conformance to Requirements	8/10	8/10	7/10
Product Selection	9/10	9/10	6/10
Price and Brand	7/10	7/10	6/10
Value added Services	9/10	8/10	5/10
Relationships and Experience	7/10	7/10	4/10
Total Evaluation Score	40/50	39/50	28/50

PART 2A

Service Quality Defined:

It is widely accepted that there are different definitions of service quality depending on what basis it is being perceived or measured. Different authors have suggested similar or different definitions depending on customer's needs, perceptions and expectations. The Business dictionary (2019) sees service quality as conformance to client's expectations from a high standard service delivered and suggests that for Business operators to improve their service and identify problems in their service, they need to regularly assess the quality of service they provide.

On the other hand, Kotler and Armstrong (2006) sees it as a blend of two different words which are 'service' and 'quality'. They stated that "Service is an activity or benefit offered which is intangible and does not result in ownership and Quality as a strategic tool used in achieving operational efficiency and better performance in business", therefore, defining service quality as the ability of businesses and organisations to retain their customers as retention is the best measurement of service quality.

My perception of service quality based on all these definitions therefore is seen from the customer's understanding and judgement on expected service and excellence received.

Zeithaml et al (2010) also defines service quality as "the delivery of excellent or superior service to customer's expectation" In addition to this definition, exceeding customer's expectations is paramount. A broad research was conducted where the 5 dimensions of service quality were identified.

5 Dimensions of Service Quality:

- Reliability
- Assurance
- Tangibles
- Empathy
- Responsiveness

Reliability:

Singaraj et al, (2019) defines reliability as “ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately”. It is a major factor for customers to know that when service providers promises a service on prompt delivery, providing service expected, good price and resolves any problems arising, they stick with those firms. This means the expectations of the customer have been met and loyalty is retained. Also, customers from different sectors expect different kinds of reliability. For instance, Waitrose customers would expect to find very good and high quality products in the stores whilst an Aldi shopper who is tight on funds would rely on finding ‘value’ products for a cheaper price. In Waitrose as well, the quality of their products are mostly retained and customers rely on that, though could be more expensive.

Assurance:

This is to do with employees being knowledgeable about the company which inspires trust and confidence in customers. Customers dealing with employees feels a sense of relief, confidence and assurance when they are dealing with an employee who is knowledgeable and displays that they can be trusted (Singaraj et al, 2019). For example, Waitrose is likely to provide the expertise by their employees of a service and specialist shop but Aldi might not be able to do that because all products are there in their boxes on their aisle for customers to find whatever they want. The impression when shopping in Aldi is not of a specialist shop like Waitrose.

Tangibles:

This 3rd dimension showcases the physical facilities, equipment, technology and the employee’s appearance. Waitrose invests in their building, the inside layout looks inviting with bright lights and innovative technology for faster checkout for customers. Their staff uniforms looks good too. Aldi have smaller stores and do not waste time on displays as they leave their products in their boxes.

Empathy:

This dimension of service shows that service providers are compassionate towards their customers in the way they deal with complaints and

problems. They must care, must be helpful and give reassurances when needed. Each customer must be shown their uniqueness and shown they are special in order to satisfy the different needs of the customer.

Waitrose has become more compassionate towards the way they source their produce and this shows they are listening to their customers who are becoming more 'green' and care for sustainability. Customers know they can be trusted on products and the environment (Collins, 2019). Aldi's empathy on the other hand is more towards their employees in the sense that they do not need to keep their store in order by stocking shelves and arranging their products nicely and this saves time and number of staff at a time. Therefore, they invest more on higher salaries for their staff.

Responsiveness:

The 5th dimension is responsiveness and Singarag et al (2019) explains this as "A dimension that focuses on the attitude and promptness of dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints and problems". Staff issues like their commitment, presence and punctuality is a focus too. This is mostly a continuous process.

Summary Table for Dimension of Service quality

(Fig 2.1)

Dimensions	Workplace example (Waitrose)	Comparator organisation (Aldi)	Ranking
Reliability	8/10	6/10	
Assurance	8/10	5/10	
Tangibles	9/10	5/10	
Empathy	7/10	6/10	
Responsiveness	7/10	6/10	
Total	39/50	28/50	

Conclusion:

Given the analysis above, we can see that Waitrose offers greater service quality and customer value as it is evident in the first 3 dimensions which are Reliability, Assurance and Tangibles. Although they score slightly lower on Empathy and Responsiveness, it is still a good rating for them.

PART 2B GAPS IN SERVICE (SERVQUAL)

What is SERVQUAL?

SERVQUAL is the service quality gap model. This is a tool used for measuring service quality by Project managers in service organisations, where they can identify gaps between customer expectations and the service they provide. Service provided occur at different stages of delivering these services so service organisations like Banks, Finance establishments, Supermarkets, Insurance companies, Power companies, to mention a few, can assess the quality of service provided.

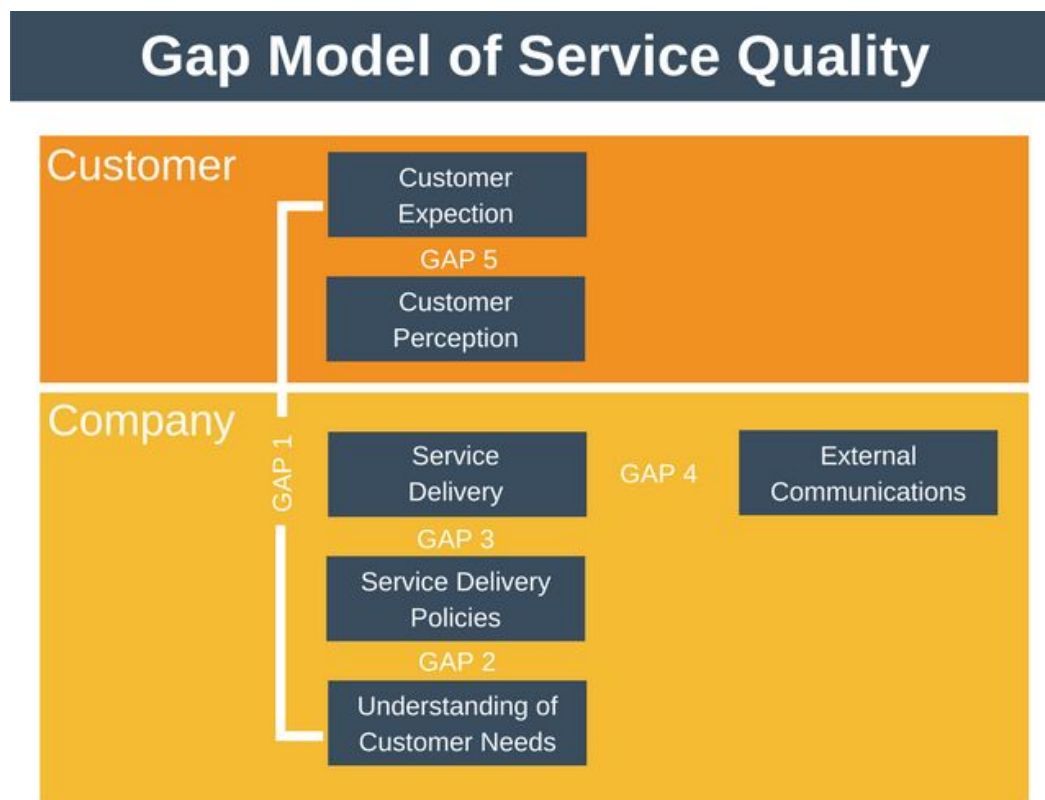
According to Parasuraman et al (1988), the moment of truth is of quality service comes to light during the delivery because that is when there is an opportunity to perform by meeting the customer's expectations and also exceeding those expectations. For instance, A top Finance company who at the last minute wants to hold a meeting for the executives and need quality lunch served would go to Waitrose or Marks & Spencer food store to shop rather than go to Aldi. This is because the perception is that good quality food and the way they are packaged and presented would be found at Waitrose or M&S though more money would be spent, than in Aldi. SERVQUAL is entwined with the dimensions of service quality as we can see in part 2A of this report. It is a tool for measuring service quality which plays an important role in customer satisfaction where perceptions of service received is compared with expectations of service desired (Parasuraman et al, 1988). SERVQUAL is linked with Reliability,

Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness, all dimensions of service quality.

Service Gaps:

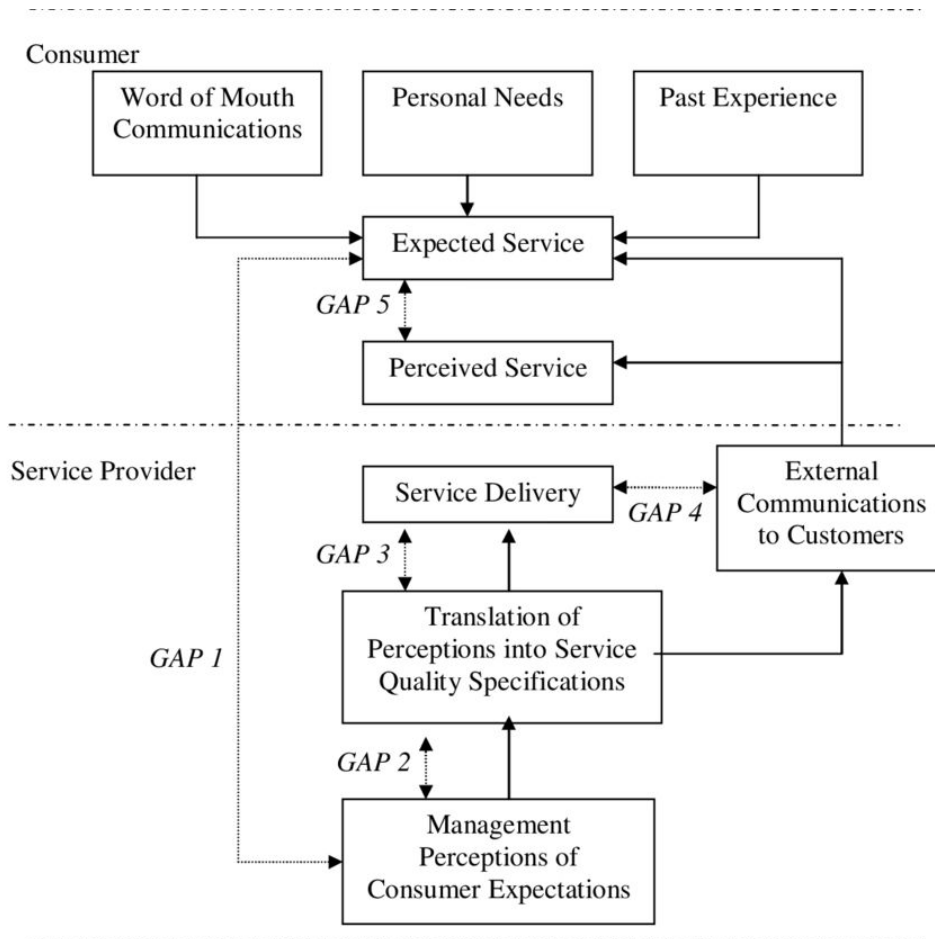
These gaps can aid our understanding of service of customer satisfaction as shown in the simple illustration below;

(Fig 2.2 by Expert Program Management)



We can see from this illustration the customer section and the service provider section. Gap 1 links the customer and the company, Gap 2, 3, and 4 lies within the company and gap 5 are customer expectation and perception. Within the company is their service delivery linked to external communication. To be able to explain each gap separately, another illustration is provided below;

(Fig 2.3 by ResearchGate) Gap Model of Service Quality.



The 5 Gaps are namely;

1. Knowledge gap
2. Standards gap
3. Delivery gap
4. Communication gap
5. Satisfaction gap

1. Knowledge Gap: Not knowing what customers expect fall into this gap. When customers are not approached the right way by their service provider, it means there is a gap in their understanding of customer's expectations (Mulder, P. 2018).

There are different reasons why this gap happens and why it leads to lack of understanding by the service provider. Insufficient marketing research orientation and focus on relationships, and also breakdown in communication with the customer. For these reasons, a gap is created between customer's expectations and service provider's perception of customer's expectations.

Let us take for instance Waitrose's customer's expectations are to be able to find very good quality food produce in Waitrose, not minding the price and waitrose deciding they would cut down on their prices to attract more customers without market research to find out their loyal customer expectations. That is a gap created because Waitrose have thought slashing their prices and compromising on good quality would generate more customers but loose their loyal customers.

Aldi could also decide to start stocking 'brands' to attract customers who shop in other supermarkets thereby losing their loyal customers who are attracted to them by their low prices not minding quality. This is a gap too.

Ranking: Waitrose 8/10 and Aldi 6/10

2. Standards Gap:

This gap is formed when the standard of quality is not right. There is a risk of the service provider forming their quality policy and rules over wrong assumptions of customer's expectations because there is no correlation and an idea is already formed, this leads to a standards gap (Mulder, P. 2018). Reasons this could happen are seen in poor service design, lack of custom-defined service standards and unsuitable physical evidence and service.

Waitrose are doing well in closing this gap as revealed in their (food and drink report, 2019). There has been a rise in demand for their rapid delivery

which is a 2 hour delivery service doing so well that it has been extended outside of London. People are living more of a fast-paced life and with the world leaning more into innovative technology and social media, Waitrose is doing well in rising to customer's expectations. Aldi, on the other hand, do not have an online delivery system yet, as customers can only shop for wines and home and garden products on their 'click & collect' service. This is the standard gap for them which needs to be worked on.

Ranking: Waitrose 9/10 Aldi 4/10

3. Delivery Gap:

Mulder, P. (2018) explains this gap as occurring when the service provider offers service which is different from the customer's expectations, involving a wrong implementation. This is due to human resource policies that are unsatisfactory, lack of meeting supply and demand, difficulty with service intermediaries and also customers not accomplishing their roles. Therefore there is a gap between customer driven service designs and standards, and the service delivery.

If Waitrose have promised and are offering the 2 hour delivery service and they fail on some occasions, this is an example of a delivery gap because they are not delivering to their customer's expectations. Aldi does not offer any online delivery service currently however for them not to be a gap in this section, they must provide customer's expectations on their 'click & pick' service.

Ranking: Waitrose 7/10 Aldi 6/10

4. Communications Gap:

Promises not matching actual delivery. Wrong impressions can be created with the external marketing communication sent out by the service provider (Mulder, P. 2018). They must not over-promise customers on what they know that cannot be delivered. They must adequately manage their customer's expectations and sufficiently communicate with all departments. Waitrose and Aldi are doing well to close the communication gap in their

own ways. They promise what they can deliver and customers find what they expect to find in their supermarkets and online services.

Ranking: Waitrose 8/10 Aldi 8/10

5. Satisfaction Gap:

This is the difference between customer perception and customer expectations. The reasons for this gap lies within not knowing what is expected by customers, not choosing the right service designs and standards, not matching performance promised to what has been promised and also not delivering service promised to standard expected. Mulder, p. (2018) stated that “Dissatisfaction results from a significant difference between the service a customer expects and the service they actually experience and this will eventually lead to the biggest gap in the experience of quality.

Ranking: Waitrose 7/10 Aldi 7/10

Summary Table for gaps in Service

(Fig 2.4)

Gaps in service	Chosen organisation (Waitrose)	Competitor (Aldi)
Gap 1. Knowledge Gap	8/10	6/10
Gap 2. Standards Gap	9/10	4/10
Gap 3. Delivery Gap	7/10	7/10
Gap 4. Communications Gap	8/10	8/10
Gap 5. Satisfaction Gap	7/10	7/10

Total	39	32
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Conclusion for part 2b:

Given the analysis above, Waitrose has scored more than Aldi in the way they have closed their gaps. There are ways in which these gaps could be effectively closed by both service providers.

Gap 1 - Both supermarkets need to understand their customer's expectations, enhance communication between employees who interact with customers and management and also act on information gathered from customers.

Gap 2 - They need to initiate the right service quality standard by communicating and reinforcing customer-focused service standards throughout the organisation. Appraise staff performance and give feedback and also reward staff and their managers.

Gap 3 - Both supermarkets will need to that service performance meets standards by clarifying employee's roles, training their staff in setting priorities and time management and eliminating conflict in roles among employees.

Gap 4 - Waitrose and Aldi must make sure that service they match the delivery of service with what they have promised. This can be done by advertising realistically, seek employee's input and ensure consistent standards in all departments.

Overall Conclusion

As already discussed, Customers have high assumptions of the value they receive for the cost or the experience they get from their service provider or organisation. The five dimensions of customer value encompasses customers experiences and are interrelated. We are also able to understand that value for different people mean different things as some prefer value for money whilst some remain loyal to quality.

There are dimensions guiding service quality which are seen in the reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles of the service provider.

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