Valarie Zeithaml: autobiographical reflections

Valarie A. Zeithaml
Department of Marketing, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA

Received 17 May 2017
Revised 20 May 2017
Accepted 23 May 2017

Abstract

Purpose – By examining my personal development and career trajectory, I hope to share some insights into life as an academic. My particular path has contained, as most paths do, twists and turns. As I look back, they all seem somehow related to each other, but they were not all planned.

Design/methodology/approach – I will discuss my life and career in chronological order, then reflect on my career and research philosophy. I will also discuss several of my most cited articles and how they emerged.

Findings – I emphasize research that is both academically rigorous and relevant to business. I also show that passion for a subject, even one that is risky and not encouraged by others, has resulted in lifelong interest and inspiration for me. While not appropriate for all because of the risk, I found it worth taking a chance, largely because I was highly inspired by the subject.

Practical implications – Research that is programmatic has benefits because it allows a scholar to own an area. Also, working with the right co-author teams – sometimes ones where different talents are distributed across the team is effective.

Originality/value – The story and opinions are mine alone.

Keywords SERVQUAL, Service quality, Gaps model, Price perceptions, Reflections on a career, Services marketing

Paper type Viewpoint

I welcome the opportunity to reflect on my roots and career at this stage. One of my biggest insights in writing this is that studying what I am passionate is what makes me excited about research even at this stage. This paper assured me that I chose the right career – I cannot imagine doing anything other than being a marketing professor. I hope that my humble roots and challenges along the way will convince all who read this that persistence and resilience are the pathways to success.

Childhood

I am the daughter of John Hoyle, a steelworker, and Alma Hoyle (neé Loomis), a housewife. As the oldest of three girls, I was the son my father never had. He brought me up to believe that I could do anything a male could do and that it would be best if I did not make a big deal of being a female.

My father did not get a formal education. He quit school in the eighth grade to enlist in the Second World War, and when he returned, he began at Bethlehem Steel as a mechanic. A brilliant but uneducated man, he moved up the ranks at Bethlehem Steel and read everything he could put his hands on. He consumed four library books a week and when I was four years old, I became his library companion. As a very young girl, even before I attended school, I read voraciously – all the Nancy Drew mysteries, Pippi Longstocking and Mary Poppins were among my favorites.

Journal of Historical Research in Marketing
Vol. 9 No. 3, 2017
pp. 264-276
1755-750X
DOI 10.1108/JHRM-05-2017-0017

All his life, my father believed that his lack of formal education limited him. He determined that my sisters and I would acquire the education that he missed. When I was just one year old, he sat me down and told me that I was going to college. When I was five, he told me that I would be the first female President of the USA. Far from being motivated and confident by this extraordinary challenge, I felt heavy expectations on my tiny shoulders that led to both positive and difficult outcomes in the future.

I was a diligent student in elementary school, surprising the teachers with how well I read and performed. It turns out, however, that this was a complete revelation to my mother, something I discovered when she returned from a parent–teacher conference when I was in second grade. The teachers had informed her that I was an excellent reader and student and that I tested well on all the standardized exams. She was astonished because she had no idea that I would do well in school. I'm sure I felt it my duty to do well because my father expected it. My favorite subjects were science, reading and writing.

High school and college

In high school, I immersed myself both in my studies and in extracurricular activities. I was captain of the cheerleaders, editor of the literary magazine, editor of the daily mimeographed newspaper called the *Pointer Peeper* and a member of the student council. In terms of my studies, I excelled in science but had a particular love for English.

I discovered my academic passion when I was 15 years old. I was a lifeguard hired to teach small children to swim at the local YMCA. My boss, Lou Hammond, was huge and frightening, but not clear to me about what my job involved. All I knew for sure was that I shouldn't let people drown, what we service researchers call the outcome component of service quality. I was curious about the process components. The roots of my future research were planted in that lifeguard chair as I tried to figure out what Lou, the children and their parents – all my customers – expected. Hmm. Act like I know what I'm doing. Be friendly and confident. Learn the children's names. When a parent complains, listen attentively, reassure her and act quickly. Those of you familiar with my research may recognize these as precursors to SERVQUAL attributes.

When I was a junior, my math teacher nominated me to go to Grinnell Behavior Science Institute, a nine-week summer program to teach 50 students – one from each state – about behavioral psychology. We learned programmed learning, brain anatomy and neuroscience and also conducted behavioral experiments on rats. We even met B. F. Skinner. In retrospect, I believe it was a program to sell a burgeoning and controversial form of psychology to young students to convince us to pursue that sub-discipline of psychology as we went to university. It was highly stimulating to be around students that smart and I came home inspired to study even harder.

I strongly believe that the success I have achieved in my career is due – more than anything – to learning to write well. I had many good English teachers in high school who taught me important lessons – how to diagram sentences, how to write good paragraphs, essays and reports. I had one very special English teacher who made a world of difference in my life. Being in his class on creative writing was magical. He made me curious about great literature. He opened my eyes to famous books and my heart to poetry. He taught me that I, too, could write creatively. He inspired me to exceed my expectations of myself by telling me that I had a gift in writing. I don't know if I really did back then but because he was my hero, I believed him. And I took that belief and turned it into a major factor in my career.

When I was in high school, we had no computers. I took a (very useful) typing class using those clumsy black manual typewriters. I pounded out many a high school and college paper as practice to improve my writing. And my extracurricular reading involved paperback books that improved my writing ability. At one point, I had seven paperback books on vocabulary (e.g. *30 Days to a More Powerful Vocabulary*) and an entire college of books to improve my writing (e.g. *Elements of Style*).

My sisters and I all went to private colleges and we were expected to contribute our summer paychecks to the college fund. To help pay my way through college, I held many service jobs – lifeguard, babysitter, cafeteria worker, clerk, camp counselor, typist and secretary. For two summers, I was “the girl in the white gloves” for Manpower, a temporary help agency. I did, however, find a way to get spending money by working weekends as a bus girl in a cafeteria. My father let me keep that money.

In college, I continued to love extracurricular activities: cheerleading, choreography, student senate, sorority, dancing in musicals and shows. I was less dedicated to my studies, particularly in my first year. My father sternly reprimanded me and I shaped up enough to almost achieve a 3.0 overall in my undergraduate school. I majored in psychology, but not behavioral psychology. Instead, I wanted to become a clinical therapist.

Jobs and early career

When I graduated from college with a degree in psychology, the only job available without an advanced degree was as a parole officer. I decided to pass on that opportunity.

Instead, I pounded the streets of Baltimore and chanced into advertising. My starting salary as a secretary was only $6,000, but by the end of that year, my income doubled through commissions. I was fortunate that the company was a medium-sized 4A agency (American Association of Advertising Agencies, a certification organization) where I was able to convince people to let me buy media, write advertising copy, do production and accompany the “suits” or client representatives to meetings. With a bit of luck and hard work, I soon become a “suit” myself. I had two “goods” clients (Utz potato chips and Kirk-Stieff Sterling) and five services companies (Lord Baltimore Hotel, City of Baltimore, Baltimore’s Inner Harbor, Masonry Institute of Maryland and Baltimore Savings Bank). It was obvious early on that there was a huge difference in marketing the services and the goods. The goods companies were straightforward to market and advertise; marketing the services was harder, but I did not yet understand why or how.

MBA and PhD

Lacking the insights I sought, I applied to the University of Maryland for an MBA and received a stipend to work as a research and teaching assistant. As far as my search for knowledge about services, however, the textbooks and courses at the time were not helpful, using only beer, cars, durable goods and packaged goods as examples. Halfway through the MBA, I decided to stay at Maryland for a PhD to read the academic journals, learn what I could and write a dissertation on the topic.

PhD students were heavily recruited from our MBA program. The organizational behavior, accounting and marketing departments all encouraged me to join their areas. Accounting was very persuasive, trying to convince me that I would make far more money there; I even published one of my class papers in an accounting journal (Beard and Hoyle, 1976). Not the least persuaded, I joined the marketing program, despite the pressure from accounting. One of the most difficult administrative aspects of Maryland at the time was that while the university awarded selected MBA students stipends for research and teaching assistance, PhD students did not receive any financial remuneration. To support ourselves, we taught undergraduate courses at the rate of $1,000 per section. Each semester I *taught* four sections – two of advertising and two of core marketing – in addition to *taking* three doctoral courses. For teaching ten courses (eight during the year and two in the summer), I made $10,000 per year, barely enough to live in the Maryland suburbs of D.C.

I married Carl Zeithaml when he was a PhD student and I was a second-year MBA. In addition to my hectic schedule of teaching and taking courses, I unexpectedly became pregnant after two months of being married. At the time, no other doctoral students had children or were expecting them and I was shaken that it had happened to me right at the beginning of my PhD. I realized I was going to have a baby while substitute teaching for Tom Greer, our department head. I passed back his exams to students who were furious with their grades and virtually revolted in class. Right in the middle of the class, my hormones kicked into gear and I found myself crying and cancelled the class. At that point, I was certain I'd be removed from the program and never get my PhD. You can imagine how the little girl who was programmed to be president felt about failing. I was convinced that was the end of my academic career.

The next day, I recovered enough to try to think constructively about how I could manage everything. I read a very inspiring book called *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life* by Alan Lakein. The bible of time management at the time, I read and followed virtually all recommendations. The first and most strategic approach was to itemize my three lifetime goals, my three five-year goals and my three six-month goals (should I have only six months to live). My lifetime goals were to become a respected marketing scholar, to stay fit and to have a happy family life. Other, more tactical advice included:

- avoid procrastination by setting a timer for an hour, begin writing when it started and stop when it ended;
- divide all tasks into A [most important], B [second most important] and C [least important]; and
- identify prime productive periods and always do the As at that time while doing the Cs during unproductive times.

I finished my dissertation by following this advice and continue to practice these tactics to this day.

My doctoral committee would not allow me to write a dissertation on services marketing because, in their view, major journals would not accept papers on the topic. I dutifully wrote my dissertation on another topic, behavioral price perceptions in grocery stores. My supervisor, Phil Kuehl, was primarily a consultant but he assisted me immensely by helping me to obtain a $5,000 grant from the Food Marketing Institute, the national association of grocery stores. With that money, I hired a research firm in Columbus, OH, to find respondents and house a field experiment. A local grocery store built dummy grocery aisles, stocked them with groceries, provided shopping carts and helped me present four different price environments. This was the era when price stamps were removed from items and prices were added to shelves, so these were two of the treatments along with several on-shelf guides with prices presented in order from lowest to highest.

The critical personal aspect of conducting the dissertation is that I was boarding the airplane to go to Columbus when my eyes turned yellow with jaundice. I was infected with hepatitis A, which I caught from my one-year-old son who got it in daycare. I went to Columbus anyway, as this was my only chance to execute all my preparations. I avoided any contact that would infect my respondents (today the IRB would certainly not approve!). As soon as my plane returned to College Station, my husband rushed me to the hospital where I spent two weeks in quarantine. Not wanting to waste the time, I coded my questionnaires during the hospital stay.

The good news is that my research hypotheses were confirmed: respondents paid more, were less confident, disliked the shelf prices and processed them mentally in different ways. I submitted the paper to *Journal of Consumer Research* (Zeithaml, 1982) and it won the

Ferber Award from *JCR*, which led me to continue one stream of research on behavioral pricing and attend the Association of Consumer Research (ACR) for several years even though my interests were more deeply in services.

The most superb experience I had as a doctoral student was to attend the 1979 Doctoral Consortium at Wisconsin. Meeting my academic heroes and finding them approachable and helpful was an event that still stands as one of the three most memorable academic experiences of my life. Kent Monroe and Orville Walker, in particular, spent time with me to shape my research. I also found a cohort of doctoral students for life – Bill Cron, Roland Rust and Ray Fisk among them.

Academic jobs

I did not follow the traditional academic job search path because my husband was a year ahead of me and in a different field, strategy. My son was just one year old and our plan was to go on Carl's interviews until we found the first good school that offered us both jobs. I didn't even have a dissertation topic at the time and presented a paper on environmental management that had been accepted at *Journal of Marketing* (Zeithaml and Zeithaml, 1984).

When Texas A&M offered us both jobs, we accepted them. As soon as I arrived, I was immediately drawn back to services marketing. I had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time, the early 80s, with the right people, Len Berry and Parsu Parasuraman. A little known-fact about our collaboration is that Parsu was not a service researcher when we met but was gracious and willing to work with me. A second little-known fact is that Parsu and I bribed Len to come to A&M on the promise that the three of us would work together if he took the offer.

The renegade band of service researchers began to assemble at that time. In 1981, American Marketing Association (AMA) sponsored the first Services Marketing Conference where a group of executives and academics from all over the world came together. We raised questions about and sought answers to what we believed were critical services questions. That group was responsible for developing the field of services marketing. Ask these researchers, and their academic descendants, and they will tell you that we were a supportive and encouraging community, making work in the area enjoyable.

Marketing Science Institute and PZB: researching service quality using a programmatic approach

The 1980s was the era of quality, but service companies struggled to apply standard tangible quality tools and techniques. They wondered what their customers evaluated in service, how to measure service and then how to deliver it. At that time, no academic literature existed to help. The topic of service quality was one of the highest on Marketing Science Institute (MSI)'s list of priorities. After winning a seed grant to begin the study of the topic, our research team started by interviewing customers, managers, CEOs and employees in many different service industries. We conducted an MSI-sponsored programmatic series of ten research studies – conceptual, empirical and qualitative – over a 15-year period (see Figure 1). Our investigation involved major topics as presented in the following sections.

Consumer evaluations of service quality

Although researchers and companies were eager to find ways to measure service quality, we recognized that insufficient preliminary research had been conducted to begin measurement. When we began our work on service quality, very little literature existed. Early writing on the topic of consumer perceptions suggested that service quality results from a comparison of what customers feel a service provider should

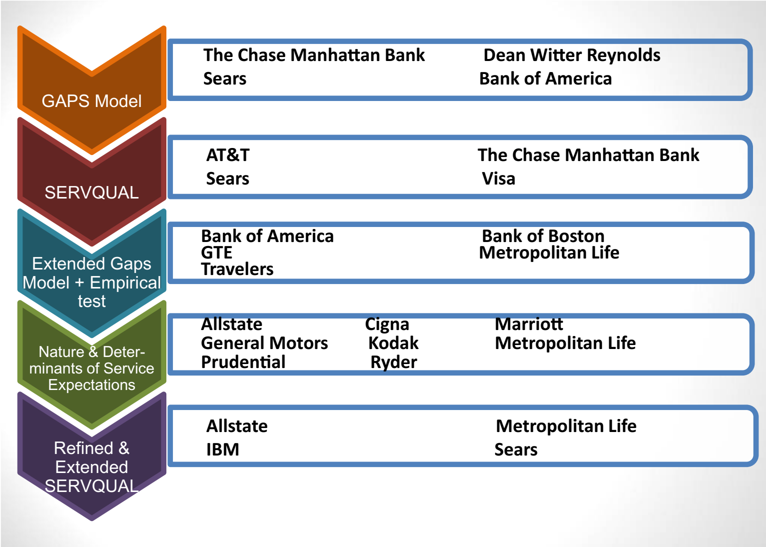

Figure 1.
Companies that sponsored our research through MSI

offer (i.e. their expectations) with how the provider actually performs. This notion that service quality is a function of the expectations–performance gap was reinforced by our first study (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), a qualitative, multi-sector study involving 12 customer focus group interviews – three in each of four different service sectors (retail banking, credit card, stock brokerage and appliance repair and maintenance) – that explored how customers assessed service quality. Based on common insights from the focus groups, we formally defined service quality, as perceived by customers, as the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' service perceptions and expectations (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

Early conceptualizations also suggested that customers use more than just the service outcome or "core" in assessing service quality. Customer assessments are also influenced by the service process and the peripherals associated with the service. Our customer focus group research confirmed that both outcome and process dimensions influence customers' evaluation of service quality and illuminated the specific aspects of the service process that were evaluated by customers. Although we expected that these specifics would vary across types of service (e.g. that banking customers assess different factors than appliance repair customers), common patterns of responses from the focus group interviews revealed ten general evaluative criteria that customers might use, regardless of the type of service sector.

SERVQUAL

As is the case with any qualitative research, we acknowledged the possibility of overlapping dimensions and noted that the measurement of overlap across the ten criteria, as well as determination of whether some could be combined, could be examined empirically. We followed the exploratory study with empirical analysis, which produced SERVQUAL, a 22-item, five-factor service quality instrument (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). In the empirical analysis, three of the original ten dimensions remained intact in the final set of five dimensions. These three dimensions were tangibles, reliability and responsiveness. The remaining seven original dimensions were clustered into two broader dimensions. Based on the content of the items under these two broader dimensions, we labeled them assurance and empathy (Figure 2).

Hundreds of published studies have used SERVQUAL and adaptations of it in a variety of contexts, such as real estate brokerage, physicians in private practice, public recreation programs, a dental school patient clinic, a business school placement center, a tire store, motor carrier companies, accounting firms, discount and department stores, a gas and electric utility company, hospitals, banking, pest control, dry cleaning, fast food and higher education. Numerous descendants of SERVQUAL in various industries have been developed, including DINESERVE in the restaurant industry, LODGSERV in the hospitality industry and LibQUAL in the library field. In addition, consultants have used the instrument, which they termed RATER (the acronym represents the five factors of service quality).

Subsequent papers on SERVQUAL clarified aspects that were contested, leading us to continue to publish improved scales. What is most significant to me about the first paper, though, is that both *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Marketing Research* rejected the paper in the first rounds, claiming that it proffered "only a scale". Fortunately, the *Journal of Retailing* was willing to accept it. At last count (April 20, 2017), the original SERVQUAL paper had 26,562 citations and subsequent iterations had additional citations (see https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=fxbJ16gAAAAJ).

The gaps model of service quality

In the first phase of our research, we also developed our approach to viewing the delivery of service quality in a structured and integrated way: the gaps model of service quality. The gaps model positions the key concepts, strategies and decisions in delivering quality service in a manner that begins with the customer and builds the organization's tasks around what is needed to close the gap between customer expectations and perceptions. The integrated gaps model of service quality is shown in Figure 3.

The paper in which we presented the gaps model was the only one in my career that was conditionally accepted on the first submission. When we created the model, I did not realize how useful it would be in my research, teaching and practice. As a comprehensive framework for viewing all strategies and tactics necessary for understanding and delivering quality service, it has been an endless source of ideas for research. Virtually all services marketing strategies fall somewhere in the four provider gaps, as do service operations and human resource strategies. My services marketing course is structured around the model, with my syllabus beginning with an understanding of the customer gap and then discussing, in turn, the ways to close that gap by closing the four provider gaps. Finally, I use the model as the structure for executive education and consulting, trying to understand a company or industry's service issues within the context of the model and then focusing on

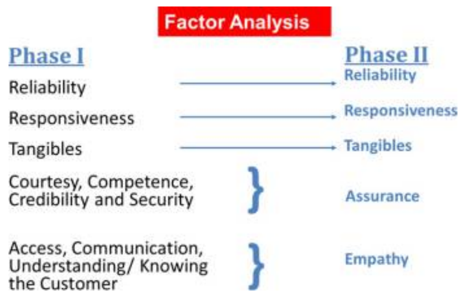

Figure 2. SERVQUAL qualitative dimensions and quantitative factors

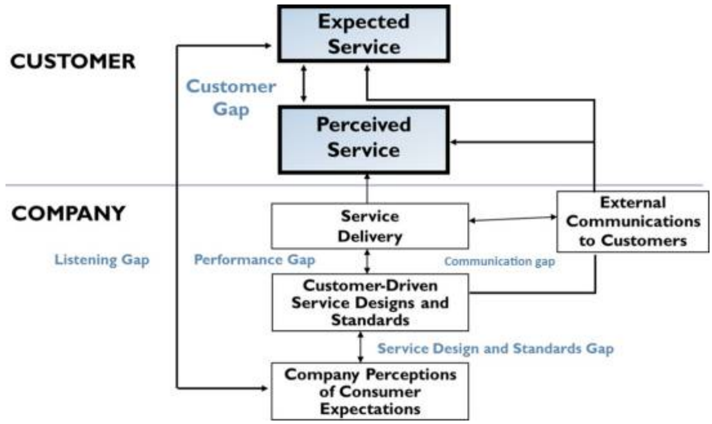

Figure 3.
The gaps model of service quality

the most salient issues in each gap. At last count, the paper in which the gaps model was proposed had 24,644 citations. And the model and SERVQUAL have been used or research all over the world (see Figure 4).

Throughout our research studies, we talked to so many business people that we knew we could write a book for the business audience. Parsu, Len and I had a very efficient and effective approach to working together. In writing the book and journal articles, we always met to plan studies and papers but – for the most part – worked individually. In the case of the book, we developed an outline, divided up chapters and the appendices among us and put the business book together in four months. Twenty-seven years later, it is still being reprinted and selling copies.

Hitting the academic wall and a five-year sabbatical

To get closer to our families, my husband and I moved to the East Coast, one of us to Duke and the other to UNC Chapel Hill. Although I had tenure from Texas A&M, I went to Duke

Figure 4.
Countries using SERVQUAL or the gaps model

for a two-year visiting position. Following the visiting period, I went on Duke's tenure track believing that I would qualify for tenure because these were very productive years for me with the series of papers on service quality published during this time. I also wrote a single-authored paper called, "Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality and Value: A Means-End Model and Synthesis of Research", combining my research on pricing perceptions with quality and value (Zeithaml, 1988). The manuscript was the lead paper in a *Journal of Marketing* issue and won the Maynard Award for the best theory-based paper that year.

What I didn't understand at that point was that *fit* between an academic and a university was critical. No matter how much I published, no matter how well I taught (I won the MBA teaching award the first year I was at Duke), no matter that I was ACR's treasurer, no matter what I contributed to the school, the fit was poor. Duke did not value managerial research, which was what I did. Looking back, I can see that clearly and realize that I did not enjoy my years there. However, it was a crushing blow to be turned down for tenure.

I wanted to stay in the geographic area of UNC and had several offers from universities that were within driving distance, but not close enough. Instead, I decided to begin a consulting practice where I would work with other organizations such as market research firms and consulting firms as partners. I called my firm Partners for Service Excellence.

The consulting practice was largely built on the 1990 business book based on our research entitled, *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Expectations and Perceptions* (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1990). It was released during the period that the Free Press sought manuscripts based on solid academic research that had application to business. Without doing any marketing at all, companies began calling me to consult, among them IBM, General Electric and John Hancock. For each of these companies, I was tasked to examine their businesses and evaluate key aspects relating to service (e.g. their approach to consumer research, their service standards, their communication and their measurements).

Mary Jo Bitner and I also decided to write a services marketing textbook during this period and to structure the book around the gaps model rather than around typical marketing topics. Paralleling the structure of the gaps model, we began our book with chapters on customer perceptions and expectations and then progressed through the four provider gaps in subsequent chapters in the book. Over time, I have authored or co-authored seven books on services marketing.

During this time, I continued to write academic papers and realized that I was hungry for teaching and time to reflect on research again. A colleague suggested that I approach UNC to be a visiting professor. I did so and, after a year, the school hired me as a full professor with tenure. As soon as I walked into Carolina, I felt I was home. It was a perfect fit. The University prized relevant research and teaching.

The UNC period

During the 20 years I spent at UNC, I became involved in research extensions in service marketing. Parsu, Arvind Malhotra and I researched and wrote several articles on what we termed E-S-QUAL, a multiple-item scale of perceptions of service quality online (Parasuraman and Zeithaml, 2002; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2005). Our original motivation was to correct what we perceived as a misuse of SERVQUAL – using it and its five factors as a measure of online service quality. We believed that the context of the internet required new study and – indeed – found that different factors represented consumer perceptions of online service quality than offline service quality. One major difference was that the dimensions most important online were efficiency and privacy, and that the empathy factor only became critical in the service recovery context.

Roland Rust, Kay Lemon and I also began to study customer equity, first for conference presentations, then for journal articles and finally in a book entitled, *Driving Customer Equity: Focusing Strategic Decisions for Long-term Profitability*, Free Press (Rust *et al.*, 2000). The book won the 2003 American Marketing Association Berry Prize for the best marketing book of the previous three years. The *JM* paper (Rust *et al.*, 2004) won the 2005 MSI/H. Paul Root Award and the 2009 Sheth Foundation/*Journal of Marketing* Award. We published other papers on the topic, many addressed to business audiences (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2001; Lemon *et al.*, 2001; Rust *et al.*, 2004). My research streams were virtually all associated with services, as shown in Figure 5.

After I became a chaired professor at UNC, I was involved in various administrative positions including area chair, Senior Associate Dean and MBA Associate Dean. Strange as it always sounds to colleagues from other universities, I truly enjoyed my four years as MBA Associate Dean. My strategy was to use the gaps model to run the program. To do so, my team and I started with student research (gap 1), followed by developing processes to put the most important student expectations and productivity standards in place (gap 2), worked on all performance issues (gap 3) and improved communication to all audiences (gap 4). I had an excellent team of directors who implemented the strategies quickly and competently. I recall my first few Monday morning meetings as we made plans together. I wrote down all the plans and then realized – to my great surprise and satisfaction – that I didn't have to complete the jobs because my team did them for me. It was a new way to work for an academic who typically took responsibility for most of the work.

I also benefited from external service, particularly to the MSI and the AMA. I served as an MSI Academic Research Trustee for six years, interacting with the brightest academics and executives in the world. I was also Chairman of the Board of the AMA during its transformation in 2016-2017, and on the organization's Office of the Chairman of the Board for a four-year period from 2015-2018. Both of these were experiences that enlightened me.

Reflections

Most academics develop a philosophy of research over time. I strongly believe that research must be solidly grounded in theory, literature and hard evidence. But right from the beginning of my academic career, it was also important to me to be relevant. I wanted to understand what executives and managers knew, and found them an inspiration for

Figure 5.
Zeithaml research streams

research ideas, refinement in my thinking and irreplaceable sources of feedback. In turn, communicating to business audiences helped me learn to translate my academic thinking into understandable concepts for the classroom.

I view research as a jigsaw puzzle. No one individual or approach to research has all the puzzle pieces: customers have some, executives others, academics yet others. Behavioral researchers have some pieces, as do modelers. What I like to do best is to create the edges of the puzzles – the conceptual frameworks – and then work and rework all the inside pieces until they fit together. If the edges are solid, the inside pieces can be continuously reconfigured as we learn more. I do not worry that others will pre-empt my research because I learn what I can from them and incorporate their pieces into the puzzle. The PZB gaps model is an example of such a puzzle that my colleagues and I first developed in the early 1980s but that has morphed over time with our own and many others' research.

I believe strongly in RIGOR and RELEVANCE. Thank goodness the MSI, its staff, academics and company members thought of this combination a long time ago. When we published our academic book for business in 1990, we dedicated it to MSI, saying that MSI was a "one of a kind GEM of an organization". I can't say enough about how valuable MSI is to our field. And MSI's view of the world – connecting academia and practice with rigor, relevance and readability – meshed perfectly with my own.

I've been fortunate to have developed an academic family where the bonds go far beyond work. I value my three true academic homes of Maryland, Texas A&M and UNC at Chapel Hill. I value the colleagues with whom I've collaborated and my mentors who have guided me through. I'm also grateful for the enduring friendships I've made in this profession. Each has taught me many intellectual and practical lessons but – just as important – I have had many good times with them. I have been blessed with the best co-authors, most of whom I've worked with programmatically. These individuals, particularly Parsu and Len, shaped by thinking and development in many ways (Figure 6).

Parsu Parasuraman has had, more than any other individual, the biggest impact on my career. It's not just because he is brilliant and hardworking, which he is. It's not just because he is the researcher who created our brand name, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (PZB), which he was. It is also because he is kind, supportive, generous, witty, sensitive, fun and even protective when necessary. I don't have a brother, but if I did, I'd choose Parsu.

An MBA student who came into my life at the second AMA services marketing conference was vital to my career. This student contacted me and asked me to have breakfast with her. She didn't have a PhD; she wasn't even in a PhD program at the time.

Source: AMA, with permission

Figure 6.
PZB co-authors: (from left) Valarie Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman, Leonard L. Berry

That student was Mary Jo Bitner, with whom I have since collaborated on papers, conferences and – most important to me – our Irwin/McGraw-Hill textbook on services marketing. My favorite story about our first edition is how we wrote the proposal. We were standing in a swimming pool in Mesa, AZ, because it was too hot to do it anywhere else. Writing a textbook has its challenges, but it has more rewards than challenges. Because we wrote the first fully integrated text, incorporating academic research and practice, we could be creative and pull together everything we knew in the emerging field. It has been published legally and illegally all over the world. Mary Jo is also my friend and I'm proud of her work in making Arizona State's Service Leadership Center the best in the country.

Mary Gilly, Denise Smart and I started our careers together at Texas A&M more than three decades ago. We began as colleagues, writing papers, sharing teaching ideas and discussing ways that we could run the marketing area better than those in charge. Over the decades, we watched each other's children grow, became sounding boards on everything from achieving balance in life to which shoes went best with which outfit. I am proud to know them as successful academics. Each has been a leader in AMA holding the position of President of the Academic Council. Denise is one of the most successful deans in the country and Mary continues to amaze me as she contributes to the literature and to the growth of her doctoral students. Most important is that they are my dearest friends in the world.

When MSI appointed me as an Academic Trustee the first year, a Dutch author sat down beside me at an MSI Trustees Dinner. I thought he was a doctoral student from Wharton and that we would spend the dinner talking about research. But he didn't want just to talk about research. We also discussed female shopping behavior, children and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Over time, we became friends, then colleagues, then fiancées, then spouses and then soul mates.

The field of services marketing has come a very long way since 1982, when I began my work with Len and Parsu on service quality. At that time, services marketing scholars were a small band of researchers trying to demonstrate to the rest of the marketing field that services were more than "just a context" and that real differences existed in service offerings, which required research and approaches, which required adjustments in marketing concepts and practice. After more than 25 years of research on the topic, service firms have embraced these adjustments and have created strategies for success.

I am thrilled to have spent my career as a marketing academic. In what other job could I study exactly what I wanted with wonderful colleagues, and still find compelling challenges four decades later?

References

Beard, L.H. and Hoyle, V.A. (1976), "Cost accounting proposal for an advertising agency", *Management Accounting*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 35-37.

Lemon, K.N., Rust, R.T. and Zeithaml, V.A. (2001), "What drives customer equity?", *Marketing Management*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 21-25.

Parasuraman, A. and Zeithaml, V.A. (2002), "Service quality of websites: a critical review of extant knowledge", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 30 No. 4, pp. 362-375.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1985), "A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 41-50.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1988), "SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring service quality", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 12-40.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Malhotra, A. (2005), "e-SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for assessing electronic service quality", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 213-233.

Rust, R.R., Lemon, K.N. and Zeithaml, V.A. (2004), "Return on marketing: using customer equity to focus marketing strategy", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68 No. 1, pp. 109-128.

Rust, R.T., Zeithaml, V.A. and Lemon, K.N. (2000), *Driving Customer Equity: Focusing Strategic Decisions for Long-term Profitability*, Free Press, New York, NY.

Rust, R.N., Zeithaml, V.A. and Lemon, K.N. (2004), "Customer-centered brand management", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 82 No. 9, pp. 110-120.

Zeithaml, V.A. (1982), "Consumer response to in-store price information environments", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 357-369.

Zeithaml, V.A. (1988), "Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of the evidence", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 52 No. 2, pp. 2-22.

Zeithaml, C.P. and Zeithaml, V.A. (1984), "Environmental management: revising the marketing perspective", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 48 No. 2, pp. 33-46.

Zeithaml, V.A., Parasuraman, A. and Berry, L.L. (1990), *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Expectations and Perceptions*, Free Press, New York, NY.

Zeithaml, V.A., Rust, R.T. and Lemon, K.N. (2001), "Make customer profitability the basis for service", *California Management Review*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 118-142.

Further reading

Boulding, W.A., Kalra, A., Staelin, R. and Zeithaml, V.A. (1993), "A dynamic process model of service quality: from expectations to behavioral intentions", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 7-27.

Parasuraman, A., Berry, L.L. and Zeithaml, V.A. (1991), "Refinement and reassessment of the SERVQUAL scale", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 67 No. 4, pp. 420-450.

Parasuraman, A., Berry, L.L. and Zeithaml, V.A. (1993), "More on improving service quality measurement", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 69 No. 1, pp. 140-147.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1994a), "Alternative scales for measuring service quality: a comparative assessment based on psychometric and diagnostic criteria", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 70 No. 3, pp. 201-230.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1994b), "Reassessment of expectations as a comparison standard in measuring service quality: implications of future research", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 58 No. 1, pp. 111-124.

Rust, R.T., Lemon, K.N. and Zeithaml, V.A. (2001), "Where should the next marketing dollar go?", *Marketing Management*, Vol. 10 No. 3, p. 24.

Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. (1993), "The nature and determinants of customer expectations of service", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 21 No. 1, pp. 1-12.

Zeithaml, V.A., Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. (1996), "The behavioral consequences of service quality", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 60 No. 2, pp. 31-46.

Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M. and Gremler, D. (2018), *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm*, 7th ed., Irwin/Mc-Graw Hill, New York, NY.

Corresponding author

Valarie A. Zeithaml can be contacted at: Valarie_Zeithaml@kenan-flagler.unc.edu