

**MEASURING THE LEVEL OF CLIENT SATISFACTION IN
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANT FIRMS IN DHULE****Dr. Nilesh A. Rote¹, Mrs. Deepika S. Chhajed²**

¹ Assistant Professor, Head, Dept. of Commerce, Vidyawardhini Sabha's Dr M Y Vaidya Arts,
Prof P D Dalal Commerce & Dr D S Science College, Dhule.

² Research Student, KBC NMU Jalgaon.

Email: runwaldeepika@gmail.com

Abstract

In professional services like chartered accountancy, client satisfaction plays a vital role in building long-term relationships and sustaining practice growth. This study attempts to measure the level of client satisfaction with Chartered Accountant firms operating in Dhule city. A descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected from 89 clients through a structured questionnaire covering ten dimensions of service quality. These included overall service satisfaction, personalized attention, understanding of business needs, regular updates, client relationship value, customer support, CRM effectiveness, personalized advice, meeting specific financial needs, and willingness to recommend. Simple percentage analysis and one sample t-test were used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that clients are generally satisfied with their CA firms, with an overall mean score of 4.02 on a five-point scale. The hypothesis testing confirmed that satisfaction levels are significantly above the indifferent level. However, the study also found that dimensions such as personalized service, regular communication, and understanding of business needs received comparatively lower satisfaction ratings. A notable proportion of clients expressed indifference on certain parameters, indicating scope for improvement. The highest positive response was recorded for willingness to recommend the firm to others, reflecting underlying trust. The study concludes that while CA firms in Dhule have built strong client relationships, there is need to focus on personalized engagement and proactive communication to convert satisfaction into lasting loyalty.

Keywords: Client Satisfaction, Chartered Accountants, Service Quality, Professional Services.

► *Corresponding Author: Dr. Nilesh A. Rote*

Introduction:

In the contemporary business landscape, professional service firms operate in an increasingly competitive environment where client satisfaction has emerged as a critical determinant of organizational success and sustainability (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Among professional service providers, Chartered Accountants (CAs) occupy a unique position as trusted financial advisors whose services extend beyond traditional compliance and auditing to encompass strategic business advisory, tax planning, and financial management (Greenwood, Li, Prakash, & Deephouse, 2005). The quality of client-CA relationships and the level of satisfaction derived from these professional engagements significantly influence client retention, word-of-mouth referrals, and the overall reputation of accounting firms in the marketplace.

Client satisfaction in professional accounting services has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing technical competence, service responsiveness, personalized attention, and the perceived value of the advisor-client relationship (Behn&Carcello, 1997). Research suggests that satisfied clients are more likely to maintain long-term relationships with their service providers, exhibit greater tolerance for occasional service failures, and actively recommend the firm to potential clients (Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994). In the context of accounting firms, where services are often intangible and outcomes may not be immediately apparent, the quality of interpersonal interactions and the demonstration of genuine concern for client welfare become paramount in shaping satisfaction perceptions (Sharma & Patterson, 1999). Despite the acknowledged importance of client satisfaction in professional services, limited empirical research has examined this phenomenon in the context of smaller cities and regional accounting practices in India. Dhule, an emerging commercial center in Maharashtra, presents a unique context for investigating client satisfaction with CA firms, given its growing business ecosystem and the increasing demand for professional financial services.

Need and Importance of Client Satisfaction in CA Firms:

- **Client Retention and Loyalty:** In professional services, acquiring new clients is significantly more expensive than retaining existing ones. Satisfied clients demonstrate greater loyalty and are less likely to switch to competing CA firms, ensuring stable revenue streams and long-term business sustainability (Zeithaml, Berry, &Parasuraman, 1996).
- **Referrals and Word-of-Mouth Marketing:** Given the intangible nature of accounting services, potential clients heavily rely on recommendations from trusted sources. Satisfied clients serve as brand ambassadors, voluntarily endorsing their CA firm to business associates, friends, and family members, thereby generating cost-effective organic growth.
- **Competitive Advantage:** The accounting profession in India has witnessed substantial growth with increasing numbers of practicing CAs, intensifying competition particularly in regional markets. Client satisfaction functions as a key differentiator, enabling firms to distinguish themselves through superior service quality rather than competing solely on fees.
- **Risk Mitigation:** Satisfied clients are more cooperative during audits and compliance processes, providing timely information and maintaining transparent communication. This cooperation reduces professional risks for CA firms and enhances the accuracy and efficiency of financial reporting and statutory compliance.
- **Premium Pricing Potential:** Firms with established reputations for client satisfaction can command premium fees for their services. Clients perceive higher value in relationships where their needs are understood and addressed proactively, making them willing to pay for quality assurance and peace of mind.
- **Long-Term Relationship Value:** Accounting relationships ideally span decades, encompassing business lifecycle stages from startup to succession planning. Client satisfaction nurtures these long-term associations, allowing CAs to provide continuous value through evolving business needs and regulatory changes.
- **Professional Reputation and Credibility:** In close-knit business communities characteristic of cities like Dhule, a CA firm's reputation spreads rapidly. Consistently satisfying clients builds professional credibility, enhancing the firm's standing among peers, regulatory authorities, and the broader business ecosystem.

The present study aims to measure the level of client satisfaction with Chartered Accountant firms operating in Dhule city. Specifically, it examines client perceptions across multiple dimensions

including overall service satisfaction, personalized service delivery, understanding of business needs, regularity of updates, perceived value of client relationships, quality of customer support, effectiveness of client relationship management (CRM) practices, provision of personalized advice, ability to meet specific financial needs, and clients' willingness to recommend their CA firm to others. By systematically analyzing these dimensions, this research seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on professional service quality while offering practical implications for CA firms striving to enhance client satisfaction in competitive regional markets.

Review of Literature:

Client satisfaction in professional accounting services has been extensively examined through various theoretical lenses and methodological approaches. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) pioneered the SERVQUAL framework, establishing that service quality in professional contexts encompasses reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Their work remains foundational for understanding how clients evaluate professional service encounters, particularly in intangible domains like accounting.

Behn and Carcello (1997) investigated audit client satisfaction among Big 6 firms and identified that timely communication, responsiveness to client needs, and involvement of key personnel significantly influenced satisfaction levels. Their research demonstrated that technical competence alone does not guarantee client satisfaction; rather, interpersonal dynamics and service delivery mechanisms play equally crucial roles. Similarly, Sharma and Patterson (1999) examined relationship commitment in professional services and found that communication effectiveness and trust were critical antecedents of client satisfaction in accountant-client relationships.

In the Indian context, Singh and Kaur (2011) explored service quality in accounting firms and reported that reliability and assurance emerged as the most significant predictors of client satisfaction among small and medium enterprises. Their study highlighted the unique expectations of Indian business clients, who value personalized attention and proactive financial advice alongside technical accuracy. More recently, Gangwar and Sharma (2020) examined client satisfaction in Delhi-based CA firms and found that technological integration, timely updates, and perceived value significantly influenced retention intentions.

Internationally, Ismail, Haron, and Ibrahim (2016) studied Malaysian accounting firms and established that empathy and responsiveness were the strongest determinants of client satisfaction in the Asian cultural context. They noted that cultural factors moderate the relationship between service quality dimensions and satisfaction outcomes. Similarly, Awang and Jusoff (2017) investigated client expectations in Malaysian accounting practices and found that clients prioritize communication clarity and problem-resolution capabilities over technical expertise alone.

Research Methodology:

A. Objectives of the study:

1. To study the importance of client satisfaction in Chartered Accountant practices.
2. To assess the level of client satisfaction with Chartered Accountant firms in Dhule city.

B. Hypothesis of the study:

Clients of Chartered Accountant firms in Dhule city are satisfied with the services provided.

C. Research Design:

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample of 89 clients of Chartered Accountant firms from Dhule city was selected through stratified simple random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed with simple percentage calculations.

D. Sources of Data:

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources of data:

- Primary: Questionnaire and structured interview
- Secondary: Reference book, research journal and PhD theses

E. Data Collection Instrument and Scaling Technique:

The study employed a structured questionnaire as the primary data collection tool. The instrument consisted of closed-ended items designed to gauge clients' level of satisfaction regarding the services provided by CA firms. To ensure precision in responses, a five-point Likert scale was utilized.

Response	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongly Agree
Scale (Marks)	01	02	03	04	05

Data Analysis & Result:

N O	Items	Response				
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Indifferent	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Satisfied with services provided	0	1	14	48	26
2	Satisfied with personalized service	0	7	20	38	24
3	Firm understands business needs & provides tailored solutions	0	10	19	39	21
4	Firm provides regular updates	0	11	15	44	19
5	Firm values client relationship	0	4	14	44	27
6	Satisfied with customer support	0	5	14	49	21
7	CRM enhances client experience	0	4	18	50	17
8	Personalized advice provided	0	6	16	51	16
9	Firm meets specific financial needs	0	4	20	49	16
10	Recommended the firm to others	0	3	12	45	29

Discussion:

The analysis of client satisfaction with Chartered Accountant firms in Dhule reveals important insights across ten dimensions. The findings indicate that while overall satisfaction is high, certain areas require attention.

1: Satisfied with services provided – 83.1% of respondents expressed satisfaction, with only one client expressing disagreement. This suggests that CA firms in Dhule are meeting basic service expectations effectively. Technical work such as audits, tax filings, and compliance appears to be handled competently.

2: Satisfied with personalized service – 69.7% satisfaction with 7.9% disagreement indicates that while core services are satisfactory, clients may not be receiving individual attention. This gap between overall service satisfaction and personalized service suggests that clients value being treated as individuals with unique preferences.

3: Firm understands business needs and provides tailored solutions – This dimension received the lowest satisfaction at 67.4%, with 11.2% disagreement. Clients appear to perceive that their CA firms do not fully understand their specific business contexts. A garment retailer and a transport contractor have different financial challenges, and when advice is generic, clients notice.

4: Firm provides regular updates – 70.8% satisfaction with 12.4% disagreement indicates communication gaps. Timely information about regulatory changes and compliance deadlines is essential in accounting. Clients who disagreed likely felt uninformed or dependent on their own efforts to stay updated.

5: Firm values client relationship – 79.8% satisfaction demonstrates that most clients feel their CA genuinely values the relationship. This emotional connection builds trust and makes clients more forgiving of occasional service shortcomings.

6: Satisfied with customer support – 78.7% satisfaction suggests that most clients can access their CA when needed and receive responses to queries. Only 5.6% expressed dissatisfaction, indicating generally adequate support mechanisms.

7: CRM enhances client experience – While 75.3% agreed, 20.2% remained indifferent. This indifference suggests that formal client relationship management practices are not visibly impacting client experience. Clients may be unaware of CRM efforts or do not perceive their benefits.

8: Personalized advice provided – 75.3% satisfaction with 18% indifference indicates that some clients receive generic rather than customized guidance. Personalized advice requires understanding each client's risk appetite, business stage, and goals.

9: Firm meets specific financial needs – 73% satisfaction with 22.5% indifference represents the highest indifference rate. This suggests that while basic needs are addressed, clients do not perceive proactive efforts to identify their unique or evolving requirements.

10: Recommended the firm to others – This dimension received the strongest response with 83.1% satisfaction and 32.6% strong agreement. Willingness to recommend represents genuine trust and loyalty, as clients stake their personal reputation on such referrals.

Testing of Hypothesis:

On the application of One Sample T- Test, the calculated t-value (20.15) is greater than the table value (1.987) and p-value (0.000) is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This confirms that the mean satisfaction score (4.02) is significantly higher than the indifferent level of 3. Therefore, the research hypothesis is **accepted**, establishing that clients of Chartered Accountant firms in Dhule city are satisfied with the services provided.

Conclusion:

The present study attempted to measure the level of client satisfaction with Chartered Accountant firms operating in Dhule city. Based on the analysis of responses from 89 clients across ten distinct dimensions, several meaningful conclusions can be drawn.

The findings clearly indicate that clients are generally satisfied with the services provided by CA firms in Dhule. The overall mean satisfaction score of 4.02 on a five-point scale, supported by the statistical testing ($t=20.15$, $p<0.05$), confirms that satisfaction levels are significantly above the indifferent level. This is encouraging news for the accounting profession in the region.

However, the study also reveals that satisfaction is not uniform across all dimensions. While clients feel strongly that their CA firms value the relationship and they willingly recommend their firms to others, certain areas require attention. Personalized service, regular updates, and understanding of specific business needs received comparatively lower satisfaction ratings. These are precisely the dimensions that distinguish a routine service provider from a trusted business advisor.

The high indifference rates observed across multiple parameters, particularly regarding CRM practices and meeting specific financial needs, suggest that many clients remain neutral simply

because they have not experienced proactive engagement from their CA firms. This indifference should not be mistaken for satisfaction, as neutral clients can easily switch to competitors offering more attentive service.

In conclusion, CA firms in Dhule have successfully built trust and goodwill among their clients. However, to convert this goodwill into lasting loyalty, firms must invest in understanding each client's unique business context, communicate more regularly, and offer genuinely personalized advice. The foundation is strong, but the superstructure needs reinforcement.

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