Service quality evaluation models determined by Online consumer perception and satisfaction

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Abstract

Since the 1980s, service quality has represented a reference point for marketers, being considered essential for companies’ differentiation strategy. Having its conceptual and empiric support the specialty literature, this paper focuses on service quality dimensions and emphasizes the existing models for evaluating online service quality. Even if the existing literature offers various models for service quality evaluation, there does not yet exist an agreement on the model unanimously accepted by all researchers and which is in concordance with all their theories. It is therefore obvious that marketing managers of service companies should know the existing online service quality evaluation models and use them to adjust their strategies and to target their market with specifically adapted offers.

Keywords: service quality, perception, satisfaction, evaluation model;

1. Introduction

Service quality has always represented for marketers a point of strong debate and interest, being considered an essential aspect for companies differentiation. Nowadays, clients are much more unwilling to accept inefficient or unpleasaant services due to the fact that they benefit from better and better services, which trigger their continuously growing expectations. No client would return to a place where he has been neglected or treated unappropriately (poor service quality, unfair price/service rapport); moreover, he would share his dissatisfaction with his friends and acquaintances (Zeithaml et al., 2013).

2. Service evaluation models

Marketing specialists have always been interested in identifying the most important factors on which the service evaluation models are based. At the same time, the importance of services on the international market has been increasingly growing. Therefore, there exists an urgent need to understand more clearly the service evaluation models or the way consumers actually evalulate services they benefit from.

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Christian Gronroos (1983) defines two types of qualities: *technical quality*, which represents the result of the service provision (responds to the question *What?*) and *functional quality*, which represents the way in which the service is delivered to the client (responds to the question *How?*). Due to the fact that during the consumer-service provider interaction, the service provider has the opportunity to demonstrate the quality of his service, from the client’s viewpoint the functional quality is as important or even more important than the technical quality of the provided service.

*Figure 1. Service quality model – Christian Gronroos*

Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) define ten dimensions representing evaluative criteria that clients make use of regarding service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, understanding the consumer. The SERVQUAL model used to measure service quality includes five of these dimensions considered the most important: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. According to Shoemaker, Lewis and Yesawich (2007): “These dimensions lead to the acronym RATER. All dimensions together result in the total experience the customer takes away.” Cronin and Taylor (1992) argued that using SERVPERF to measure service quality is better than SERVQUAL in terms of validity, reliability and forecasting. According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2004), service quality has different meanings for customers and it also depends on service delivery perception.
Brogowicz et al. (1990) present a synthetized service quality model, based on both the Nordic School (Christian Gronroos, Evert Gummerson etc.) and the North-American School (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry etc.), having as aim presenting the main dimensions of service quality in close relationship with managerial functions of planning, implementation and control in order to guide companies’ efforts of improving their services.

Figure 2. A synthetized service quality model
Lapierre et al. (1996) study the service quality evaluation from various perspectives based on studies done by Gronroos (1983) and Parasuraman et al. (1985). Lapierre et al. (1996) distinguish between professional services and standard services, by considering the professional service as being “an art or an representation offered by a person with qualified experience to a third party that disposes of a code of ethics and which represents the object of high quality control standards.” A standard service is “any other tertiary activity, a temporal experience, an art or a representation in which propriety cannot be transferred, it is intangible and usually presupposes a personal interaction between client and service provider.”

Cetină (2009) considers that a well-delivered service is a profitable strategy for the company which offers concomitantly a greater satisfaction to the customer. A high quality service results in attracting new clients, an enlarged business portfolio with current customers and new potential customers. The quality is the main element which creates loyal customers, customers satisfied with the choice they made regarding a company and its services, customers that will therefore use its services in the future and recommend them to their friends and acquaintances.

Brady et al. (2005) researched the way consumers understand, perceive and evaluate delivered services and also how these factors influence the consumer service buying behavior. One of the main purposes of the authors has been to elucidate which is the standard and generally used service evaluation model by making a detailed analysis of already known models. Therefore, there have been chosen four different models of service evaluation which are often used to describe relations factors which determine behavioral intentions. Each model is based on the attitude theory having as central dominant element: the perceived value, quality, satisfaction and comprehension. The carried research show that the comprehensive model includes all other and confirm the fact that service quality determines customer satisfaction and has therefore consequences on behavioral intentions. This order is specific also for the satisfaction model, which is the second from the point of view of its relevance in this study.

\[\text{Figura 3. Comprehensive model of service evaluation}\]


SAC – sacrifice, SQ – service quality, VAL – perceived value, SAT – satisfaction, BI – behavioural intentions

The results of this research challenges managers to consider perceived value and consumer satisfaction as being two important factors that should be taken into account when elaborating the strategic objectives of the company. Nevertheless, service quality is more difficult to evaluate as product quality due to the intangible character of services (Brady et al., 2005, Cetină, 2009).
According to Zeithaml, Bittner and Gremler (2013), the relationship and the interconnectedness between customer satisfaction and service quality are evinced by the following figure:

**Figure 4. Customer Perceptions of Quality and Customer Satisfaction**

![Diagram of Customer Perceptions of Quality and Customer Satisfaction]

Reliability  
Responsiveness  
Assurance  
Empathy  
Tangibles  

Service Quality  
Product Quality  
Situation factors  
Customer Satisfaction  
Customer Loyalty  
Personal factors  


Parasuraman *et al.* (2005) developed E-S-QUAL scale which considers that the main factors which influence online service quality are: efficiency, system availability, fulfillment and privacy. In contradistinction to the difference made by Gronroos between technical and functional dimension of services, Fassnacht si Koese (2006) consider that there are three dimensions of e-SQ, i.e.: the environment quality, the service delivery quality and the service results quality. The service results quality is determined by three sub-dimensions: reliability/trustworthiness, functional benefits and emotional benefits.

**Figure 5. Model of e-SQ and its consequences**

![Diagram of Model of e-SQ and its consequences]

Notes: e-SQ- e-Service Quality; Recco: Positive recommendations intentions; RPI: Repurchase intentions


Gera (2011) considers as key attributes of e-SQ: *ease of access, flexibility and reliability*. The web site experience of the consumer is also important for positive evaluation and behavioral response, therefore, web site design and its interactive features are the most important aspects for customers to develop favorable perceptions of their service, thus influencing their online consumer behavior and e-satisfaction.
3. Conclusions

There is a great theoretical basis in the field on service quality research which offers to the representants of this field the possibility to obtain information necessary for analysing the existing online and offline service evaluation models and to develop new ones.

Marketers should always bear in mind the fact that service quality evaluation presupposes not only the appreciation of the final result, but also of the service delivery process. In this business sector, service quality cannot be separated from the delivery activity (Cetină, 2009). Therefore, managers of service organizations should adapt their strategies to better correspond with the characteristics of their targeted clients and to specific offers existing on the market.

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