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SERVICE QUALITY AND SERVICE STRATEGIES AS ANTECEDENTS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN SERVICE INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to address the importance of dimensions of service quality, customer satisfaction as a part of service strategies in service industry. Marketing strategy is the basic approach that the business units will use to achieve its objectives, and it consists of broad decisions on target markets, market positioning and mix, and marketing expenditure levels. As services sector has become more competitive, organizations need to consider ways of developing relationships with their existing customers in order to defend their market share. Strategic dimension of marketing should focus on the direction that an organization would take in relation to a specific market or set of markets in order to achieve a specified set of objectives. Every service firm must recognize that its "strategic posture" depends partly on the competitive environment, partly on its allocation of marketing resources. This paper investigates the importance of implementation and evaluation of marketing strategies in services and whether these marketing strategies are customer centric or organization centric in the long run.

KEYWORDS

Customer satisfaction, Marketing, Services, Strategies, Service quality.

INTRODUCTION

 Services marketing strategy focuses on delivering processes, experiences, and intangibles to customers rather than physical goods and transactions. It involves integrating a focus on the customer throughout the firm and across all functions. All company functions marketing, selling, human resources, operations, and R&D – must work together to create effective services marketing strategy. Rather than the traditional goods marketing focus on transactions and exchange, services marketing strategy is centered on the customer, usage, and relationships (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). Services may be defined as the economic activities that are intangible and perishable in nature and make life convenient. Services are considered to primary revenue generating activities for the firm. Service managers have understood the importance of strategies in the services so as to satisfy the customers or we may say to attain the customer satisfaction so they are managing the competition by differentiating the quality, differentiating the price so on so forth. In recent years the impetus on customer service and customer satisfaction is growing because of the fact of the intensity of the competition within the industry, improvement in the technologies and innovations. Thus in the environment of tough competition, increasing costs and innovations services firm have to deliver on the quality of services and this can be mainly done by revisiting and focusing more and more on the strategies. Business organizations make considerable use of professional services. However, it has received less attention in the context of professional business services than of other consumer services in general. There are few articles to investigate customer satisfactions of the service firms. In the present economic environment, characterized by technological dynamism and intensive competition, the issue of customer satisfaction has become extremely important for the success of any business. If not recognized and responded to rapidly changing business environments effectively, a firm may result in increased pressure of work, lost revenue opportunities, increased costs and, ultimately, in increased levels of customer dissatisfaction (Gurau and Ranchhod 2002). With the emergence of competitive battlefield, the need for an appropriate approach to quality measurement in the context of professional business became apparent. Evidently, there is a need to understand the needs and wants of customer and to devise the marketing strategies according to their needs and wants.

"A service is any activity or benefit that one party can offer to another which is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything." **Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong**

"Services are economic activities that create value and provide *benefits* for customers at specific times and places as a result of *bringing* about a desired change in or on behalf of the recipient of the service." **Christopher Lovelock**

"Services are the production of essentially intangible benefits and experience, either alone or as part of a tangible product through some form of exchange, with the intention of satisfying the needs, wants and desires of the consumers." **C. Bhattachargee**

Service quality is nothing but the difference between the service expectation & service actually received by the customer. Customer has certain expectation about the service. If the customer experience the same service as they expect then this difference will be zero and we can say that the service quality is very good. Higher the difference of above equation lower will be the service quality.

FIG. 1

The RATER Model – Service Quality Dimensions

| Dimension | Refers to | Specific criteria that customers use |
|---|--|---|
| RELIABILITY Delivering on promises | Your ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness • Consistency/Regularity • Accuracy |
| ASSURANCE Inspiring trust and Confidence | The knowledge and courtesy of staff, their ability to inspire trust and confidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff competence • Respect for stakeholders • Credibility • Probity and confidentiality • Safety and security |
| TANGIBLES Representing the service physically | The physical representations or images of your service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical facilities • Equipment • Technology • Employees • Communication materials |
| EMPATHY Treating customers as individuals | The caring individualized attention you provide your stakeholders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access (to staff, services, information) • Communication (clear, appropriate, timely) • Understanding the stakeholder • Services appropriate for stakeholders' needs • Individualized attention |
| RESPONSIVENESS Being willing to help | Your willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Willingness to help • Prompt attention to requests, questions • Problem resolution • Complaint handling • Flexibility |

The five dimensions of service quality are applied across all the service industry to evaluate service quality and devising the marketing strategies. :

SERVQUAL has been extensively utilized in assessing service quality of different service providers including banks suggested that "Quality evaluations are not made solely on the outcome of a service; they also involve evaluations of the process of service delivery" (Parasuraman et al., 1985,p.42). Within the SERVQUAL model, service quality is defined as the gap between customer perceptions of what happened during the service transaction and his expectations of how the service transaction should have been performed. SERVQUAL refers to five dimensions of quality:

Reliability (Delivering on promised services)

Assurance (Inspiring trust and confidence)

Tangibles (physical cues available in any service)

Empathy (Giving individualized attention to customers)

Responsiveness (Being willing to help)

As service industry is growing enormously and there is paradigm shift in the economies becoming service driven economies, so the dimensions of service quality are critical in achieving the customer satisfaction and should be given considerable attention.

Since the appearance of Parasuraman et al.'s (1985, 1988) research, which developed their scale to measure service quality (SERVQUAL), numerous researchers have attempted to empirically replicate the instrument's five-dimensional structure as follows:

1. Responsiveness-willingness to help customers and provide prompt service;
2. Assurance-knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence;
3. Empathy-caring, individualized attention to customers;
4. Tangibles-physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel; and
5. Reliability-ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

GAPS MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY

Parasuraman et al. (1985) proposed that service quality is a function of the differences between expectation and performance along the quality dimensions. They developed a service quality model based on gap analysis. The various gaps visualized in the model are:

Gap 1: Difference between consumers' expectation and management's perceptions of those expectations, i.e. **not knowing what consumers expect.**

KEY FACTORS LEADING TO GAP 1:

1. Inadequate market Research
2. Poor upward communication
3. Insufficient relationship focus
4. Inadequate service recovery

Gap 2: Difference between management's perceptions of consumer's expectations and service quality specifications, i.e. **improper service-quality standards.**

KEY FACTORS LEADING TO GAP 2:

1. Poor and vague Service Design
2. Absence of customer Driven standards
3. Inappropriate physical evidence and service scape.

Gap 3: Difference between service quality specifications and service actually delivered i.e. the service performance gap.

KEY FACTORS LEADING TO GAP 3:

1. Deficiency in human resource policies.
2. Problems with service intermediaries.
3. Failure to match demand and supply.

Gap 4: Difference between service delivery and the communications to consumers about service delivery, i.e. whether promises match delivery

KEY FACTORS LEADING TO GAP 4:

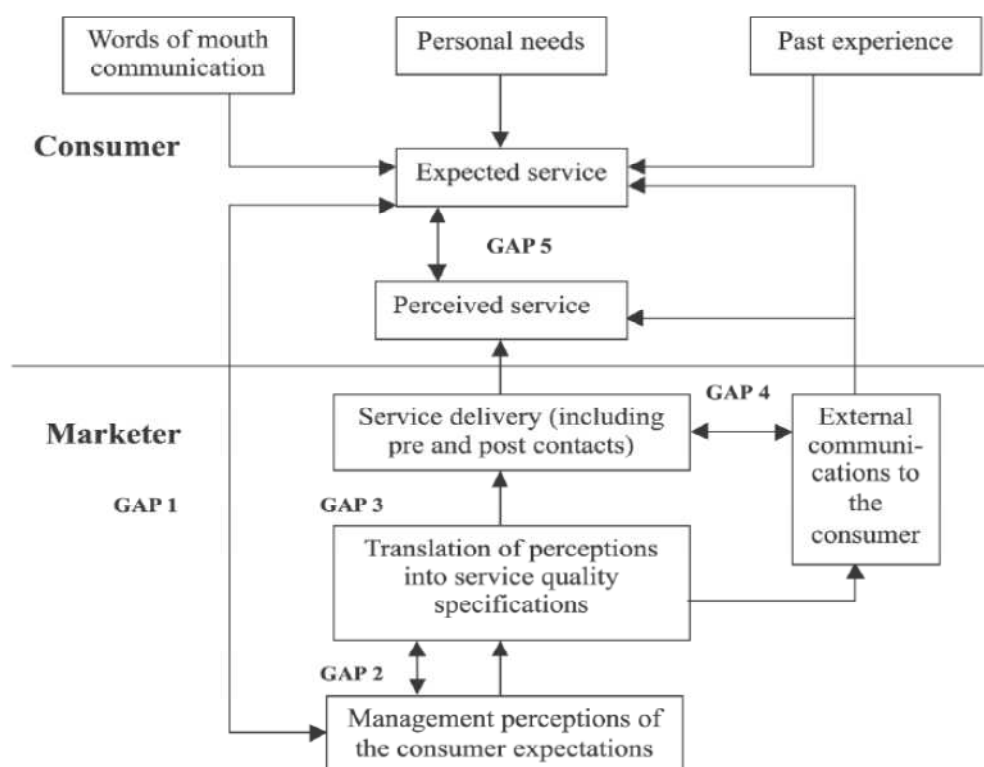
1. Lack of integrated service marketing communications.
2. Overpromising
3. Inadequate horizontal communications.

Gap 5: Difference between consumer's expectation and perceived service. This gap depends on size and direction of the four gaps associated with the delivery of service quality on the marketer's side

KEY FACTORS LEADING TO GAP 5:

1. Lack of market research
2. Lack of understanding the requirements of customer

FIG. 2



Source: Parasuraman *et al.* (1985)

CONCLUSION

In this paper, service quality, dimensions of service quality and gaps model of service quality were studied and reviewed. Assessing service quality and better understanding of devising the marketing strategies would help the organization to formulate customer centric services. In today's era of liberalization and globalization the focus of organizations is shifting from profit maximization to customer satisfaction. The pressures of competition are forcing organizations to deliver quality and organizations are spending millions of dollars to improve their service quality and emphasizing on the customer retention. Moreover organizations are adopting these findings of the extensive market research as their strategies.

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