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MARKET ORIENTATION 'HICCUPS' BY SERVICE QUALITY GAPS

LUCYANN MUTHONI KARANI
LECTURER
EGERTON UNIVERSITY
EGERTON

DANIEL AUKA
PROFESSOR
EGERTON UNIVERSITY
EGERTON

ABSTRACT

Previous studies have shown that several firms assessed their market orientation levels using employees and management reports. An emerging perspective on market orientation suggests that strategic insights may be gained when firms take into account their customers' view on the organization's level of market orientation. Recent research offers evidence on the applicability of a customer-defined market orientation construct, where the customers define the value they derive from products and services of a market oriented firms. When the customers give feedback on their perceived value that they derive from a firm's level of market orientation Vis - a -Vis their expectations then a comparison can happen between what the firm offered as of value to what the customer's reports to be their perceived value. There could be existence of gap(s) on expectation versus perceived service quality. This study extends this line of research by exploring the 'hiccups' in market orientation which may be brought by service quality gaps. The hiccups can only be determined when customers give feedback through customer -defined market orientation construct. This paper accentuates the subject by reviewing empirical viewpoints as to consumer- defined market orientation and service quality gaps.

KEYWORDS
'hiccups', market orientation, serviqual, service quality gaps.

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INTRODUCTION

A market orientation is a business culture in which all employees are committed to the continuous creation of superior value for customers. There is considerable agreement that, in general, a market orientation is a culture in which all employees are committed to the continuous creation of superior value for customers (Narver and Slater, 1990; Deshpande, Farley and Webster, 1993; Day, 1994). A market orientation contains three major behavioral components: Customer orientation— the continuous understanding of the needs of both the current and potential target customers and the use of that knowledge for creating customer value; Competitor orientation—the continuous understanding of the capabilities and strategies of the principal current and potential alternative satisfiers of the target customers and the use of such knowledge in creating superior customer value; and Inter functional coordination—the coordination of all functions in the business in utilizing customer and other market information to create superior value for customers (Narver and Slater, 1990).

Deshpande and Farley (1997) define market orientation as "The set of cross functional processes and activities directed at creating and satisfying customers through continuous needs-assessment. In line with this reasoning, researchers have pursued extensively an understanding of market orientation and various areas in a business.

Firstly, Studies have been conducted to find the link between market orientation and performance, investigating a direct causal link (Narver and Slater 1990; Ruekert 1992), a moderated relationship (Day and Wensley 1988; Diamantopoulos and Hart 1993; Greenley 1995; Jaworski and Kohli 1993; Slater and Narver 1994a), and even the roles of market orientation's antecedents (Jaworski and Kohli 1993). The strong argument is that there is a relationship between market orientation and company performance (Narver and Slater (1990), Ruekert (1992), Despande et al. 1993, Pelham and Wilson, 1996, Deng and Dart, 1994, Pelham and Wilson, 1996).

Secondly, studies have been done on developing a valid measure of market orientation (Kohli, Jaworski and Kumar, 1993). At present all most all the companies, irrespective of developed or developing countries, consider market orientation as a pivotal point in their decision making process. Literature on this concept suggests that environmental factors such as technology turbulence, competition, market turbulence, create the need of market orientation (Malhotra, 2001). Therefore, companies now adopt market orientation either as a culture or philosophy or behavior (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990, Narver and Slater, 1990).

Thirdly, studies have been done linking market orientation to customer satisfaction (Gronroos, 1992). The literature suggests a linkage among market orientation, customer satisfaction and service quality through the concept of value (Webb et al.,2000). Customers will be satisfied when get value from a firm. The value should therefore be in line with satisfied needs and wants. Firms which are market oriented strive to meet their customers' needs and wants.

Lastly, studies have exclusively considered market orientation as an employee or manager –perceived phenomenon. As a result, subsequent studies pertaining to a firm's market orientation generally have been based on employee self-reports. The customer-defined position argues that the adoption of the employee/manager-defined view of market orientation is one-sided and myopic as it ignores the vital role of customers in terms of value recognition (Webb, Webster, and Krepapa. 2000). It should be argued that the consumers should be the key people to assess the market orientation aspect in a business. This is essentially important for it is the very consumers who consume the products and services of an organization.

This argument extends from Desphandé et al. (1993) assertion that the evaluation of a firm's extent of customer orientation (market orientation) should also come from customers, and not just the managers of the firm itself. Drawing from the argument, an emerging perspective from researchers such as Steinman et al., (2000) and Webb et al. (2000) suggests that beneficial strategic insights may also be gained when firms take into account their customers' view on the organization's level of market orientation.

These authors argue that an organization can be described as market-oriented only when the firm's total product offerings are both recognized and described by customers in value terms. In other words, when the customers perceive the firm is market-oriented and offers considerable value to them, only then can the organization be described as market-oriented. However, gaps may exist on the value of the service to be offered by a market oriented firm to what customers assess to be of value to them, which may be brought by service quality gaps such as not knowing what consumers expect (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014). This study therefore reviews the literature to find out whether the service quality gaps could bring hiccups on market orientation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the effect on customer-defined market orientation by service quality gaps.
2. To establish the effect on employees market orientation feedback by service quality gaps.
3. To determine the relationship between market orientation and service quality gaps.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study us based upon the desk top research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, market orientation (MO) is perceived as a philosophy that permeates the organization (Hooley et al., 1990). There are two main perspectives of market orientation; the behavioural perspective by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and the cultural perspective by Narver and Slater (1990). The central focus of these two perspectives is the organization's customers. Since market orientation involves the operationalization and implementation of marketing concepts (McCarthy and Perreault, 1990), the fundamental premise of satisfying the needs and wants of a firm's customers should be inherent in the conceptualization of market orientation. Therefore, the needs for companies to understand their customers (Shapiro, 1988), meet their needs now (Ruekert, 1992) and in the future (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), create value for them (Narver and Slater, 1990) are vital.

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) describe market orientation as the "organization wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs". They argue that MO comprises of three major elements; the generation of market intelligence; intelligence dissemination and responsiveness to market intelligence. Generation of market intelligence relies on formal and informal mechanisms such as customer surveys, meetings and discussions with customers and trade partners, analysis of sales reports, and formal market research. A service quality gap may happen when collecting market intelligence. The needs and wants of the customers may not be well captured or the needs may change over time leading to false knowledge about the customers.

Intelligence dissemination is a part of the organization's ability to adapt to market needs and relates to the effectiveness of communication among the functional areas. It is significant as it provides a shared basis for concerted actions by the different departments (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) also insist that all departments need to be responsive by selecting the appropriate target markets, designing, producing, promoting and distributing products that meet current and anticipated needs.

Cultural perspective views market orientation as the organisational culture that creates the required behaviours for the creation of superior value for customers (Narver and Slater, 1990). Narver and Slater (1990) inferred that market orientation consists of three behavioural elements; customer orientation, competitor orientation and inter-functional coordination. Customer orientation requires a sufficient understanding of the customer to create products or services of superior value which is accomplished by increasing benefits to the customers while decreasing the costs. Hence, firms need to acquire information about the customers and comprehend the economic and political constraints.

The competitor orientation relates to the organization understanding on the strengths and weaknesses of its current and future competitors, as well as their long-term capabilities and strategies. Inter-functional coordination refers to the coordinated utilization of the company's resources in creating superior value for its customers. The absence of inter-functional coordination will effect on the cooperation between departments, thus they must be sensitive to the needs of all the other departments within the organization.

Quality of service has been studied in the area of management for years because the market is more competitive and marketing management has transferred its focus from internal performance such as production to external interests such as satisfaction and customers' perception of service quality (Gronroos, 1992). The literature suggests a linkage among market orientation, customer satisfaction and service quality through the concept of value. When customer's access and report on the value they receive it is thus referred to customer- defined market orientation. At times the customers report little value obtained (dissatisfaction) from a product or service. Hence this paper explores 'hiccups' in market orientation which may come from service quality gaps by not knowing what the customers want (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014).

There are three equally important prerequisites for the creation of superior customer value. The first two prerequisites basically focus on the customer and competitor orientations. The third prerequisite involves coordinating across the firm's departmental boundaries those activities necessary to deliver superior value (Narver & Slater, 1990). Woodruff et al. (1993) explicate the sentiments of other researchers in stating that by being responsive to customer's needs, customer value delivery strategies are instrumental in building strong customer satisfaction. Webb et al. (2000) exploratory study found that market orientation has a positive relationship with service quality and satisfaction.

In customers' interactions with a service firm, they are positioned in the relationship such that they are able to form opinions about the service quality received and consequently construct cognitive evaluations about the organization's level of delivered service (Webb, 2000). The greater the level of customer-defined market orientation, the greater the level of perceived service quality and the lower the level of customer-defined market orientation, the lower the level of perceived service quality. The lower levels of perceived service quality by the customer may have been created by the service quality gaps.

Service firms take various processes to make sure that they provide adequate service to their customers in response to changing customer needs (Chang and Chen, 1998). As a result, service firms more oriented to their markets are likely to make changes to meet or exceed customer expectations. A market orientation firm may produce higher profits through superior quality, in terms of, leads to higher productivity and stronger customer loyalty (Zeithaml et al., 1990). The adoption of a market orientation narrows perceptual gaps, but not always, between customers and the management and yields better business performance because customers are better served in a cost-effective manner (Voon, 2006). Premium service quality is expected to be an end result of a market-oriented service firms.

Having considered the preceding arguments, it is argued that market orientation is a significant positive factor that contributes to enhance service quality although there are service quality gaps that do exist which would impact on customer. Service quality is an overall evaluation of an entity's excellence or superiority, and that this judgment or evaluation is similar to attitude and related to, but not equivalent to satisfaction (Parasuraman et al. 1988).

Over the past decade, service quality has been defined as the difference between customer expectations of service to be received and perceptions of the service actually received (Grönroos 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991). A market oriented firm conducts market intelligence so as determine customer needs and expectations in a service. Parasuraman et al. (1985) made progress in modeling service quality, developed the gap model and 10 dimensions of service quality. These dimensions were subsequently tested using their SERVQUAL scale and were refined to five (Parasuraman et al., 1991).

SERVQAUL was used to measure service quality in service firms, even though, later literature found that it might not be applicable to all service firms. SERVQAUL limited use in certain context because the expected five dimensions could not be replicated and the measures were inadequate for some service (Lapierre, 1996). (1993). Marketing researchers have asserted that quality is a multidimensional construct for both product and services (Garvin, 1984; Parasuraman et al. 1988). SERVQUAL scale provides an approximate measure of quality for a general class of services (Parasuraman et al., 1988, Zeithaml et al., 1990), which is built on five components: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1991).

THE GAP MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY

The gap model is a marketing method to analyse perception in relation to expectations. This model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) proposes five gap types that appear when trying to measure service quality (Parasuraman, et al., 1985). They further postulated a GAP model and designed the SERVQUAL scale mentioned above. The five service gaps identified are understanding, service standard, service performance, communication and service quality and referred as Gap1, Gap2, Gap3, Gap4 and Gap5 respectively. The way the service is delivered is identified by Gap 1 to 4 and Gap 5 depends on size and direction of other four gaps.

This GAP model and SERVQUAL model within GAPs framework give definition of service quality as the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' perceptions and expectations, and had "perceived service quality" as the gap between customers' perceptions and expectations, as a measurement of service quality. The smaller the gap the better the service quality provided and the greater the gap the greater the customer satisfaction. Thus, this paper explores customer- defined market orientation in explaining the service quality gaps of due to unmet customer expectations. Lewis & Booms (1983) have defined service quality within the scope of service industry as meeting customers' needs and wants and the extent the service meets the customers' expectations.

The five gaps can further be visualized as:

Gap 1: Difference between consumers' expectations regarding service provision and the organization's management perceptions of those expectations, i.e. not knowing what consumers expect (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014).

Gap 2: Difference between the perception of managers regarding consumers' expectations and the service quality specifications, i.e. improper internal organization quality standards (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014).
Gap 3: The discrepancy between service quality specifications (internal standards regarding service quality) and delivered service quality, i.e. the service performance gap (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014).
Gap 4: The discrepancy between service delivery process quality and how the organization communicates to its consumers about service delivery, i.e. did promises match delivery? (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014).
Gap 5: The difference between the service the consumers are expecting to receive and their perception of the service they have actually gotten (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014).
In the marketing literature studies the understanding of customer satisfaction is fulfillment of needs and wants of the customers. Moreover, the literature survey points out the provision of service quality leads to customer satisfaction.
The research work of Parasuraman et al, Gronoos and Johnson have defined service quality in terms of customer satisfaction that is degree of fit between customers' expectation and perception of service. Based on their research they postulated that the ratio of perceived performance to customer expectations was a key to maintaining satisfied customers. A previous study by Webb et al. (2000) shows that market orientation leads to service quality which leads to customer satisfaction. Thus this paper investigates the service quality gaps that may occur during market orientation efforts by a firm.
Conducting a market research so as to understand needs and desires of the consumers is paramount in a market orientated firm. However, the implementation of the findings in the firm's standards and policies so as to offer quality services basing on five components of service quality SERVQUAL model: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1991), that would satisfy customers may be problematic. The problems may come from any service quality gaps mentioned above. Thus, a firm may have a market oriented culture but fails to offer perceived quality in their services because of the service quality gaps existence when a firm have not known what the customers want (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014). This papers pays more attention to Gap 1. Gap 1 is the knowledge gap, where there is a difference between consumers' expectations regarding service provision and the organization's management perceptions of those expectations, i.e. not knowing what consumers expect (Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, 2014). This therefore means that market orientation may be affected by service quality gaps.

CONCLUSION
Market orientation is a culture in which all employees are committed to the continuous creation of superior value for customers. Market orientation in a firm is assessed not only by the employees and management but also by the customers. When customers give their feedback on the value they receive from the firm it is known as customer- defined market orientation. To offer value a firm need to have market intelligence on customers' needs and wants. However, these needs keep changing and sometimes the firms may not articulate consumers changing needs. Thus, a firm may not have full knowledge of the customers' needs and therefore a firm may miss to offer value to the consumers as far as consumer expectations are concerned. The literature show studies have been done on the relationship between market orientation and customer satisfaction (e.g Gronroos, 1992). Another study by Webb et al. (2000), shows market orientation relationship with service quality and customer satisfaction. Seth, et al., 2005; Gârdan & Gârdan, (2014) indicate Gap 1 of service quality exist due to lack of knowledge about consumers' needs and wants. It can therefore be concluded that lack of knowledge on consumer needs and wants (Gap 1 of service quality gaps) will affect the market orientation value creation by the firm. In that case therefore service quality gaps act as 'hiccups' to market orientation.

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