

How Relationships Between Service Quality and Satisfaction Are Formed Among Participants From Nearby Cultures



Management

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ABSTRACT

To the best of our knowledge, studies thus far have not investigated the relationship between service quality and satisfaction among customers of the same level of experience with similar cultural traits. The present study aims to examine the relationships between three service quality dimensions and satisfaction among countries with shared exposure to Mediterranean culture. Specifically, the study focuses on the field of public sport and fitness centers, considering the above relationships in a sample of participants with the same level of experience. The results indicate that for the experienced participants, the above relationships differ in two of the three dimensions (interaction and outcome quality) and for the novice participants in one (outcome quality). This study confirms previous findings and contributes additional evidence which suggests that in services there is a need for segmentation, as the existence of global markets as we know them is not certain and future researchers should always take into consideration local preferences.

1. Introduction

Over several decades, segmentation has become a core process in the practice of marketing. Segmentation is defined as “the process of partitioning markets into groups of potential customers with similar needs and/or characteristics who are likely to exhibit similar purchase behavior” (Weinstein, 1994, p. 2). Researchers suggest that experience should be used as a segmentation variable for customers (Dagger & Sweeney, 2007; Mittal, Katrichis & Kumar, 2001) and that cultural characteristics influence their service quality perceptions (Brady & Robertson, 2001; Donthu & Yoo, 1998). Several years ago, Kale and Sudharshan (1987) mentioned that segmentation should take into consideration both differences within countries and similarities across countries. This means that country and culture are not always synonymous.

Although Greek and Spanish cultures have different origins, they have certain similarities, which can be primarily attributed to their shared Mediterranean location. They also share commonalities in family and social structures, which also affect business styles. There are many similarities in the manner Greek and Spanish entities conduct business, a fact which has been observed by several business organizations. Nowadays, these two countries are even facing the same economic crisis due to the political strategies they have been following.

In the international marketing literature, it is noted that the function of global markets differs with regard to products and services. In the context of services marketing, the notion of service quality plays a central role in understanding customer satisfaction and retention. Previous studies have offered little insight into the effect of service quality dimensions on customers’ satisfaction among different countries. Researchers argue that the effect of service quality dimensions on satisfaction vary across different cultural groups (Mattila, 1999; Winsted, 1997). Also, Dagger and Sweeney (2007, p. 22) indicated that “the contribution of attributes to overall service quality differs across novice and longer-term customer cohorts, as does the interrelationship of service quality, satisfaction and behavioral intentions”. Separating clients into groups of experienced and novice participants enables researchers to study the relationships between different concepts more deeply. But what if the effect of service quality dimensions on satisfaction also varies among groups with similar cultural traits and the same level of experience regarding a service? In this study, which focuses on the field of public sport and fitness centers, we examine the relationships between three service quality dimensions and satisfaction, among countries with shared exposure to Mediterranean culture, in a sample of participants with the same level of experience.

2. Relationships between Service Quality Dimensions and Satisfaction

Several studies to date have suggested that service quality and customer satisfaction are indissociable, as they are the two key drivers through which customers’ loyalty can be interpreted (Clemes, Brush & Collins, 2011; Ferrard, Robinson, Valette-Florence, 2010). Martinez and Martinez (2010) argue that Brady and Cronin’s model (which was based on Grönroos’ theoretical model) was superior to previous models with regard to the measurement of perceived service quality; researchers should, nonetheless, develop industry-specific service quality models, as there are no universal dimensions/factors/attributes of service quality. Although ‘physical environment quality’, ‘interaction quality’ and ‘outcome quality’ are the key factors of quality that are most likely to be considered in the majority of research contexts, until now, the way these dimensions are evolving in different circumstances has not been clarified. Mittal & Katrichis (2000) suggest that the effect of service quality characteristics on other concepts such as satisfaction and loyalty are likely to change, as the relationship with the customer-company matures. Moreover, Furrer, Shaw-Ching Liu & Sudharshan (2000, p. 356) observed that “if the relative importance of the service quality dimensions to customers is likely to vary depending on their culture resource allocation, different dimensions of service quality should be contingent on the importance attached to them by customers”.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Altogether 1041 participants of two public sports and fitness centers in Europe participated in the study (396 from Spain and 645 from Greece). Participants were practitioner’s only programs in the halls, weight-lifting and ergometric machines. Respondents completed their questionnaires before the start of their program and without training intensity. Customers were divided into two distinct groups based on their experiences with the municipal sport organization. Those who had been attending the center for less than six months were characterized as novice (N=385) and for more than three years as experienced (N=656). For the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the Greek and Spanish groups the descriptive analysis of frequencies was used (Table 1).

	Greece	Spain
Gender		
Male	23.7%	36.4%
Female	76.3%	63.6%
Age (mean)	37.9 years	52 years

Family			
Married	62.1%		43.6%
Single	32.3%		29.9%
Did not specify	5.6%		25%
Education			
Secondary	42.8%		56%
Higher	57.2%		44%
Net monthly income			
< 650 euro	51.9%		29.8%
651-1200 euro	37%		19%
>1201 euro	11.1%		51.2%
Occupation			
Student	8.7%		9.7%
Employee of public sector	20.3%		8.5%
Employee of private sector	27.5%		12.2%
Own business	6%		3.4%
Unemployed	25.1%		12.6%
Did not specify	12.5%		50.4%

Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of the Sample

3.2. Measures

Service quality:

the questionnaire used to track customers' perceptions of service quality adopted from Alexandris, Zahariadis, Tsorbatzoudis & Grouios (2004) having three dimensions consisted of four items each : physical environment quality (i.e. "The facilities are clean"), interaction quality (i.e. "Employees help members feel comfortable"), and outcome quality (i.e. "programs helped members to improve their health").

Satisfaction:

was measured using 3 items based on Cronin, Brady and Hult (2000) and Oliver (1997) (i.e. "I am satisfied with my decision to become a member of this health and fitness centre").

A 9-point Likert - type scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 9 (very strongly agree), was used for each concept.

4. Results

In the present investigation, in order to study the effect of three dimensions of service quality on overall satisfaction among Greek and Spanish novice and experienced participants, regression analysis was used. The results of regression analysis showed that the three dimensions of service quality significantly predict overall satisfaction in both groups of the two countries (Table 2 & 3).

Table 2. Regression analysis for predicting satisfaction among Greek and Spanish novice participants

Variables	Beta	T	P	R ²
Greek				
PEQ	.276	5.78	.000*	.565
INT	.198	3.49	.001**	
OUT	.489	8.97	.000*	
Spanish				
PEQ	.366	5.73	.000*	.501
INT	.244	3.32	.001**	
OUT	.265	3.71	.000*	

*p<.001, **p<.005

Table 3. Regression analysis for predicting satisfaction among Greek and Spanish experienced participants

Variables	Beta	T	P	R ²
Greek				
PEQ	.387	10.9	.000*	.578
INT	.182	4.87	.000*	
OUT	.404	11.0	.000*	
Spanish				
PEQ	.335	5.77	.000*	.404
INT	.360	5.42	.000*	
OUT	.069	1.11	.000*	

*p<.001

In order to examine whether there were statistically significant differences in the values of these regression coefficients between the two countries, a categorical variable (dummy variable) was used in the regression model. The bivalent categorical variable named "country", took values 0 to 1 for Greek and Spanish participants respectively. Similar statistical analysis applied by Mittal et al., (2001) in the study of the effect of the characteristics of performance in overall satisfaction on credit card holders. The new independent variables created, were used as predictors of satisfaction in the regression equation.

Table 4. Comparing regression coefficients between Greek and Spanish cultures

Novice	Greek	Spanish	Sig.
PEQ→SAT	.276	.366	ns
INT→SAT	.198	.244	ns
OUT→SAT	.489	.265	.012**
Experienced	Greek	Spanish	Sig.
PEQ→SAT	.387	.335	ns
INT→SAT	.182	.360	.012**
OUT→SAT	.404	.069	.000*

*p<.001, **p<.05

5. Discussion and Future Research

The findings of the study indicated that the effect of some service quality dimensions on overall satisfaction vary among participants with similar level of experience from countries with similar cultural traits. More specifically, the effect of the outcome dimension on overall satisfaction differs between Greek and Spanish participants with the same level of experience. It seems that Greek novice and experienced participants view the outcome dimension as more important than Spanish participants do. Also, differences between the two cultures were found in the interaction dimension, but only in the groups of experienced participants: the Spanish give more weight to the effect of interaction quality on satisfaction. Conversely, for the physical environment quality, no statistically significant differences were found between the two cultures for either of the examined groups.

Future researchers could study the relationship between service quality dimensions and other concepts such as value, loyalty, and commitment, using samples from different fields and from various other countries. In the service sector, future research could be directed towards testing the hypothesis that adaptation is more appropriate than globalization, in terms of different countries, cultures and experiences.

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