Chapter 18
The Conceptualization of the E–Service Quality:
A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

Several research studies have focused on the conceptualization, measurement, and management of service quality and their effects in electronic environments. Most of them are based on a classic paradigm, which consists in relating the quality of e-service to customer satisfaction and loyalty. The prescribing intent of the e-service as a plausible consequence of the quality of the e-service has not received enough interest from the researchers. Along these lines, this chapter examined the direct effect of the quality of the e-service on the prescribing intention of the e-service by the consumer as well as the indirect effect through a mediating variable, which is the perceived online value of the consumer.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of online sales has created strong competition in the online market space, and hence the need for a change in the direction of online commerce, with a greater focus on other means of marketing. differentiation, rather than low prices (Kim and Kim 2010). Benaroch and Appari (2011) have pointed out that the emergence of the electronic service paradigm goes beyond simple service automation to include differentiation by the quality of the services offered ". Santouridis et al. (2012) argued that the major challenge that many companies face concerns the correct management of the processes associated with customer service.

The quality of service is well recognized in the literature as an important factor that allows companies to have various strategic advantages, such as the increased ability to attract and retain customers. Benaroch and Appari (2011) have pointed out that the provision of quality service creates a significant competitive advantage, which helps ensure effective differentiation and long-term profitability gains. The need for studies to better understand the quality of service in a digital context is recognized by several

authors (Blut et al, 2015, Chen et al. 2013; Carlson and O'Cass, 2011). To this end, researchers should pay more attention to conceptualizing the quality of e-service and analyzing its consequences.

In this chapter, we will define the concept of the quality of an electronic service, noting its specificities and its differences from the quality of a traditional service. We will endeavor to highlight the dimensions and the underlying attributes of this concept, by analyzing the theoretical basis relating to the conceptualization of the quality of e-service.

THE QUALITY OF THE E-SERVICE

With the development of the Internet and technology, the website takes the place of physical business units. The perceived usefulness of the site and of the new electronic environment constitutes an important part of the company's image. The increase in the number of electronic services can also affect the interaction and purchasing behavior of businesses and consumers (Yang, 2001; Santos, 2003). At the same time, consumers have become more sensitive to the quality of service thanks to the competitive and comparable system of electronic commerce. As a result, issues relating to e-commerce, e-service, e-service quality and measurement of that quality have started to arouse the interest of marketers.

Thus, we will propose to define the concept of electronic service or e-service, highlighting its differences from the traditional service. We will then define the quality of e-service, by noting its points of difference relative to the traditional quality of service.

From Traditional Service to Electronic Service

According to Hoffman and Bateson (1997), "the term service refers to acts, efforts, processes or performances".

Several authors have identified salient intrinsic characteristics of services, namely, intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability.

- Services are intangible, as they are seen as an act on the part of the provider and an experience for the recipient (Zeithaml et al, 1988).
- Services are heterogeneous since they are based on an impersonal relationship and a subjective and situational assessment (Sabadie and Vernette, 2003).
- Services are characterized by inseparability, in that their production, distribution and consumption processes are simultaneous (Eiglier and Langeard, 1987).

Zeithaml et al (2013) argue that: "although traditionally retail customer service has been associated with the direct interaction between service personnel and customers, developments in information technology have given rise to this called electronic services or e-service".

Rowley (2006) defined electronic service as "acts, efforts or performances whose delivery is mediated by information technologies, including the Web, information kiosks and mobile devices". The service and interaction that occurs online is known as e-service (Ho and Lin, 2010). Information flows and good experiences between businesses and consumers are delivered through e-commerce (Santos, 2003).

Websites are considered as service environments in which customers form perceptions of online service experiences through their cognitive and affective responses to web interface signals.

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