



Weaknesses of servqual which resources from cognitive differences

Ahmet Hakan, Özkan*

ABSTRACT

The quality standards of service industry are strictly customer-centric. Their expectations shape the service designs and their satisfaction shapes the competition. SERVQUAL measures the service quality and it is one of the most important factors that shapes the service industry. SERVQUAL focuses on the perceptions of the customers, and if the perceptions of the customers are rational, it provides reliable results. But the cognitive differences may cause irrationality or perceptual differences, because of personality disorders or cultural differences. Thus, some common cognitive differences are the weaknesses of SERVQUAL. These weaknesses are elaborated with this study.

Keywords: Cultural differences; customer perceptions; personality disorders; SERVQUAL; service quality.

Available Online: 30-11-2016.

This is an open access article under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, 2016.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The service industry is growing with the changing lifestyles. The service industry cannot keep any stock as the output is perishable. This perishability does not allow the customers or the company owners to evaluate the output once again. Only the consumers can evaluate the service. That is why the consumers decide which service is good and which service is bad.

The service industry focuses on service quality to provide continuous improvement. Service quality is different than product quality, because it is not possible to make any test on the outputs. Homogeneity, is also the target of service sector, but it is not possible to talk about homogeneity of the services all the time. Even if two services are exactly the same, they may be perceived different by the customers. Therefore the perceptions of the customers plays an important role in service quality.

The satisfaction determines the quality of the service. It is strictly related with the expectations (Parasuraman et al, 1994). If the expectations of the customer is met, then he will be satisfied. If the

* Istanbul Aydın University, Anadolu BİL Vocational School, Business Management in English, E-mail: ahmetozkan@aydin.edu.tr

expectations of the customer is greater than the performance, then the service will be accepted to be less satisfactory and quality will be perceived to be less (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990).

There are several factors which affect the perception of service quality. On the other hand, perception and evaluation appears during the comparison of the expectations to the result. If the result is better than the expectations, then the perception of quality will be high. Cognition may shape the expectations, but matching expectations to satisfaction is not related to cognition. Only the success of a service can shape this. In other words, successful services provide more satisfaction by building a bridge between expectation and perception.

Service quality measurements, which are vital to service sector companies, takes the expectation and satisfaction relationship as a metric. SERVQUAL, which is a common service quality evaluation technique, has such a design. It focuses on the perceptions of the customers. The quality perceptions of the customers are measured by using the mentioned metric. However some certain cognitive differences may cause differences on the perception of service quality and decrease the performance of service quality measurements. This study will elucidate such cognitive differences.

2.0 COGNITION

Cognition is a mental process which includes the understanding of life and its events. Even though life is the same for everyone, each individual perceives and summarizes life differently due to the cognitive differences. There are several factors that affect the formation of cognitive structures.

Cognition has the most significant impact on personal morals. Bandura (1999) claims that individuals are guided by their own ethical standards. That is why it is possible to see some people act the same way due to their morals (Bandura et al, 1996), and some people are reprimanded (Bandura, et al, 1975). There are some unwritten rules which are known by a community (Bandura et al, 2001), these rules shape the cognitions of the people.

Individuals cannot support their ethical reasoning ability without ethical rules and these rules mean “anticipatory sanctions” for a person (Ashforth, 2002). Opatow (1990) claimed that ethical rules determine the people who are not socially accepted. He called this situation a kind of “exclusion”. Exclusion is totally related with the people and the groups. There is no universal “right” or “wrong”. A person, who is socially accepted in his country, can be excluded in another country.

Environment affects the cognition (Barsalou, 2003), that is why people who live in the same environment can understand each other more easily. It is inevitable to avoid the impacts of the social environment, because the social environment will have connection and repeat the common ideas (Glenberg, 1997), by the way these ideas will be reaching each individual. Social interaction has many other different ways to shape the cognitive structures of the members of that society (Prinz 1997). Besides the language of a nation, each region has its own language due to social interaction (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). Because the needs of the societies vary and the main needs of a society will be the center of their cognitive structure (Smith & Semin 2004; Yeh & Barsalou 2006).

3.0 SERVICE QUALITY

Service and manufacturing operations have obvious differences, but the most important difference depends on the quality dimensions. The outputs of a manufacturing operations may have certain criterias for internal control (Peeler, 1996). On the other hand service operations have relative criterias and internal control is not always possible, mostly external control is necessary (Heskett and Sasser, 2010). The service operations are not only related with the performance of the employees, it is also related with the expectations of the customers. Therefore the cognitive structures of the customers play a great role in the quality of service (Valarie et al, 1996). The ability of the company to understand the cognitions and emotions of a customer will affect the service quality (Ruyter, 1997).

The features of the products might be important at service industry, but how they are used for service is more important. Because after e-marketing, it is easier to reach any product. Therefore the product can be bought from anywhere. But the service is unique. Anyway, the quality of the products which are used for the service can increase or decrease the quality of the service.

The attitude of the employees is very important for the service quality. It is accepted just like attitudes do not reflect the behaviour, on the other hand it is partially true. Depending on the connection between the people, even the attitudes which are hidden perfectly can be realised by the other person. That is why the employees need intrinsic motivation to be able to increase the service quality (Kreps, 1997). Customers can create emotional ties with the people who loves what he is doing. These emotional ties will bring trust. If the employee can create trust and the customer feels that he is reliable, then even low quality of the products which are used for that service may be neglected by the customer.

No service of company is exactly the same with the service of another company as the employees are not the same. At the service sector, the value can be created by the employees (Gronroos, 2000). Even a perfect business design with high quality products cannot survive without the contribution of the employees.

The customers have expectations. They are satisfied if their expectations are met with that service. These expectations are shaped in time. If a service company can provide a satisfying service for a while, the tolerance level of that customer will increase. This situation is called loyalty (Caruana, 2002). To increase the life of the company, customer loyalty is vital. To provide the customer loyalty, companies focus on evaluating their service quality performance. Service quality measurement techniques are improved with this purpose. Main measurement technique is called SERVQUAL.

4.0 SERVQUAL

Service quality measurement is difficult, because it is perishable (Bateson, 1995). The outputs cannot be stored, exhibited or perfectly imitated. They can only be perceived by the customers. Thus the service quality measurement depends on the customer perceptions.

Parasuraman et al. (1988) proposed a new model to measure service quality which is called SERVQUAL. It was a 22-item scale relating expectations with perceptions. Only five dimensions are used for this service quality test. These dimensions are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility. SERVQUAL is used to evaluate the service quality of the hospitals (Babakus and Mangold, 1989). CPA firms are also evaluated by using this test (Bojanic, 1991). Dentist centers, tire stores (Carman, 1990), fast food (Spreng and Singh, 1993) and discount stores (Finn and Lamb, 1991) are some other sectors where SERVQUAL is used for measurement.

Parasuraman et al. (1994) tried to improve SERVQUAL. The expectations are taken as comparison standards. It is seen that the desired service and adequate service is used as metrics by the customers. Zeithaml et al. (1996) mentioned that there are ten dimensions of service quality and displayed the relationships between them. Avkiran (1994) attempted to create a new model with four dimensions such as contact, reliability, communication, and access to services. This model was specific for the service quality measurement in the banks. Othman & Own (2001) tried to make measurements by using another system, which was even more specific, designed for Islamic Banks. Anyway, the attempts to improve SERVQUAL did not come up with such a result which can create a new system.

5.0 COGNITIVE DIFFERENCES

SERVQUAL is designed to minimize the cognitive differences. It mostly focuses on how expectations shape satisfaction. On the other hand some of the personality disorders are reasons of irrationality between expectations and perceptions.

5.1 IRRATIONALITY AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS

First disorder, which is a reason of irrationality, is the borderline personality disorder. Provoking, is a common behaviour of people with borderline personality disorder (Gunderson, 2007). Provoking is a defense mechanism (Bland et al, 2004). This behaviour has a negative impact on the social relationships of the people with this disorder. The reason of provoking is various and it usually deteriorates the business life of a person. The time of provoking is unpredictable and it can affect the business life of a person with borderline disorder by causing adverse circumstances.

The fear, which is a common characteristic of people with borderline personality disorder, is the fear of losing. This feeling is also known as “the fear of commitment”. At first sight, this fear seems to be related with the relationships. But it is related with anything that the person with borderline personality disorder. For example, if such a person has strong emotional ties with his job, he may tend to lose his job.

The fears stimulate the irrational behaviors. For example, a person with borderline personality disorder, who is afraid of being dismissed from his school, may be dismissed by provoking the other students, even the teachers. Such a person can do many other things to be dismissed. If this person has too much fear, more than he can stand, his stress might be destructive and take control. Being dismissed will be getting rid of the feeling which causes stress. To get relief, the person will try to be dismissed unconsciously.

People with borderline personality disorder may have complicated love affairs, due to their fear of losing. A healthy relationship will be very difficult for him because of the fear of losing his partner. This feeling will cause stress. He may try to hurt his partner. These kind of behaviors are mostly thought as psychopathic behaviors, but they are not. Because the person with borderline personality disorder does not enjoy such situations and regret is the dominant feeling which comes after every provoking behaviour. Sometimes regret is very intense and that is an evidence of the non-existence of psychopathic behaviors. But the instinct of provoking is irresistible and strong. That is why it is also possible to see the relationships ruining the business life of these people. For example, it is irrational to argue with his wife before a very important meeting, but a person with borderline personality disorder has such a strong instinct to do that and the argument is inevitable.

People with borderline personality disorder have proness to irrationality. Self-harm and suicidal thinking can also be accepted as some other forms of irrationality. When these tendencies appear, the preferences of the people with borderline personality disorder will not be rational and their quality evaluations will be irrational.

Second disorder, which causes irrationality, is known as parental alienation. With various reasons, deliberately or unconsciously, it does not matter, some kind of parents do not appreciate any success of their children (Minzenberg et al, 2006). They rather appreciate the failures of their children. As a result, the children will be conditioned for failure, not for success. This situation will cause irrationality.

Some parents focus what is best for the child obsessively. They give orders and expect their child to obey. It is inevitable to see the child reacting to protect his personality. It does not matter for the child to agree with her parents or not, he just needs to take his decisions to feel that he is an individual. If the parents have rational demands, the rebel child act irrationally. If the parent is not alienated parent, this situation will be temporary. This behavior is observed on adolescents especially.

The alienated parents are rejected by the children. The reason is mostly the other parent as the other factors cannot affect a child to reject the other parent effectively. If the alienating parent is rational and the child is avoiding to imitate him, then the child may have irrational behaviors. The period of this situation strongly depends on how long that parent will be alienated by the child. Sometimes the children realise the manipulation and alienated parents change.

Third disorder, causing irrationality, is the bipolar disorder. Bipolar people have cycles (Wehr and Goodwin, 1979). They have manic and depressive periods (Glenn et al, 2006). They are very strong and energetic during manic periods and they are very weak and tired during depressive periods (Krystal, 1998). They are usually rational during mania and irrational during depression. Because they tend to take too much responsibility during manic periods and they try to get rid of them during depressive periods.

Paranoia is accepted to have relationship with schizophrenia (Philipps et al, 1999). In fact, has more relationship with borderline personality disorder (Lenzenweger et al, 2008) and with parental alienation (Gardner, 1999). The manipulation of the parents is the main reason of paranoia. Some parents defame their children and blame them. A child who sees these kind of behaviours will think that the other people around him are worse, because of the nature. Nature tells that, parents treat a person better than others. On the other hand it is not always true for humans.

Paranoid people may have serious confidence issues. These issues may seem to be related with the other people at first sight, but they are related with the person who has paranoid personality disorder. Because these people tend to doubt the other people. Lack of confidence will also appear and it is one of the main reasons of irrationality.

5.2 CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Culture shapes the behaviors of the people living in the same environment. Every environment has a dominant culture. People, who shares the same culture, learns the shared social values, from each other. That is how the social values and norms of the cultures affect the cognitive structures.

Cognition is the ability to explain the incidents with a cause and effect relationship. The perceptions of the people depends on their causes, sometimes a behavior is accepted to be the cause of an incident for a person, but it cannot be the cause of such an incident for another person from a different culture.

The culture has strong impact on the expectations of the people. A person might expect something good after a behavior and another person might expect something bad after the same behavior. Because some behaviors are signs of friendship in some cultures, but they are signs of disrespect in some others. The social values shape this situation. The main reason of the difference on the social values is culture. Different cultures can have different social values and norms. As a result, people from different cultures may get different messages from the same situation.

Shweder (1991) thinks that some cognitive content is universal, but cultural differences in cognitive processes exist and cultural practices should be evaluated together with cognitive processes. It is true that some certain rules are accepted by almost all the cultures. But details can cause great differences on cognition. It is experienced on the languages. Words, which sound the same might mean a good thing in a language, and it might mean a bad thing in another language. Cultures are just like languages. The behaviours mean something. Some behaviours may have some specific meanings. If a process is not evaluated together with these kind of details, then there may be some gaps on understanding that process. Differences on the cognitive structures can be realized. Anyway it may be difficult for another person from a different culture, to understand the reason of such difference.

Sperber (1985; 1994; 1996) proposed a theory which seeks to elucidate the cultural characteristics in terms of distribution of ideas in a population, on the one hand, and psychological limitations on cognition and communication on the other. It is usual to see that the same ideas are shared by the people who shared the same culture. Cultures may affect the ideology. But people from a different culture may have some constraints on understanding that ideology. Because that person did not experience and embrace most of the other opinions and ideas of that culture. A culture is formed in a long period of time. Their impact on a person also depends on the time and the cognitive structure of that person. If that person had the ideas of another culture, his cognition will be affected from that culture. It can be easier or harder to get the new ideas of the new culture. This situation is related with the structure of his first culture.

Similar cultures will help to embrace the ideas of the new culture, and any conflict between the cultures will make it more difficult to embrace the new culture for sure.

Boyer (1993; 1994) has found religious beliefs at the roots of cognitive structure of a culture. Religion cannot have conflict with the culture. Otherwise the people of that culture would not choose that religion. By the time, it is usual to see the culture more affected by the religion. Religions have their own ideology. Just like the ideologies, they also create different expectations.

Hirschfeld (1988; 1994; 1996) noted that there are evidences about the impact of race and gender on cognition. Discrimination may be a crime, but some of the cultures protect a certain race which may mean discriminating the others. This discrimination can stay inside the legally acceptable limits. But it will still enable the other cultures to react. It is the same for gender. A gender or a race may be forced to feel humiliated with the attitude of the people who shares the same culture.

The most important factor that affects the cognitives structures of the people is the culture. Together with traditions, religious subjects have a significant impact on the cognition of the people. Sometimes an individual may suffer because of his decisions which are against the morals of his culture, because of the reactions of the other people.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Measurement of service quality is based on the perceptions of the customers. SERVQUAL focused on the expectations as a base of the perceptions. But the expectations are affected by the cognitive structures of the people. There are internal factors and external factors that shape the cognition. Personality is the main internal factor and environment is the main external factor that builds the cognitive structure.

Some personality disorders affect cognitive structure adversely by damaging rationality. The result of such personality disorders is the irrational behaviors. Irrational behaviors and irrational manner, which is caused as a result of the certain personality disorders, decreases the success of SERVQUAL.

The cultural motives that play a great role in understanding the environment, vary and these variations may have negative impact on the validity of SERVQUAL. Because this test is totally related with the perceptions and different cognitive structures that produce different perceptions will cause some misunderstandings. That is why cultural differences may also be a constraint on the success of SERVQUAL.

Because of the cultural differences, comparion between different regions by using SERVQUAL can be deceptive. The regions should be chosen carefully by taking the cultural differences into account. The adverse impacts of the culture can be avoided by doing so, but the adverse impacts of internal factors cannot be avoided. The deviation which is caused by the irrationality of the people with personality disorders cannot be removed.

REFERENCES

- Ashforth, B. E. & Kreiner, G. E. (2002). "Normalizing emotion in organizations: Making the extraordinary seem ordinary". *Human Resources Management Review*, 12: 215-235.
- Avkiran, N, K. (1994). "Developing an instrument to measure customer service quality in branch banking". *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, 12 (6), 10-18.
- Babakus, E. and Mangold, W.G. (1992), "Adapting the SERVQUAL scale to hospital services: an empirical investigation", *Health Service Research*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp. 767-86.
- Bandura, A. (1999). "Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities", *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3: 193-209.

- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). "Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(2): 364-374.
- Bandura, A., Caprara, G.V., Barbaranelli, C., Pastorelli, C., & Regalia, C. (2001). "Sociocognitive self regulatory mechanisms governing transgressive behavior". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80(1): 125-135.
- Bandura, A., Underwood, B., & Fromson, M. E. (1975). "Disinhibition of aggression through diffusion of responsibility and dehumanization of victims". *Journal of Research in Personality*, 9: 253-269.
- Barsalou, L.W. (2003). "Situated simulation in the human conceptual system". *Language & Cognitive Processes*, 18, 513-562.
- Bland, A.R., Williams, C.A., Scharer, K. & Manning, S. (2004) "Emotion processing in borderline personality disorders". *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 25, 655-672.
- Bateson (1995). "SERVQUAL: review, critique, research agenda", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 1, pp. 8-32.
- Bojanic, D.C. (1991), "Quality measurement in professional service firms", *Journal of Professional Services Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp.27-36.
- Carman, J.M. (1990), "Consumer perceptions of service quality", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 66, pp. 33-55.
- Caruana, A. (2002). "Service Loyalty: The Effects of Service Quality and the Mediating role of Customer Satisfaction". *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(7), 811-828.
- Finn, D. and Lamb, C. (1991). "An evaluation of the SERVQUAL scale in a retailing setting", *Advances in Consumer Research*, 18, 483-90.
- Gardner, R.A. (1999). "Differentiating between parental alienation syndrome and Bona-fide Abuse Neglect". *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 27 (2), 97-107.
- Glenn, T., Whybrow, P.C., Rasgon, N., Grof, P., Alda, M., Baethge, C. & Bauer, M. (2006). "Approximate entropy of self-reported mood prior to episodes in bipolar disorder". *Bipolar Disord*, 5(1),424-429.
- Glenberg, A.M. (1997). "What memory is for. *Behavioral Brain Science*". 20, 1-55.
- Gronroos, C. (2000). *Service management and marketing*. John Wiley & sons Ltd.
- Gunderson J.G. (2007). "Disturbed relationships as a phenotype for borderline personality disorder". *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 164, 1637-1640.
- Heskett, J. L., & Sasser, W. E. (2010). *The Service Profit Chain: From Satisfaction to Ownership*, *Handbook of Service Science*, Publisher: Springer.
- Kreps, D. (1997), *Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Incentives*, *American Economic Review*, 87(2), 359-364.
- Krystal, A.D. (1998). "Low-dimensional chaos in bipolar disorder?". *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 55(3), 275-276.
- Lenzenweger, M. F., John F. Clarkin, J., F., Yeomans, F., E., Kernberg, O., F. and Levy, K., N. (2008) "Refining the borderline personality disorder phenotype through finite mixture modeling: implications for classification". *Journal of Personality Disorders*, 22(4), 313-331.
- Lewis, B.R. & Mitchell, V.W. (1990). "Defining and measuring the quality of customer service". *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 8(6), 11-17.
- Minzenberg, M.J., Poole, J.H., Vinogradov, S. (2006) "Adult social attachment disturbance is related to childhood maltreatment and current symptoms in borderline personality disorder". *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 194, 341-348.
- Prinz, W. (1997). "Perception and action planning". *European Journal of Cognitive Psychology*. 9,129-54.
- Opatow, S. (1990). "Moral exclusion and injustice: An introduction". *Journal of Social Issues*, 46(1): 1.
- Othman A.Q., & Owen L. (2001). "Adopting and measuring customer service quality (SQ) in Islamic Banks: A Case Study in Kuwait Finance House". *International Journal of Financial Services*, 3(1), 1-26.
- Parasuraman, A., Valarie A. Zeithaml, and Leonard L. Berry. (1988) "SERVQUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality." *Journal of Retailing* 64 (1): p. 12-40.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. & Berry, L.L. (1994). "Alternative scales for measuring service quality: a comparative assessment based on psychometric and diagnostic criteria". *Journal of Retailing*, 70(3), 201-230.
- Peeler, G. H. (1996). *Selling in the quality era*. Blackwell Business, USA.

- Phillips, M.L., Williams, L., Senior, C., Bullmore, E.T., Brammer, M.J., Andrew, C., Williams, S.C.R. & David, A.S. (1999). "A differential neural response to threatening and non-threatening negative facial expressions in paranoid and non-paranoid schizophrenics". *Psychiatry Research*, 92, 11–31.
- Rizzolatti, G. & Craighero, L. (2004). "The mirror-neuron system". *Annual Review of Neuroscience*. 27, 169–192.
- Ruyter, K. (1997). "Measuring service quality and service satisfaction: an empirical test of an integrative model". *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 18, 387-406.
- Smith, E.R. & Semin, G.R. (2004). "Socially situated cognition: cognition in its social context". *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 117, 36:53.
- Spreng, R. & Singh, A. (1993). "Analysing service quality in the hospitality industry using the SERVQUAL model", *Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 1, July, pp. 324-43.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Berry & Parasuraman (1996). "The Behavioral Consequences of Service Quality". *The Journal of Marketing*, 60(2), 31-46.
- Wehr, T.A. & Goodwin, F.K. (1979)." Rapid cycling in manic-depressives induced by tricyclic antidepressants". *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 36, 555–559.
- Yeh, W. & Barsalou L.W. (2006). "The situated nature of concepts". *American Journal of Psychology*. 119, 349–84.
- Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L.L. & Parasuraman, A. (1996). "The behavioural consequences of service quality". *Journal of Marketing Management*, 60(No. April), 31-46.