Perceived Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, and Intentions

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT - Research has examined a) the conceptual distinction between customer satisfaction (CS) and perceived service quality (PSQ) (c.f. Oliver 1997); b) the causal ordering between them (e.g., Teas 1993); and c) their relative impact on intentions (e.g., Cronin and Taylor 1992). Both PSQ and CS have been conceptualized as transaction specific and cumulative evaluations that result from a number of transactions. However, much confusion remains. The purposes of this paper are to (1) review the conceptual distinctions and causal ordering between PSQ and CS both at the transaction and cumulative levels; (2) develop and test a model that includes both performance and behavioral intentions as well as PSQ and CS.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research has examined a) the conceptual distinction between customer satisfaction (CS) and perceived service quality (PSQ) (c.f. Oliver 1997); b) the causal ordering between them (e.g., Teas 1993); and c) their relative impact on intentions (e.g., Cronin and Taylor 1992). Both PSQ and CS have been conceptualized as transaction specific and cumulative evaluations that result from a number of transactions. However, much confusion remains. The purposes of this paper are to (1) review the conceptual distinctions and causal ordering between PSQ and CS both at the transaction and cumulative levels; (2) develop and test a model that includes both performance and behavioral intentions as well as PSQ and CS.

We adopt the widely accepted proposition that PSQ is primarily a cognitive concept, while CS is more affective. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) and Oliver (1997) defined PSQ as a global judgment of the service, thus treating it as a cognitive construct. In contrast, CS is usually considered to be a more affective concept. There are empirical findings supporting both views. Oliver (1994) found that PSQ was influenced by performance (cognitive judgments) alone, not by affective constructs, whereas CS was affected by both cognitive (disconfirmation) and affective antecedents.

There is considerable debate concerning the ordering of PSQ and CS. Some contend that CS→PSQ based on the assumption that CS is a result of disconfirmation for a single transaction and PSQ is a result of multiple service transactions (Bitner, 1990). Others contend that PSQ→CS. Oliver (1993) suggests that CS is a function of the disconfirmation of expectations, and therefore specifies PSQ as an antecedent of CS. Several studies proposed reciprocal relationships between CS and PSQ, but found only the PSQ→CS ordering to be significant (e.g. Cronin and Taylor 1992). We adopt the view that PSQ is an antecedent of CS. Oliver (1997) suggested a model in which transaction constructs lead to cumulative constructs since cumulative constructs are based on a series of specific transactions.

Model To Be Tested And Hypotheses

Cumulative PSQ and CS are proposed antecedents of intentions. The more satisfied the customer is and the higher the perceived level of service quality over a series of transactions, the higher the level of intentions to repurchase. Several studies found that CS has a stronger effect on intentions than PSQ (e.g., Taylor and Baker, 1994). We therefore hypothesize:

H1a: Cumulative PSQ will have a positive effect on intentions.
H1b: Cumulative CS will have a positive effect on intentions.
H1c: Cumulative CS will have a stronger relationship with intentions than will cumulative PSQ.

Oliver (1997) proposed a model in which transaction PSQ affects cumulative PSQ, and transaction CS affects cumulative CS.

H2a: Transaction PSQ will be positively related to cumulative PSQ.
H2b: Transaction CS will be positively related to cumulative CS.
H2c: Cumulative PSQ will be positively related to cumulative CS.

Research has found a strong direct effect of performance on CS (e.g., Churchill and Surprenant 1982) and PSQ (e.g., Cronin and Taylor 1992). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3a: Performance will be positively related to transaction PSQ.
H3b: Performance will be positively related to transaction CS.
H3c: Transaction PSQ will be positively related to Transaction CS.

Method

Data were collected from customers of a distribution center of a large state agency. The distribution center is responsible for purchasing and distribution of equipment and supplies. A total of 306 usable responses were obtained. Commonly accepted measures from previous studies were used to measure all constructs.

Results

The reliability and validity of the measures were assessed using CFA and were found to be acceptable based on common standards. The full model was found to have an acceptable fit (GFI=.92; CFI=.98; RMSEA=.07). H1a and H1b were both supported. H1c stated that cumulative CS would have a stronger relationship with intentions than will cumulative PSQ. A chi-square difference test found that there was a marginally significant difference (p=.091), partially supporting H1c. H2a, H2b, and H2c were all supported. H3a was also supported. H3b stated that performance would have a positive effect on transaction CS, but this was not supported. Given the common finding that performance is a strong antecedent of satisfaction, we suspected that the effect of performance on transaction CS was completely mediated by transaction PSQ. The criteria for mediation were examined and indicated complete mediation of the effects of performance on transaction CS by transaction PSQ. H3c was supported.

Discussion

The results indicate that the four CS/PSQ constructs can predict intentions, and cumulative CS has a marginally stronger effect on intention than cumulative PSQ. Furthermore, we show that the four constructs are distinct. Our findings also show that transaction PSQ completely mediates the effect of performance on transaction CS.

References


