

THE IMPACT OF THE SERVICE PROCESS QUALITY ON THE CONSUMER'S BEHAVIOR AND PURCHASING DECISIONS

Ph.D Małgorzata Adamska¹

Ph.D Aneta Kucińska-Landwójtowicz²

^{1,2} Opole University of Technology, Poland

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the article is to present the impact and the role of sales personnel and the pursued quality strategy in the customer service process on the customer's behaviour and processes of making purchase decisions. The identified dependencies may exert a significant impact on activities undertaken with respect to the formation of future customer relations and their nature, with special attention given to the context of the service process quality and sale personnel who carries out such process.

The article is a concept study based on the results of a literature search query, experiences deriving from cooperation with the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises and the author's own studies on the management of relations with customer capital in the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises.

The original feature of the article are recommendations pertaining to the feasible scenario of operation and the proposed model of management with respect to sale personnel and service process quality, enhancing the creation of values for customers via efficient marketing strategies implemented in the area of customer servicing.

Keywords: *service process quality, loyalty, consumer behaviour*

INTRODUCTION

When discussing the efficient operation of companies in the current market dimension, namely extensive, complex, varied and changing, the customer capital is the most important element in building a company's real market value. It is the group of all, current and past, customers who established a relationship with the company and these who may in the future be interested in its offer. Companies are constantly looking for an answer to the question about the expectations of customers in relation to the cooperation with the company and their needs in reference to the offered products. Proper examination of customer needs and keeping up with their changes allows for adjusting to the market requirements and offers a possibility to fight with the competitors.

The customer's role in shaping a company's market value was initiated by the era of 2.0 marketing, which popularised the idea of focusing on the client and his/ her expectations. The subsequent stage of marketing development, so-called 3.0, also known as value marketing, was a perfect fit for the concept of corporate social responsibility, which met the customer's expectations in order to satisfy spiritual needs, apart from material needs [8], [6].

The concept of intellectual capital management was developing in parallel to the evolution of marketing; it forms a basis for the modern approach to consumer behaviour and understanding the role of customer capital in the process of shaping a company's market value. It mobilised the entrepreneurs to think about the factors that exert actual impact on the customer's decision making processes, including its current and potential value, which may potentially be accomplished. The concept of customer capital management is anchored in the intellectual capital management theory in the reference literature [1], [5].

Consumer behaviour is a consistent set of reactions related to making choices with respect to satisfying individual needs in specific social, cultural and economic conditions [4]. Consumer behaviour comprises these activities that are stimulated by the experience of needs.

The article's purpose is the identification of dependencies between customer behaviour and the practised strategy of quality activities in the area of customer service and contacts. The undertaken research problem focuses on the hypothesis that, H: the quality of the service process and the sale personnel may exert a significant impact on the customer's decision-making processes. The identified dependencies allowed to develop an original scenario of conduct improving the service process quality, improving the shape and the nature of relations with customers.

QUALITY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CONSUMER SERVICE PROCESS

In practice, the concept of quality is most often defined as features of a product or service that depend on its' capacity to satisfy specific needs [9]. In a clearly technical context, quality means a product or a service free from deficiencies. Mohammad & Alhamadani reviewed the concept of service quality, calling it a strategic core in the processes of building a competitive position [11]. Quality should always be analysed from various perspectives: philosophical, sociological, humanistic, legal, technical, technological or economic.

Quality is received subjectively, depending on the adopted stances and context in which it is analysed. Such an approach to quality results from ongoing improvement of quality processes and including them in the new intangible dimension that was offered by the intellectual capital management concept [5].

Global, intense competition combined with the evolution of product creation and production processes have resulted in the fact that the quantity and variety of offers on markets have never been so extensive before. The entrepreneurs became aware that the similarity of products and their characteristics for the client requires them to build a competitive advantage by increasing quality in other areas. An overview of factors that constitute the causes of an increase in quality requirements in the context of external and internal conditions influencing a company are presented in table 1.

Table 1. *Causes of increase in quality requirements*

Growth of customer expectations	Economic education Change in servicing standards Subjective quality context Evolution of socio-cultural needs Low price of goods Full information about the product
Trends in economy	Increasing complexity Increasing exploitation efficiency Free flow of capital and goods Counteracting waste and overproduction Shorter time of innovation introduction
Legal regulations	Safety provisions Environmental protection provisions Standards/ guidelines Principles of corporate social responsibility Sustainable development concept Globalisation of innovative processes
Key company objectives	Modern products High quality and reliability High degree of product acceptance on the market High profitability Risk limitation Good company reputation System approach to management Elimination of redundant costs
Competitors' capital	Technological race Growing pressure from the competitors' capital Changes in market structure Globalisation of marketing processes Shortened life-cycles of products and services.

Source: prepared on the basis of [7], [15]

An increase in customers' expectations, as one of the key factors that drive the progressive trend in the area of quality requirements, results from the fact that for the customers, quality is primarily the fulfillment of various groups of needs. They both refer to the typical use: comfort, reliability, compatibility, the

possibility of extending functionalities, possibilities of repair, maintenance, guarantee, etc.; as well as needs related to the brand image: aesthetics characteristic for the brand (colour, logo, packaging), market message, recognisability and prestige. The proper mode of customer acquisition is a systematic building of the customer's loyalty through enhancement of customer service processes, as they form an important source of the competitive advantage.

Sale Personnel, as an instrument of the marketing mix and an inseparable element of every organisation, is a significant factor influencing the company's image in the customer's eyes. A modern customer often feels lost at the developed market of goods and services. However, one can count on the fact that such a customer will remember professional personnel, with whom he/ she was in contact and who exerted a significant impact on the image created in the customer's awareness, thereby attaching the customer to the brand. The effects of work of sale personnel are relatively easy to assess via measurement of such values as: profit per employee, number of new customers, number of regular customers, customer ranking, fluctuations in sale value, number and value of orders, customer capital rotation, number of satisfied customers, number of returning customers.

LOYALTY AS EFFECT OF SATISFACTION WITH SERVICE PROCESS QUALITY AND CONTACT WITH SALE PERSONNEL

The customer's positive emotions are the key factor creating the customer's market behaviour. Satisfaction is a kind of physical condition that results from the experience of choosing and using a given product, service or brand. The level of accomplished satisfaction is different in various customers on account of the subjective nature of this feeling [14], whereas its assessment is aimed at determining the customers' reaction to the presented offer and quality of service in the course of making a transaction and in post-sale contacts. The concept of satisfaction is inseparably linked to the concept of loyalty [2], [11], [12]/ Loyalty is often understood interchangeably with such concepts as: satisfaction, habit, commitment, preferences and other [10]. It is necessary to view it in a long-term perspective as overall feelings and experiences, which influence the customer, resulting from various contacts with the product or the company undertaken by him/ her and which, in a significant mode, impact the customer's purchase activities in the future and make him/ her attached to the brand [12], [13].

On the opposite side, there is the customer's dissatisfaction, which stops the customer on the way to reaching the level of loyalty expected by the brand. As a further consequence, dissatisfaction may be the cause of negative changes in the customer-brand relationship, leading to behaviour resulting in the adoption of a stance of anti-ambassador of the brand and initiation of buzz marketing to build a bad opinion about the brand [3]. Lack of activity on the part of a dissatisfied customer testifies to the loss of such customer as a result of failure to meet the customer's expectations and lack of loyalty. Lack of satisfaction on the part of

customer capital may result from various reasons, related directly to the product and its' features, or located in other areas of the marketing mix.

The objectives of buyers are always different from the objectives of supply entities. If the cause of dissatisfaction was the product price, it is necessary to launch mechanisms aiming at its' renewed determination for the purpose of acceptance by customers. The inefficient organisation of distribution processes and sale place may result in lack of comfort of purchase on the part of the customer. Unconvincing and unattractive promotion creates negative feelings and associations. The material certificate should fulfil the necessity of appreciation and affiliation and prestige of possession related to the power of the brand. Personnel, having direct contact with the customer, via the implemented processes, exerts a significant impact on customer satisfaction and even minor incompetence may be the cause of negative reception of the entire brand. Frequently, it is only and exclusively the relationship established with a member of the sales personnel that conditions renewed purchase of goods or services and the competence of servicing personnel testifies to the quality of the offer for the customer, encouraging the customer to accept it and, in consequence, building consumer trust and loyalty towards the brand.

SCENARIO OF CONDUCT IMPROVING THE SERVICE PROCESS QUALITY

High quality of the service process carried out by competent sale personnel with which the customer met, and which exerted a significant impact on the image created in the customer's awareness, makes the customer attached to the brand and shapes the expected purchase behaviour. The key role in the process of creating experiences with the brand is played by every employee having any interaction with the customers. Wherever there is a human factor, there is also uncertainty whether the employee is sufficiently committed to pursuing the company's objectives, as every employee may well undermine or even damage a positive opinion about the brand. Simultaneously, even if the remaining instruments of the marketing mix fail - the employee's commitment may be fundamental in the process of mitigating conflict situations and customer retention, resulting in the fact that in spite of everything, the customer will still remain in the group of current customers. It is obvious that it requires a commitment of both regular employees and managerial personnel. In effect of identified recommendations supporting the service process quality management, a scenario of conduct improving the service process quality was suggested (Table 2).

Table 2. *Scenario of conduct improving the service process quality*

<p>Customer capital diagnosis</p>	<p>Every company should be familiar with its customers and their preferences; however, it is a good idea to put the knowledge characterising the relationship between the customer and the brand in order: times when they are most active, the type of support that they expect, the problems that they notify most often, the average servicing time, the costs of servicing, etc. at this stage, it is necessary to get into the customer's shoes and learn the customer's view about the ideal course of servicing when concluding a transaction, but also in the post-sale period. Knowledge about behaviour and functioning of customers allows for offering tailored solutions, which will be positively received on the market, favourably influencing the level of satisfaction derived from contact with the brand. The more such positive experiences, the greater the loyalty translating to competitive advantage.</p>
<p>Analysis of hitherto course of the service process</p>	<p>Consist of identification of critical points, causing greatest problems for the employee and the ones that are badly-received by the customer. At this stage, constructive criticism of the weak sides of the service process and an empathic approach to the customer are of key importance. It is necessary to answer the following question: are all of the customer's expectations fulfilled in the course of the service process? It is a good idea to observe the course of servicing, send a mystery customer, talk to the employees and customers. Collected observations, information, and remarks will offer a basis for identifying real needs and expectations of customers, which will result in better deployment of resources - in places where they actually bring the expected profit.</p>
<p>Description of the ideal climate of cooperation</p>	<p>Preparation of a description of the ideal climate of cooperation is not an easy task, but worth attention and commitment. It is also worth analysing the brand identity once again and creating a climate of cooperation fully compliant with it. On the level of teams and the entire company, it is necessary to talk about the objectives, vision of the future, market opinions, expected directions of development and challenges. In this manner, joint commitment allows for designing an improved concept of customer service. The key aspect is to promote this concept in the internal environment of the organisation, so that all employees</p>

	are aware of which image objectives the company is pursuing.
Experience based scenario of the customer service process	Preparation of scenarios for the course of the customer service process taking into account hitherto experience, both positive and negative. Here, the key role is played by the personnel that is responsible for it. Every employee should propose, in the form of a mind map, how he/ she would like to carry out the service process and what support is needed at specific stages. From the individual level, it is then possible to work out scenarios of conduct accepted by all employees. At this stage, assessment indicators to measure the growth of customer value may be proposed. Here, experiences derived from such methods as the Intangible Assets Monitor, the Skandia Navigator or the Balanced Scorecard, forming a part of the concept of intellectual capital management, may be used.
Popularisation of the improved concept of customer service	Popularisation of the improved concept among sales personnel and other employees, locating their role and significance in the process of company value management by creating the value of customer capital. Sale workshops, individual training sessions with a personal coach, creation of master-apprentice teams: all of this should focus on employee support to accomplish the best results in relations with customers
Implementation	The implementation process of an improved customer service concept, analysis of accomplishment of intended objectives on the basis of the constructed assessment indicators. Eventually, in line with the assumptions of Deming model, acting in compliance with the classic scheme of continuous improvement, aimed at constant enhancement and development.

Implementation of the scenario of conduct will be a significant factor supporting the creation of the relationship. Positive changes in consumer behaviour that are possible to accomplish will be conducive to cost rationalisation on account of the fact that the costs of service drop over time, as the partners, already know the principles of cooperation and promotion are not intensely used. It is also possible to expect an increase in revenues, given the fact that the higher the customer retention indicators and the higher the regular customers have climbed the loyalty ladder, the more attached they become to the brand and the purchase portfolio is extended. Development of customer capital accomplished thanks to the high quality of service process results in the fact that the customers, current and future, become positive brand ambassadors, recommending, via buzz marketing, the brand on the market and contribute to the building of the brand's good opinion.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the article was to present the impact and the role of sales personnel and the quality of service process on the customer's behaviour, processes of purchase decisions and building long-term market relations.

A company that efficiently prepares and implements a high level of service process quality, receives a higher and more stable acceptance of its offer from the customers, reflected in benefits resulting from relationship marketing. Author's studies focusing on customer capital management and experiences resulting from hitherto cooperation with companies were the basis for developing an original scenario of conduct improving the service process quality, improving the shape and the nature of relations with customers. The discussion on the research hypothesis has become an inspiration for preparing a scenario of improved conduct via efficient support of the sales personnel and the development of pro-quality conduct procedures.

The major benefit is cost optimisation. Costs of procuring new customers are always high, due to the fact that a new customer requires intense and efficient promotion strategy, direct marketing and time to build commitment. This carries substantial risk, due to the fact that a customer encounters numerous offers on a dynamic market. The costs of procuring a new customer include, do not guarantee that such 'accidental' customer will turn into a regular customer, thence the necessity of focusing on building a relationship with customers with the use of efficient marketing communication before, during and after purchase.

Another key benefit is the expected increase in revenues. The higher the customer retention indicators, the more positive the revenue forecast, due to the attachment to the brand, which extends their purchase portfolio, because the developed trust also starts to encompass other product lines. The sensitivity of regular customers to higher prices is also different; the argument of a low price ceases to be significant in comparison to the trust to the brand and service quality.

Another benefit is definitely a decrease in operating costs because the costs of service drop as partners are familiar with the principles of cooperation and the intense promotion strategy is no longer used.

The last benefit identified in the course of work on the scenario improving the management of sale personnel and quality of service process is a systematic development of customer capital: the customers, current, and past, become positive ambassadors of the brand, recommending the brand on the market via buzz marketing and contribute to building the brand's good opinion.

The presented scenario of improved conduct is a tool to support managers of sale personnel, responsible for the management of the customer capital structure and growth of its' value.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bontis, N., Chua Chong Keow, W. and Richardson, S., Intellectual Capital and Business Performance in Malaysian Industries. *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, Vol. 1, pp 85-100, 2000. <https://doi.org/10.1108/14691930010324188>.
- [2] Coelho, P. S., Henseler, J., Creating customer loyalty through service customization. *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 46, pp 331-356, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561211202503>.
- [3] Bougie, J. R. G., Pieters, R. and Zeelenberg, M., Angry customers don't come back, they get back: The experience and behavioral implications of anger and dissatisfaction in services. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(4), pp 377-393, 2003. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070303254412>.
- [4] Chiu, C.-Y, Kwan, ., L. Y.-Y., Li, D., Peng, L. and Peng, S., Culture and Consumer Behavior. *Foundations and Trends in Marketing*, Vol 7, pp.109–179, 2012. <https://www.nowpublishers.com/article/DownloadSummary/MKT-032>.
- [5] Edvinsson, L., Sullivan, P., Developing a model for managing intellectual capital. *European Management Journal*, Vol. 14, pp 356-364, 1996. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0263-2373\(96\)00022-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0263-2373(96)00022-9).
- [6] Gómez-Suárez, M, Martínez-Ruiz, M. P. and Martínez-Caraballo, N., Consumer-Brand Relationships under the Marketing 3.0 Paradigm: A Literature Review. *Frontiers Psychology*, 8:252, pp 1-4, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00252>
- [7] Hernas, A., Gajda, L., Quality management systems. Publishing House of the Silesian University of Technology, Gliwice, 2004.
- [8] Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., and Setiawan, I., *Marketing 3.0: From Products to Customers to the Human Spirit*. John Wiley and Sons, Hoboken, New York, 2010.
- [9] Lu, C., Berchoux, C., Marek, M. and Chen, B., Service quality and customer satisfaction: qualitative research implications for luxury hotels. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 9(2), pp 168-182, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCTHR-10-2014-0087>.
- [10] Malär, L., Krohmer, H., Hoyer, W. D., and Nyffenegger, B., Emotional Brand Attachment and Brand Personality: The Relative Importance of the Actual and the Ideal Self,' *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 75, pp. 35–52, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.75.4.35>
- [11] Mohammad, A. A. S., Alhamadani, S.Y.M., Service Quality Perspectives and Customer Satisfaction in Commercial Banks Working in Jordan. *Middle Eastern Finance and Economics*. Vol. 14, pp 60-72, 2011.
- [12] Pazio, N. M., *Qloyalty Marketing*, Difin Publishing House, Warsaw, 2015.

[13] Smaoui, F., Temessek Behi, A., Brand engagement vs. brand attachment: which boundaries?. *Micro & Macro Marketing*, Vol. 2, pp 255-272, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1431/35139>

[14] Thomson M., Mcinnis D.J., Park C.W., The Ties that Bind: Measuring the Strength of Consumers' Emotional Attachments to Brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 15, pp 77-91, 2005. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp1501_10

[15] Zymonik, Z., Quality costs in enterprise management. Second, extended edition. Publishing House of Wrocław University of Technology, Wrocław, 2003.