The Measurement of Electronic Service Quality: Improvements and Application

Grégory Bressolles, BeM Management School - Bordeaux, France
Jacques Nantel, HEC Montréal, Canada

ABSTRACT

Several measurement scales have been designed by both practitioners and researchers to evaluate perceptions of electronic service quality. This article tests three of the main academically developed scales: Sitequal (Yoo & Donthu, 2001), Webqual 4 (Barnes & Vidgen, 2003) and EtailQ (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003) and compares them against the scale ensuing from our research: NetQual (Bressolles, 2006). Based on 204 evaluations of consumers that participated in a laboratory experiment involving two Canadian Web sites in travel and online insurance, NetQual best fits the data and offers the highest explanatory power. Then the impact of nature of task and success or failure to complete the task on the evaluation process of electronic service quality and attitude toward the site is examined and discussed on over 700 respondents that navigated on six different Web sites.

Keywords: attitude toward the site; electronic commerce; electronic service quality; Internet; services marketing; task completion

INTRODUCTION

A relatively recent form of commerce, online shopping is increasingly becoming routine. Despite recent years' turbulence, electronic retail commerce is on the rise in Canadian commercial landscape. Representing a sales volume of $4.7 billion, about 1.3% of Canadian retail sales, e-commerce is becoming an indispensable tool for retailers. In total, 67% of Canadian households use the Internet. While only 18.4% of consumers that use the Internet claim to purchase products on the Web, 56% of Web users report using this medium to obtain product information before purchasing it at a brick-and-mortar store. The systematic increase of Internet integration in consumers' decision making processes has created a strong impetus for retailers to go online. In 2005, 34% of Canadian retailers had a Web site and 11.4% sold products on the Web. The proportions at finance and insurance sectors were 43% and 8%, respectively, compared with 51% and
14% for that of arts and culture. While both
transactional and informational commercial
activity on the Web is growing, studies did not
find sites directed at consumers to always meet
expectations.

A study by the e-tailing group found
that only 3% of consumers who visit a site to
complete a purchase; more than 47% of con-
sumers abandon their order before checking
out (cart abandonment). Partly explained by
Internet anonymity, such statistics could be
also explained by the fact that many sites do
not meet consumers’ needs or poorly tailor their
decision-making processes. One could argue
that having an online presence and posting low
prices seemed to be sufficient to succeed; neither
of these conditions, however, does guarantee
service quality. Inevitably, certain quality issues
have appeared, such as the inability to carry
out online transaction, non-compliance with
delivery time, undelivered products, unan-
swered e-mails, and inaccessible or inadequate
information. As at a brick-and-mortar store,
the service quality of a commercial Web site
plays a vital role in its survival. Internet sales
have particular characteristics that differentiate
them from traditional sales. For these reasons,
measurement instruments have been developed
by practitioners and researchers to evaluate
service quality in e-commerce.

While literature on service quality includes
articles that compare various scales across dif-
ferent contexts such as health, arts, professional
services, and retail stores, it do not offer any
study that offer a comparison of Web-oriented
scales. Results observed in tangible situations,
where interpersonal contact is a key, can not be
taken for granted in a virtual context (Bitner,
Brown & Meuter, 2000; Dabholkar, 2000;
Parasuraman & Grewal 2000). For instance,
Parasuraman & Grewal (2000) posit that on-
line and offline environments are sufficiently
different to justify the development of scales
specifically dedicated to the measurement of
electronic service Quality. Even when the same
product or service was purchased, online and
offline environments present different shopping
experiences. Consequently, such measure-
ment instruments of service quality became
a necessity.

This article starts by defining the concept of
electronic service quality, and compares it
with the traditional one. Given the abundance
of measures of electronic service quality put
forth by practitioners and researchers, we then
selected to test three of the main academically
developed scales: Sitequal (Yoo & Donthu,
2001), Webqual 4 (Barnes & Vidgen, 2003)
and EtailQ (Wolfinbarger & Gilly, 2003) and
to compare them against the scale ensuing
from our research, NetQual (Bressolles, 2006).
Based on 204 evaluations of consumers who
participated in a laboratory experiment that
involved two Canadian Web sites (travel and
online insurance), we intend to determine the
most relevant scale in terms of content, parsi-
mony and explanatory power in an e-commerce
context. Then we explore the impact of task
nature and success or failure to complete a
specific task on the electronic service quality
evaluation. The link between electronic service
and attitude toward site is studied. Discussion
of limitations and future research avenues
conclude the paper.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
OF ELECTRONIC SERVICE
QUALITY

Definition, Similarities, and
Differences with Traditional
Service Quality

Whereas dimensions, variables, and other as-
pects of traditional service quality have received
extensive study over the past two decades, the
study of electronic service quality is a relatively
new domain. While traditional service quality
was defined as an overall evaluation or an at-
titude relative to the superiority of the service
(Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988),
electronic service quality were considered as
“the extent to which a Web site facilitates ef-
ficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and
delivery of products and services” (Zeithaml,
Parasuraman, & Malhotra, 2002, p. 363). This
What’s Around Me?: Applying the Theory of Consumption Values to Understanding the Use of Location-Based Services (LBS) on Smart Phones
www.igi-global.com/article/around-applying-theory-consumption-values/68174?camid=4v1a