What are the Characteristics of Customer Satisfaction Among Chilean Consumers?

An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

In the environment where many organizations are providing similar product offerings, with very close price range and channels of communications facing constant clutter it seems that delivering high level of customer satisfaction can be an important component of company's distinctiveness over competitors. It is well established that satisfied customers are the key to long-term business success. There are number of discussions in marketing literature devoted to the effects of customer satisfaction on business performance. Some studies have proven that customer satisfaction has strong positive impact on customer loyalty and behavioral patterns (Bolton 1998, Fornell 1992). Loyal customers tend to consume or buy more (Bolton, Kannan, and Bramlett 2000); make recommendations to others (Anderson, Fornell and Mazvancheryl 2004) therefore secure future revenue (Rust, Moorman, and Dickson 2002, Rust and Zahorik 1993, Rust and Keiningham 1994). Sui – Hua (2007) documented direct link between. This paper focuses on the physical and service attributes that affect consumer satisfaction in Chilean retail stores. The findings indicate that there is a mixed response to these issues and that many people do not care about the customer satisfaction issues. Others believe that a business that does not provide superior quality should not be in business.

Introduction

It is well established that satisfied customers are the key to long-term business success. Organizations having superior service quality have been found to be market leaders in terms of sales and long-term customer loyalty (Gilbert & Veloutson, 2006). Customer satisfaction is regarded as a primary determining factor of repeat shopping and purchasing behavior. The greater the degree to which a consumer experiences satisfaction with a retailer, the greater the probability the consumer will revisit the retailers (Wong & Sohal, 2003; Burns & Neisner, 2006). The role of affect in the evaluation of retail stores has long been recognized. Store image recognized as a key ingredient in consumer choice of shopping location and thus a key factor in a retailer's long-term success (Samli, 1999; Sirgy & Samli, 1985; burns & Neisner, 2006). Hook (1989, p.3) states that there are two generally accepted facets of store image

a. One image is combination of functional and psychological factors;

b. Another image is based on consumer's perception not reality.

c. The image which a consumer forms f a retail store, therefore, is based on the affective
perception of cues internal or external to the store in addition to the actual physical
quality of the store (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1986).

In the environment where many organizations are providing similar product offerings, with very close price range and channels of communications facing constant clutter it seems that delivering high level of customer satisfaction can be an important component of company's distinctiveness over competitors. It is well established that satisfied customers are the key to long-term business success. There are number of discussions in marketing literature devoted to the effects of customer satisfaction on business performance (). Some studies have proven that customer satisfaction has strong positive impact on customer loyalty and behavioral patterns (Bolton 1998,

Fornell 1992). Loyal customers tend to consume or buy more (Bolton, Kannan, and Bramlett 2000); make recommendations to others (Anderson, Fornell and Mazvancheryl 2004) therefore secure future revenue (Rust, Moorman, and Dickson 2002, Rust and Zahorik 1993, Rust and Keiningham 1994). Sui – Hua (2007) documented direct link between consumer satisfaction and consumer profitability. Providing high customer satisfaction has a negative impact on customer complaints (Bolton 1998, Fornell 1992) so, it can reduce costs associated with handling problems with field services, defective products and warranties (Fornell 1992). Higher levels o customer satisfaction can also enhance company's reputation (Fornell 1992, Andreson and Sullivan 1993, Wangnheim and Bayon 2004) and brand image (Lawson, Glowa 2000d), which can leads to creation of instant awareness and ease of acceptance of new product and lower costs of attracting new customers (Robertson and Gatignon 1986). Anderson (1996) suggests that higher customer satisfaction can decrease price elasticity and lover possibility of consumer switching behavior (Anderson and Sullivan 1993; Mithas, John and Mitchell 2004). Recent studies suggest that customer satisfaction has a strong relationship with shareholder return (Anderson, Fornell and Mazvancheryl 2004), and stock prices (II Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson and Krishnan 2006), which may be important from the investor's point of view. More complex approach presented by Naumann and Hoisington (2001 II) linked positive relationship between customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction, market share and productivity indicators at IBM Rochester.

BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Customer Satisfaction Definitions

There are number of approaches to define what customer satisfaction is. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) describe it as "the customer's evaluation of product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met their needs and expectations". This definition is rooted in Oliver's (1980) disconfirmation paradigm, which states that satisfaction is believed to occur through a matching of expectations and perceived performance. Schneider (2000) defines satisfaction by analyzing how it is formed. It is the result of the psychological process in which customer is making comparison of the perceived level of organization performance to his/her specific standards, known as expectations.

Woodruff and Gardial (1996) provided one of the most complete definitions that summarize many aspects of customer satisfaction. They define customer satisfaction as a customer's positive or negative reaction to perceived value of specific product offering in the specific buying situation. This feeling can be described as an immediate reaction after purchase situation or accumulation of overall experiences with product, service or organization.

Different approach to describe customer satisfaction is presented by Kano (1984). He indicated that not all attributes of product or service equally contribute to the overall customer satisfaction. He identified three different groups of attributes that have different impact on the process of satisfaction formation.

1. Expected performance variables (the must be, basic), which are basic attributes necessary to provide functional benefits of product or service. They are obvious to the customer and they don't identify them specifically. As long as they are present customer don't notice them, but without them product/service will be unacceptable and customers will be dissatisfied.
2. One-dimensional performance variables (performance or quality oriented), which present linear relationship among manifestation of these attributes and level of satisfaction. The greater level of attribute delivery (i.e.: quality) the greater level of customer satisfaction. If product/service doesn't deliver this attribute customer will not be satisfied or dissatisfied.
3. Attractor performance variables (delighter, excitement). Customers are often unaware of their existence because they don't expect them. If these attributes are present they will generate considerable satisfaction, and delightful experience. If they are not present there are no negative consequences. However, they offer significant opportunities for differentiation that can provide foundations for building a long-term relationship and loyalty.

Model presented by dr. Noriaki Kano provides some guidelines to identifications of critical components that greatly improve customer satisfaction. However, this model doesn't explain consumer motivations and reasons why some of these variables are more important than others.

Satisfaction and store loyalty

Early studies conducted by Hummel and Savitt (1988) indicated that there is a little empirical evidence to support the explicit relationship between store satisfaction and store loyalty. Many studies devoted to investigate this problem looked at the relationship between customer satisfaction and store loyalty as related to products and services (Burmann, 1991, Bloemer and Lemmink, 1992; Bloemer and Kasper, 1995). Some believes that for the retailers loyalty is important aspects of customer satisfaction because it has been often regarded as an antecedent of store loyalty (Bitner, 1990).

Mazursky and Jacoby (1986) provide some evidence that store loyalty may be (positively) related to store image. However, they didn't examine particular relationship between satisfaction, image and loyalty in a retail environment. The study conducted by Bloemer and de Ruyter (1998) tried to investigate whether there is a direct relationship between store image and store loyalty or whether there is an indirect relationship via store satisfaction. Their study shows that relationship between store satisfaction and store loyalty depends on the specific type of satisfaction. They distinguished two types of store satisfaction: manifest satisfaction and latent satisfaction as antecedents to store loyalty. The manifest satisfaction is a result of the evaluation of the outcomes that consumer is likely to be aware of which results from explicit comparison between expectations and performance. The latent satisfaction is a result of implicit evaluation because of lack of motivation and/or ability of the consumer to evaluate the store; therefore the consumer is not likely to be fully aware of his/her satisfaction. This study shows that positive impact of manifest satisfaction on store loyalty is stronger than the positive impact of latent satisfaction on store loyalty.

Another important aspect that can influence customer loyalty in the retail environment is customer's perception of value that will be offered by particular store or shopping outlet, because this is what in a first place brings customer into a store and precedes satisfaction. Without delivering value, there is no possibility to satisfy customer needs. In a study recently conducted by Smith and Colgate (2007) 4 types of customer value were analyzed in a model framework.

This was done in order to provide the researchers with a tool for companies to use in order to possibly describe a potential marketing strategy, enhance a particular product, identify potential value creation opportunities, and develop measures of customer value. The four types of value that were studied included functional/instrumental value, experiential/hedonic value, symbolic/expressive value and cost/sacrifice value. Functional/instrumental value is when a customer obtains the perceived benefits within a desired characteristic or desired function that the consumer was seeking to get from the product or service. Experiential/hedonic value deals with a product or service that is able to create customer certain feelings or emotions. Symbolic/expressive value is placing a psychological meaning to a product or service in order to justify purchase. Cost/sacrifice value deals with what the customer feels they are giving up, price for example, versus the perceived benefit of the product or service (Smith & Colgate, 2007).

<div align="center">EMERGING CHILEAN MARKET</div>

Geographically, Chile is located in the southern cone of South America bordering the South Atlantic Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean between Argentina and Peru. It has 2,500 miles of coastline with world-class costal facilities readily available for overseas commerce activity (Sharma, 2002). Chile's population of 15 million people with a literacy rate approaching 95% has given it the human capital to develop a strong growing business environment. During the period of 1988-1997, Chile's economy grew at a rate of over 8% annually. This continuous growth was primarily due to an export expansion in such items as processed natural resources, fresh fruits and forestry products (Sharma, 2002).

Chile no longer is considered a fledging republic with an unstable political economy and failed economic development policy that typically characterizes Latin American countries. In fact, Chile has become Latin America's showcase to the world. It has surmounted great economic, political and social obstacles causing it to be recognized as a global center and a first choice for investors seeking to expand in Latin America. Chile's decision in 1990 to become a

democracy has provided the political infrastructure for installing a free market economy. The free open economy has put Chile on the path to world competition among the major globally oriented countries. It is one of the world's most competitive countries with regard to the cost of doing business. Moreover, the appealing business environment in Chile is a consequence of a policy driven strategy that focuses on maintaining sound macro economic fundamentals and strong incentives that encourages competition and international integration (www.gobiernodechile).

Chile has been instrumental in promoting effective economic fundamentals with the implementation of clear transparent rules, a dynamic and innovative private sector, and a productive labor force along with an independent and accountable judiciary. These comparative advantages have meant lower tariffs, increasing levels of foreign trade and rapid integration into the world markets (www.gobiernodechile). Additionally, the key success factors of its ultra modern telecommunication systems, internationally competitive banking sector, improved infrastructure and high quality services, allows Chile to participate with almost any world competitor (www.gobiernodechile).

Probably Chile's greatest achievement is its policy continuity strategy for creating a vigorous business environment. Pressing forward consistently and deliberately has allowed Chile to create its impressive competitiveness and enduring economic stability (O'Brien, 2002). The result of this persistence produced Chilean businesses, which are predominately privately owned and controlled (Sharma, 2002). As such, Chile offers good markets for U.S. telecommunication, computers, construction, mining and financial services. Because of the strong economic foundation, enterprises that seek to compete in Chile will encounter intense competition from domestic, European and Asian business entities (Sharma, 2002).

Macro economic management will remain sound into the foreseeable future with a tightening of monetary policy in 2003 and the steady decreasing of fiscal deficits. GDP expansion is expected to reverse in 2003-04 mostly driven by exports along with a strengthening global economy, a weaker peso and an improved access to the EU (www.economist.com). The Chilean business environment is solid, stable and offers great opportunities for investors who want to conduct business in Latin America.

Chile's Retail Sector

Chile's strong economy, its low unemployment and higher wages, have provided the fertile business environment for a relatively mature retail sector (Kholer, 1996). Presently, the Chilean retail landscape is very active and highly competitive. A small number of traditional family-owned chain stores are more and more competing with big foreign enterprises to win the confidence of the emergent middle class. One of the main reasons for this expansion in retailing relates to the simultaneous growth in Chilean consumer's ability to acquire credit. This has substantially increased the number of people shopping at the malls and markets. As a result, Chile's retail sector averaged 8.8% GDP during the 1990's and thus there has been a boom in malls and a substantial growth in the super market sector. As this growth has continued, the retail sector has become the second highest employer providing jobs for 18% of the work force (www. businesschile)

Many different super markets designs have emerged ranging from hypermarkets and mega big volume malls to the traditional neighborhood super markets and convenience stores. Seventy percent the super markets are located in the provinces, while the remainder is in Santiago and neighboring communities.

Chile is an appealing market for retailers even though it is obviously limited by its small size and scarcity of major urban centers. Chileans are good customers, which creates exceptional opportunities for high performance low cost operators (Kholer, 1996).

Research

In this study we took approach to analyze customer satisfaction on a transaction level, sometimes defined as a service encounter. We utilized SERVQUAL index, which is based on the confirmation/disconfirmation model and we were asking customers to compare their perception of service they encountered with their pre-consumption standards or expectations. SERVQUAL contains six indicators to monitor customer service. The indicators include responsiveness, reliability, competence, accuracy, courtesy, and completeness.

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Research Question and Hypotheses:

Are physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving and policy important factors affecting customer satisfaction?

Based on the research question, our review of the literature and the data we collected the following hypotheses are important to understanding the customer satisfaction issues among Chilean consumers. Thus we posit that:

H1 Do consumer had a significant different response/reaction between physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving and policy.

H2 there is a significant difference among attributes of customer satisfaction and gender?

H3 there is a significant difference among attributes of customer satisfaction according to marital status?

H_4 there is a significant difference among attributes of customer satisfaction according those respondents having some college and being a college graduate status?

H5 there is a significant difference among attributes of customer satisfaction according and age groups?

<div align="center">THE STUDY</div>

Methodology and Data Collection

As an exploratory study, data for this project was collected among retail establishments in the city of Talca, Chile. Customers of the retail stores were randomly selected using the mall intercept method. A cross sectional approach was taken were different retail stores completed the survey.

The survey consisted of five major constructs or customer satisfaction attributes such as physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving, and policy. All of these constructs had

a series of questions associated with them. The final results of administering this survey

collected 201 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 5 sections with a varied number of

questions per construct. A 1-5 Liker scale was used to measure the respondents with 1 being

strongly agreed and 5 strongly disagree.

Analysis and Findings

The first step in analyzing the data for this research paper was to develop the descriptive

statistics that described the respondents' demographics and their beliefs about the five major

customer satisfaction constructs. Table 1 summarizes the means and standard deviations of all

categories associated with the main constructs.

--Insert Table 1 about here --

The second step in the analysis of the data was to regroup the data into three major categories:

Low customer satisfaction (Low), medium customer satisfaction (Med) and high customer

satisfaction (High). This provided a more realistic method of analyzing the data and shed lighter

on the areas that are important in customer satisfaction. When presented with the scale,

respondents shopping in the Talca, Chile retailing sector, had little difficulty relating to them and

the reliability coefficient for the overall scale was (Cranach Alpha = .890), which was considered

very good based on criterion used in the literature (Nunnaly, 1967).

Analysis and Findings

Using descriptive and inferential statistics we completed several analyses of the data. The

descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 indicates the mean scores and standard deviations

among all the questions posed to the respondents. Clearly there is a great deal of

The following presents the preliminary and initial results of our study.

Discussion

The results seem to indicate that there is support for the analyzing customer satisfaction in retail environments. We did find differences among marital status and customer satisfaction. There was also a significant difference regarding college educated people and customer satisfaction. There is also significant differences found between gender and personal interaction between the customer and the retail store personnel. Hence, all but one hypotheses was confirmed

Conclusions

The research has demonstrated that the overall SERVQUAL scale is both valid and reliable as a measure of market orientation in an emerging nation such as Chile. As an exploratory study this paper examined the perceptions of Chilean customers' perceptions to assess their views related to the over all satisfaction of various retail service areas.

Based on the results of cluster analysis, we believe that a large proportion of the executives who participated in the study had higher levels of market orientation. These findings are encouraging since there is a large body of the literature which supports that argument that higher levels of market orientation would lead to a better organizational performance. In other word, small businesses in Guatemala, which have higher market orientation, will place more importance on determining and satisfying customer needs. Small business owners in Guatemala should emphasize customer understanding and satisfaction as well as competitor orientation since this will enhance the level of market orientation, which in turn expected to lead to improved performance. Some of these small businesses are already involved in market orientation activities. Many of them do not label these activities as "marketing," but as we discovered in this study, small business owners in Guatemala are very much concerned

about service delivery, target markets and information dissemination as their counterparts did

in developed countries. Interviews with small business managers confirmed that they were

very familiar with that market orientated philosophy.

- Customer satisfaction is an important dimension in the retail sector of Talca, Chile retail stores.
- The methodology and survey scale used in this research is suitable and has great potential for use in other geographic locations

Most people believe that the customer satisfaction is Medium Customer satisfaction

- Medium Satisfaction means that there is room for improvement.
- Stores could add dimensions to help in the enhancement of these five store attributes
- Stores need to find new strategies to meet customer needs.

Managerial Implications

Marketers who sell goods in Chile need to understand the dynamics of consumer interactions

when selling goods to this population. The strategies that are used can determine how many

resources will be allocated to the process of selling goods to Chileans. The sensitivity of the

Chilean consumer is important for the relationship between the consumer and the retail store or

channel of distribution. When a manager does not know the needs of the consumer and how he

or she sees their relationship it will become an inefficient and ineffective relationship. When

consumer relationships are poorly developed it is bad for the seller and the buyer. So paying

attention to the customer satisfaction dynamics and characteristics can assist the seller in

reaching sales goals and customer base expansion. While personal selling in retail stores is

sometime thought of as a historical artifact, customers really like to be waited on. This has an

important impact on the customer's impression. As such, when a manager knows the

characteristics of the customer and what they want, he/she can modify, or adapt responses to the

customers' desires. Knowing the customer satisfaction characteristics is critical to successful

selling of any product or service, especially in foreign cultures like Chile.

Limitations

There are some limitations of the study and therefore the findings must be viewed as tentative.

The first limitation is that due to the cross-sectional approach adopted, our conclusions are

restricted to those of associations rather than causation. Second, this study was exploratory in

nature and specifically focused on market orientation. Third, due to the multi-organizational

nature of the sample used in this study, differences among the small businesses were not

accounted for. In this context, a worthy area of investigation may be to test for differences

performance between the market oriented and non-market oriented small business in Guatemala.

Finally, while the dataset used in this study was sizable, it was a convenience sample and a larger

and more representative sample is needed for more conclusive results.

- It was an exploratory study completed only in Talca, Chile
- Need to develop a larger sample
- Need to do a cross sectional study of more retail stores

Need to complete the study in other countries to see if there is a comparison.

Table 1

Service Quality of Retail Stores

	Physical Aspects	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1	This store has modern-looking equipment and fixtures.	3.81	.913
2	The physical facilities at this store are visually appealing.	3.63	1.00
3	Materials associated with this store's service (such as shopping bags, catalogs, or	3.68	1.00

	statements) are visually appealing.		
4	This store has clean, attractive, and convenient public areas (restrooms, fitting rooms).	3.19	.978
5	The store layout at this store makes it easy for customers to find what they need.	3.61	.922
6	The store layout at this store makes it easy for customers to move around in the store.	3.45	1.04
	Total for the six items in this category	3.56	.63
	Reliability		
1	When this store promises to do something by a certain time, it will do so.	3.54	.95
2	This store provides its services at that time it promises to do so.	3.58	1.00
3	This store performs the service right the first time.	3.54	.985
4	This store has merchandise available when the customers want it.	3.68	.958
5	This store insists on error-free sales transactions and records.	3.68	.937
	Total for the four items in this category	**3.60**	**.71**
	Personal Interaction		
1	Employees in this store have the knowledge to answer customers' questions.	3.45	.984
2	The behavior of employees in this store instills confidence in customers.	3.62	.973
3	Customers feel safe in their transactions with this store.	3.94	.95
4	Employees in this store give prompt service to customers.	3.29	1.06
5	Employees in this store tell customers exactly when services will be performed.	3.48	.884
6	Employees in this store are never too busy to respond to customers' request.	3.14	1.03
7	This store gives customers' individual attention.	3.39	1.02
9	Employees in this store are consistently courteous with customers.	3.45	1.05
10	Employees in this store treat customers courteously on the telephone.	3.30	.950
	Total for the ten items in this group	3.45	.67
	Problem Solving		
1	This store willingly handles returns and exchanges.	3.38	1.10
2	When a customer has a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it.	3.31	1.01
3	Employees in this store are able to handle customer complaints directly and	3.13	1.07

	immediately.		
	Total for three items in this group	3.27	.84
	Policy		
1	This store offers high quality merchandise	3.82	1.04
2	This store provides plenty of convenient parking for customers.	2.80	1.33
3	This store has operating hours convenient to all of their customers.	3.90	1.02
4	This store accepts most major credit cards.	3.39	1.13
5	This store offers its own credit card.	4.23	1.18
	Total for the five items in this category	3.63	.67

Table 2

Gender	Number
Male	88
Female	113
Total	201

Table 3

Age	Number
Less than 20	17
20 – 30	109
31-40	26
41-50	35
51-60	10
Over 60	6
Total	201

Table 4

Occupation	Number

Professional Manager	26
Technical, sales admin. Support	8
Service	16
Farming	8
Precision products, craft and repair	7
Operator or laborer	11
Full time student	92
Not working	21
Other	12
Total	201

Table 5 Gender and Reliability

Level of Satisfaction	Male	Female	Per Cent
Low	16	32	23.9%
Medium	45	40	42.3%
High	27	41	33.8%
	88	113	100%

Pearson's Chi Square 5.485 p > .005   - Significance .064, Likelihood Ratio .063

Table 6 Gender and Personal Interaction

Level of Satisfaction	Male	Female	Per Cent
Low	13	32	22.4%
Medium	62	56	58.7%
High	13	28	18.9%
	88	113	100%

Pearsons Chi Square 9.149, p < .05, Significance .010, Likelihood Ratio .009

Table 7 Marital Status and Physical Aspects of Retail Store

Level of Satisfaction	Married	Single	Other	Per Cent
Low	30	13	4	23.4%
Medium	70	19	3	45.8%
High	33	27	2	30.8%
	133	59	9	100%

Pearsons Chi Square 11.880, p < .05, Significance .018, Likelihood Ratio .023

Table 8 Policy and College Educated consumers

Level of Satisfaction	Some College	College Graduate	Per Cent
Low	12	23	22.7
Medium	20	54	48.1
High	5	50	29.2
	37	127	

Pearson Chi-Square 6.495 p< .05, Significance .039, Liklihood Ratio .029.

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