

Antecedents of Services Consumer Satisfaction Mirroring Individual Differences

F.L.Isac

Florin Lucian Isac

Faculty of Economics

"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania

Abstract

In specialised literature, a less walked path concerns the potential relationship between the antecedents which bear witness to individual differences among consumers and satisfaction. In the present study we shall approach two such antecedents, namely the personal values and the consumer's personality.

Keywords: consumer satisfaction, values, personality, services

Consumer satisfaction is considered as the headstone of marketing; the concept is often introduced in most studies as the final objective of the marketing function or even as a short definition of marketing. Thus, according to Kotler et al. (2002), the short definition of marketing is 'the provision of customer satisfaction with a profit', suggesting the authority of the concept of satisfaction in the business world.

Acknowledged as central in marketing mainly due to its feature of antecedent of loyalty and corporate profit (Ngobo, 2000; Anderson et al., 1997; Rust et al., 1995; Fornell, 1992), consumer satisfaction is medially located within a complex nomological network characterised by concepts such as attitude, perceived performance or perceived quality. Certain conceptual explanations (Prim, 1998; Aurier și Evrard, 1998; Ngobo, 1997; Dabholkar, 1993; Evrard, 1993) have indicated that satisfaction is a distinct concept when compared to the previous constructs.

According to the DEX (Romanian Dictionary of Explained Terms: 43), we clarify the term *antecedent* as 'a fact or previous occurrence in relation to certain data or states' The first study in the field of antecedents in consumer satisfaction was the experiment carried out by Cardozo (1965). Research conducted by Olshavski and Miller (1972) and Anderson (1973)

emphasised the relationship between expectations and the perception on product performance rather than measuring consumer satisfaction (Vanhamme, 2001: 64). These three studies constituted a starting point for the revision of the relationships established between perceived expectations, invalidation and satisfaction. Research on consumer satisfaction has primarily focused on modelling the effects of the following factors upon the level of consumer satisfaction (Szymanski and Henard, 2001: 17):

- expectations;
- expectations invalidation;
- performance;
- affectivity;
- equity.

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Personal Values

Different authors point out that personal values (approached as elements opposed to the economic values of objects) represent important antecedents of services consumer satisfaction (Oliver, 1997; Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). Rokeach (1973: 158) emphasised that 'personal values are connected to all types of behaviours'. More recently, the effect of values on consumer behaviour has been investigated by a series of authors (Allen and Ng, 1999; Durgee et al., 1996; Shim and Eastlick, 1998; Wharton and Harmatz, 1995). Most models concerning the influence of values upon behaviour are based on the model of the value-attitude-behaviour hierarchy (Homer and Kahle, 1988). Starting from this model, we may assume that the level of values has a greater impact on satisfaction than the assessments based on services characteristics (Bloemer and Dekker, 2007: 279). *The perceptions and expectations regarding the way services relate to values are more important when explaining satisfaction than the expectations and perceptions concerning the performances of the object characteristics.*

When investigating the relationship between personal values and consumer satisfaction we may refer to a couple of models: *the value perception disparity model* (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983) and *the value invalidation model* (Oliver, 1997).

Even though the original model of invalidation focused on expectations invalidation, this model was easily reshaped to complement the researchers' survey of the relationship between personal values and satisfaction, providing thus a values invalidation model. According to this model, expected values are compared to perceived values, in opposition to the comparison between attributes based expectations and perceptions.

The model of value perception disparity was first formulated by Locke (1967, 1969) and it specifically acknowledges that consumers are guided by their own set of values, but they also perceive the values involved in services provision process. The fulfilment degree associated to values depends on the cognitive-evaluative processes by which the perceived values of the service are compared to consumer values. The lesser the disparity between the value perception of the service and the consumer's values, the more favourable the assessment will be and consequently satisfaction is on the increase. Westbrook and Reilly's (1983) study has proven the positive impact of the value perception disparity upon satisfaction, but has failed to demonstrate the potential superiority of the value perception disparity model as compared to the value invalidation model.

Henceforth, other authors such as Oliver (1997) have suggested that values have an instrumental influence on consumer satisfaction. Certain authors (Spreng et al., 1996; Spreng and Olshavsky, 1993) assessed both models in terms of expectations congruency, revealing that this independently contributes to building up satisfaction to a greater extent than value invalidation regarding the expected standard. Fournier and Mick (1999), in their phenomenological and longitudinal study on satisfaction, have demonstrated that values and value perception disparity operate on a distinct level as compared to the invalidation model and play an important part in explaining consumer satisfaction. Moreover, Rosen and Surprenant (1998) show that values, as stimulating components of the relationship between consumers and the service provider, play an important part in explaining consumer satisfaction.

A study carried out by Bloemer and Dekker (2007) on a sample of consumers and employees from 18 subsidiaries of a Belgian bank, accounting for the list of values forwarded by Kahle (1983), concluded that consumer values influenced satisfaction indirectly and differently than stated by Westbrook and Reilly (1983). External values have a greater influence than internal values when explaining satisfaction. The results have proven the negative effect of expected values disparity upon satisfaction and the

positive impact of perceived value disparity upon satisfaction, supporting thus the value invalidation model. The distinction between values dimensions is instrumental when assessing them in relation to satisfaction. The management should focus on communicating external values, which have a prominent role in explaining satisfaction.

Lages and Fernandes (2005) developed an instrument in order to measure the personal values of the services consumers, an instrument which they called SERVPVAL. The scale used provides a common ground so as to assess personal values in the field of services, offering a clear understanding of key values involved in choosing and using services. On a managerial level, the SERVPVAL scale should allow providers to assess and improve the value of a service and to define strategies in order to offer their clients services according to their fundamental personal values.

Personality

Revising the literature on the topic, Kassarian and Sheffet (1991) considered the results of the efforts to make a connection between personality and consumer behaviour had been characterised by ambiguity. The conceptual models of after-sales processes and of the responses to dissatisfaction have often suggested that personality represents an important antecedent of the consumer (Singh, 1990). Empiric studies have considered the direct effects (of a personality-behaviour type) and have disregarded the intervention mechanisms through which individual differences may influence behaviour (Mooradian and Olver, 1997: 380).

The two aforementioned authors rely on a deductive logic when formulating research hypotheses regarding the influence of personality upon satisfaction. They consider that if (1) the personality determines emotional experiences and (2) the emotional experiences with a product engender satisfaction, which (3) generates after-sale behaviours from the part of the consumer, then (4) personality should be an important predictor of consumption experiences and therefore, of the after-sale processes. The model forwarded by the two authors supports the idea of the existence of certain positive effects of extroversion upon positive and negative consumer emotions and on neuroticism regarding negative consumption emotions. The model also suggests the following relationships:

1. Negative emotions reduce satisfaction, while positive emotions and the expectations invalidation increase satisfaction;

2. Satisfaction decreases complaining behaviours and increases intentions to recommend and reiterate the purchase.

Mooradian and Olver (1997) revealed that the relationship between neuroticism and negative emotion was stronger than the relationship between extroversion and positive emotions. Negative emotions were, on the other hand, stronger predictors of satisfaction than positive emotions. The interactions between consumers, products/services and consumption situations may influence the relationship between emotions and cognitions on the one hand and satisfaction, on the other hand.

Gountas and Gountas (2007: 73) conducted a survey of consumer satisfaction concerning the services provided by a British airline transport company, investigating a sample of 2196 consumers. The two hypotheses of the research were:

H1: The orientations of consumer personality relate differently to overall satisfaction towards a service and its components (tangible and intangible aspects of the service);

H2: The orientations of the personality relate differently to the intentions of reiterated purchase.

The empiric discoveries back the hypothesis of differentiated relationships between dependant and independent emotional states. The personality's orientation towards logic (of a thinking type) does not seem to be influenced by the emotional states and dispositions prior or during the journey on the studied company's aircrafts. The same conclusion also became apparent in the case of intuitive orientation of personality, mainly guided by imagination.

The discoveries also support the hypotheses according to which different orientations of the personality respond differently to the constructs of the model. The theoretical contribution of the authors lies in their demonstration that the personality orientations enter a direct relationship (as antecedents) with emotional states (positive and negative emotions), and both have an influence upon consumers' assessment regarding satisfaction and purchase intentions in the field of airline transportation services. Certain different sectors of services may provide different answers as a result of each and every personality orientation.

Conclusion

Understanding the mechanisms involved in consumer satisfaction is closely related to the knowledge of its antecedents and the way they exert

their influence. Certain antecedents of consumer satisfaction (performance, expectations, expectations invalidation) have been intently studied in the specialised literature. Less focus was received by antecedent variables mirroring the behavioural differences between consumers, among which personal values and personality are instrumental. In the future, research on the topic may focus on studying the influence of these variables upon consumer satisfaction in specific contexts (specific fields of the services industry), but also on refining the research instruments and the scales used in such contexts.

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