The evolution of service quality measurement scales: a review of the applications and extensions of SERVQUAL

Marlene Amorim, mamorim@ua.pt
University of Aveiro

Abstract

This paper presents a review of the literature dealing with service quality measurement, focusing on recent applications and developments of the SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The main purpose of the study is to understand how the general SERVQUAL instrument has been applied and modified, to fit different service business industries and contexts.

The original service quality scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) proposed a model of five dimensions which were generalist enough to be applied any service context: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Whereas such dimensions have proved to be relevant across very diverse service settings (Ladhari, 2009), the application of SERVQUAL in practice typically involves some adaptation of the original scale, which can range from small modifications on some scale items (e.g. adjustment in the wording to fit a specific service business context), including the addition or suppression of items, to more deep modifications such as the development of new dimensions (e.g. see for example in the case or retail services the development of dimensions such as "Policies" and "Problem Solving" in Dabholkar et al. (1996)).

The study builds on a non-exhaustive literature review to characterize and discuss the types of modifications and extensions to the original service quality scale across different service business industries. The study identifies distinct types of determinants which explain the need for adaptation and/or extension of the SERVQUAL instrument: i) modifications related to the characteristics of the service industry where this instrument is to be applied (e.g. retail, health, etc.; ii) modifications associated with the characteristics of the service delivery and customer-provider interactions (e.g. e-service); iii) modifications related with the nature of the service relationship.