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PREFACE

Dr. George O. Tasie
Guest Editor

Special Issue on “Contemporary Issues in International Business and Entrepreneurship”

Previously technology, globalisation, and trade liberalisation did not play a dominant role in business environments, but today the approach is totally different. The millennium is characterised by globalised trading systems and the predominance of the revolutionary information technologies. This scenario is where the real challenge is for the entrepreneuristic persons and organisations, raising the issue of how entrepreneurs and business organisations respond to the demands of the globalised markets and the fierce competition of business organisations in the so-called “borderless world”.

The papers in this special volume of Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship (JIBE) explain some of these challenges by providing in-depth and analytical information on various topics of international business interests. For instance, the article on service quality demonstrates the extent in which customer satisfaction and expectations have become a popular area of academic attention and economic development of society. Other articles also draw on the importance of internationalisation of businesses, such as global marketing, organisational reputation, Swedish entrepreneurship, the impact of currency in business and scores of other thought-provoking research papers.

The articles chosen for this special issue represent and reflect the crucial challenges facing international business and management during the past and present economic crises. Although the current worldwide economic crisis has eased and most of the countries affected are on the way to recovery, we have to recognise the factors contributing to the crisis.

It is hoped that this volume will contribute towards creating an awareness of the need for better business practices and excellent management ideas across the world. I am optimistic that wider readers will benefit largely through reading this particular issue.

Above all, I must record my thanks and profound appreciation to the contributors of articles to this issue, and especially Professor Zafar U. Ahmed for affording me an opportunity to guest edit this special issue. Finally, I wish to thank the JIBE’s Editorial Board and the reviewers for the job well done. Without their invaluable contribution, the publication of this special issue would not have been possible.

Volume 9, Number 1, 2002
Dr. George O. Tasie

George O. Tasie, Ph.D (Manchester), M.Sc (Leicester), M.P.A; B.Sc (Hon) (Liverpool), M.M.S (London), is Head, Department of Management Studies at the University of Brunei Darassulam [UBD], Brunei. His teaching interests are in general management, human resource management, human resource development, organisational behaviour, and international management. His professional work and experience in academia has taken him to the U.S.A, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Australia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam and Nigeria. The publication of one of his books on “Public Sector Administration and Management” was sponsored by the University of Malaysia Sarawak, where he was an associate professor before joining UBD. He has contributed articles to other internationally accredited journals. Dr. Tasie has also written and published books on rural financial planning and management. He has been involved in short courses and consultancy works for a variety of organisations in the U.S.A, U.K, Singapore, Nigeria, Malaysia, Brunei and JASPOC (Joint ASEAN Senior Officers’ Course). His current research interests center on business-government relations, training and development and stress management in Southeast Asia.
CUSTOMER PERCEPTION ABOUT QUALITY OF SERVICE: THE CASE OF VIETNAMESE AND AUSTRALIAN MANAGERS

George O. Tasie

Abstract

Satisfied customers are of paramount importance to creating and maintaining a sustainable advantage in the highly contemporary competitive business environment. Other forms of competitive advantage are easily lost, or copied by competitors. Consequently, customer satisfaction and service quality have been of considerable interest to both researchers and practitioners over the last two decades, and a substantial body of formal academic work has emerged to address these issues. However, comparatively little work has been carried out to date in studying what managers of business actually do in practice to measure, and consequently, manage their customer satisfaction and service quality, and less work has also been done internationally to ascertain differences in perception. This research paper reports the results of a comparative study of manager’s perceptions of their customers’ opinions of service quality in Australia (as an example of a developed country) and Vietnam (as an example of a developing country in transition to a free market economy).
INTRODUCTION

Defining service quality is difficult and complex task, even in developing economies. In economies that are in transition from central control to market-oriented emphasis, the task has barely been attempted. The importance of defining service quality is important in providing research results of use to professional practitioners. The definition of quality as a standard, of conformance to requirements, which works well in engineering environments is less useful in the intangible world of services. Marketers tend towards the definition of quality as fitness for use, and therefore specifically characterized by the customer in the customer’s terms. Garvin (1987) pointed out that historically “quality” had been used as a defensive measure to preempt failure or to eliminate defects. As analysed by Bradmore (1996), he urged managers to adopt a more aggressive strategy, one that used quality in a positive manner and as an instrument for pleasing customers, not just protecting them from annoyances. Thus a concept of customer-perceived quality can be derived, where quality can be defined only by customers and occurs where an organization supplies goods or services to a specification that satisfies customer needs (McColl, Callaghan and Palmer, 1998).

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction makes intuitive good sense. If customers’ expectations are met or exceeded and this affects the likelihood of repurchase by those customers, or the possibility of positive word-of-mouth promotion resulting in other customers purchasing the organisation’s offering, the long term financial viability of the organization is strengthened or enhanced. This is one of the cardinals of good marketing in the current competitive business aura, and “customer satisfaction” is thus something all good companies should be striving for (Iacobucci, Grayson and Ostrom, 1994). References to this are becoming increasingly common in the mainstream academic literature. For example, Paterson, Johnson and Spreng (1997, P. 4), write, “Recent interest in customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction among both academics and practitioners is due, in part, to the fact that a satisfied customer is viewed as an indispensable means of creating a sustainable advantage in the competitive environment of the 1990s.”
The relationships between customer satisfaction, dissatisfaction, the determinants of satisfaction and the association between these elements and perceived service quality are problematic and ambiguous. There is little dispute, though, that customer satisfaction is a perception held by buyers (see for example, Band, 1989), and that customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction have become an important issue for marketing practitioners (Oliva, Oliver and Macmillan, 1992). Bleuel (1990) showed that there was not a one-to-one correspondence between satisfaction and dissatisfaction and that the elements of dissatisfaction are not the same as the elements of satisfaction. What were regarded as important factors within a service encounter by satisfied customers differed from the elements most important to dissatisfied customers. Beuel (1990), on the other hand, concluded that satisfaction and dissatisfaction lay at either end of a continuum, with a "zone of uncertainty" in between. This zone of uncertainty is influenced by a number of factors, including those outside the control of a supplier, such as the mood of the customer.

Within the zone of uncertainty, Oliva, Oliver and Macmillan (1992) found that the satisfaction and dissatisfaction thresholds might not occur at the same point. The research reported here is one response to this finding; that different elements might well have different effects on different customers, and weightings might usefully be applied to criteria such as those that are brought together in the SERVQUAL construct.

MEASURES OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY

There are a number of generally accepted ways of measuring customer satisfaction (Kotler, 1997). These include complaint and suggestion systems, customer satisfaction surveys, ghost shopping and lost customer analysis. There are numerous dangers with these relatively blunt instruments; customers of course vary, and it is easy for survey results to be accidentally or deliberately distorted as a result of the unscientific nature of many of these surveys, the effects of non-response bias, (Soderlund, 1998) and other effects.

One key variable to success identified by Davidow and Uttal (1989), building on the gaps model of service quality developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), is to fill the gap between what customers see as good service and what competitors
think it is. In this way one firm can differentiate itself and its product from another. Chakrapani (1992) quotes Deming as referring to customers as “the most important part of the production line”. By expanding on its interaction with clients, an organization can rely upon them to shape the business and define the products and services on offer (Kanter, 1991). The influential clients should, of course, be those who are most valuable to the business; investment in service may be wasted if it is focused on customers as the business should lose (Reicheld, 1993).

Once perceived quality service became accepted as an important part of the marketing mix, several efforts were made to define and measure this variable based on the research studies of notably Gronroos (1984); Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988, 1991, 1994); Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1990).

In what is arguably the most significant single contribution to the discipline to date, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) built on the previous work of researchers such as Lovelock and Gronroos and suggested ten dimensions of service quality, based on qualitative research rather than relying on previous constructs of good quality, bearing in mind the demonstrated dissimilarities between service and product quality. Inasmuch as it attempted to define and measure the specific dimensions of service quality, this pioneering work has helped to define much of the work in this discipline over the past decade and a half.

Early writings on service quality like Sasser, Olson and Wyckoff, 1978; and Gronroos, 1982 suggested that perception of service quality result from a comparison of what the customers feel a service provider should offer with the provider’s actual performance; that is to say, a comparison of expectations with performance. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) performed twelve customer focus group interviews, three each in the service sectors of retail banking, credit card, stockbrokerage and appliance repair and maintenance, to test the idea that customer perception of service quality is a function of the expectation-performance gap. This study confirmed the hypothesis, and the author proposed a formal definition of customer perception of service quality as “the degree of direction of discrepancy between customers’ service perceptions and expectations (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1985, p. 48).
Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) synthesised earlier research and conducted extensive focus group work, which confirmed that both outcome and process dimensions influence customers' evaluation of service quality, and revealed ten key evaluative variables that customers might use, regardless of the type of service. This research served as the foundation for the SERVQUAL instrument and subsequent development and refinement of this model resulted in the reduction of some of the overlaps in these initial findings. Later empirical verification (Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1988; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990) reduced the ten dimensions to the five key divisions of SERVQUAL—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. For the purposes of this study, “the original ten dimensions were considered more appropriate than the final five dimensions. From my analyses, the original definitions are more detailed and specific and as such may be easier ... to articulate to the survey respondents”.

Considerable debate has been generated about this instrument, but the most frequent and popular method of operationalising service quality still remains the assessing of expectations and performance on a variety of items believed to represent five key dimensions on service quality (Babakus and Boller, 1992; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). The approach taken in the development of SERVQUAL contains the propositions that customers entertain certain expectations of performance on each of the service dimensions, observe the performance, and subsequently form perceptions of performance by comparing actual performance with expectations. It is essentially the gaps between these two key concepts that are measured by the SERVQUAL instrument. A shortfall between customer expectation and perception of service received will result in a judgment by the customer that quality is poor (Brown and Swartz, 1989; Bolton and Drew, 1991). Not surprisingly, this results in a likelihood of customer dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980; Oliver and DeSarbo, 1988). There has been considerable discussion and disagreement over the SERVQUAL instrument, notably use of both the performance and expectations measures, including questions raised when performance exceeds expectation, and the dimensionality of the instrument over different industry settings, as well as the validity of consumer interpretation of different scores (Smith, 1995), and that the instrument does not draw from the established literature in economics and psychology, and undue focus on process rather than outcomes (Buttle, 1996). There is nevertheless, at least, a general agreement that the twenty-two items are good predictors of overall service.
quality, although for instance, one Australian study comparing service provider training programmes with customer requirements in five-star hotels found it necessary to modify SERVQUAL by deleting the tangible item, with the exception of the statement dealing with the personal appearance of employees (McColl-Kennedy and White, 1997). An application of SERVQUAL to measure patients’ opinions of service quality in hospitals in Hong Kong (Lam, 1997) found SERVQUAL to be consistent and reliable scale but did not, however, confirm the proposed five dimensions of the instrument.

It is therefore considered that the SERVQUAL instrument, while the subject of considerable controversy and modification for specific markets, is nevertheless a well-understood standard that can be used as a basis for comparison and discussion.

THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IN VIETNAM

One of the most dramatic developments in Asia today is the reemergence of Vietnam, not as the belligerent champion of a militant ideology, but in the guise of a pragmatic, open, friendly country seeking a respected place in the world community. Its location on the southern border of China and alongside the sealanes that link East and West gives it a unique strategic leverage (Sage, 1999). It is now fifteen years since the Vietnamese Communist party first initiated a number of reforms intended to renovate economic and social conditions in Vietnam; the “doi moi”, or open door policy, which was introduced as a result of the Party Congress in 1986. These reforms were confirmed and strengthened by subsequent Party congresses in 1991 and 1996. In practice, the reforms have been embraced with enthusiasm, and Ho Chi Minh City is rapidly becoming a major regional trading city, as it was in previous times under the name of Saigon. The capital, Hanoi, is also making considerable advances, as are the regional and rural centers.

Although considerable progress has been made, Vietnam does not offer the same levels of business infrastructure as developed economies such as Australia in areas such as telecommunications, transport, banking, finance and insurance, a free press and media network, sophisticated business law and accounting systems, and support services for marketers such as government data collection agencies, market research specialists, advertising agencies, and graphic design and printing suppliers (Jevons, Di
Virgilio and Pidgeon, 1996). Rapid progress continues to be made; the recent general downturn in South-East Asian economies, while slowing down GDP growth in Vietnam, has not resulted in a negative growth situation as applies to its nearby neighbours. The Asian Development Bank forecast that Vietnam will post the fastest growth in Asia in 1999, with a forecast growth rate of 6.5%, compared with India, 5.2%, zero growth for South Korea, and declines in Hong Kong of 5% and Indonesia of 16% (Export Today, 1999). To some extent this is because the economy is growing from a very small base, and there is little downside from a withdrawal of foreign capital in the first place (Kokko, 1998).

There has been no stock market collapse because there is no stock market in Vietnam at the time.

Vietnam is East Asia’s fourth largest country in terms of population, behind China, Indonesia and Japan, but larger than Korea, with a population of 77 million (US Bureau of the Census, 199). Approximately 80 per cent of Vietnam’s population lives in the rural areas. However, by the year 2030, when the population is expected to reach some 108 million people, the urban component of the population will increase to an expected 39 per cent. The population is also characterized by a large proportion of persons under the age of 15 years. In 1998 the estimate was 34 per cent. The projected increase in per capita GDP coupled with these underlying demographic processes partly explain the strong demands for consumer goods (Jevons, Di Virgilio and Pidgeon, 1999). The author’s practical experience of the business environment in Vietnam, obtained through numerous visits to Vietnam, in comparison with observations in Papua New Guinea and through teaching students from mainland China, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Brunei, Cambodia, Myanmar who traveled to Australia, is of strongly supply-driven orientation. It is presumed that this is a legacy of command-style economics, where the buyer waits to see what the wholesaler has in stock before purchasing. The emphasis on supply problems in marketing channels is also presumably responsible for the general paucity of high profile consumer promotion with which those in fully market-oriented economies are familiar. This paucity is still, although decreasingly, evident. My own observation is that there is a great increase in consumer advertising, most importantly outdoor and television, particularly since the lifting of the US embargo. It is not known whether the use of brand awareness and demand stimulation techniques such as these are having immediate effect on sales of the products promoted; for them to be successful the basic infrastructure problems of distribution must first be addressed and solved. There are two types of trading companies
permitted to distribute products in Vietnam: Government Trading Companies and Foreign Trading Companies. The latter, unencumbered by ministerial affiliations, are leading the development of the distribution system, and have a stronger sales orientation. A generalized distribution channel is for the state to attend to administrative and legal requirements and then pass the product on to the private sector. From this point, the product is very difficult to follow on its path to the final consumer, with great variations in numbers of intermediaries and gross margins. Dealers in sellers’ markets are highly dependent on manufacturers and have low status in both industry and society, hence they have fewer equity concerns and higher tolerance than dealers in other channel contexts (Frazier, Gill and Kale. 1989).

However, the general slowing down in the rate of economic growth resulting from the general economic problems of South-east Asia, together with a concentration of wealth in the hands of a relatively few successful entrepreneurs, has resulted in an increase in buyer choice across industry sectors in Vietnam. The market is becoming less of a seller’s market. With the collapse of the Indonesian rupiah many exports, such as footwear, can no longer compete purely on the basis of price; a Vietnamese export contract denominated in US dollars has become relatively many more times expensive than an Indonesian rupiah contract. (The Vietnamese dong depreciated by only 20% against the US dollar during 1997 and 1998). Business practices, both industrial and consumer, are becoming more influenced by foreign (American, Japanese) attitudes as Vietnamese executives gain more international experience, both by traveling overseas and in dealing with expatriate managers in Vietnam. Tourism and telecommunications are major export earners for Vietnam and this is reflected in the type of businesses in Vietnam that send their staff to business school programmes of various universities in the country. There is strong demand for the customer service quality components of the programmes and it is probable that this is a response to an emerging need across Vietnamese business for understanding this issue.

For the above four reasons – the economic slowdown resulting in the market being less dominated by sellers, the relative increase in cost of doing business in and exporting from Vietnam, the increasing foreign influence on Vietnamese business practices, and the increased attention being paid to service quality issues by Vietnamese business, it is timely to report on the perceptions of managers in Vietnam of the relative importance of service quality dimensions to their customers, and to compare them with those of
managers in a developed market. For the sake of convenience, the market used for comparison in this case is Australia.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

*The Australian survey:* A sample population of professionals, holding membership in the Australian Consumer Service Association (ACSA), was chosen. Individual members pay $120 per annum in exchange for regular newsletters, meetings and events, and an annual awards for excellence in competition. Corporate members pay $750 and can nominate up to ten staff to receive individual membership benefits. The decision was taken to survey only those members in good standing with the organization. Following the editing of the list to eliminate multiple copies of the questionnaire going to the same organization, eventually 503 questionnaires were mailed in the first wave. In the case of corporate memberships, the nominated key contract person was the only one to receive a questionnaire. Where a number of individual members worked at the same organization, the person with the more senior title was chosen. In the case of only one organization, individual members of the Association were not able to be ranked within their employing organization, but fortunately, one of the two persons involved was selected as depth interviewees. In this case the depth interviewee did not receive a questionnaire for completion by agreement. After two waves of follow-ups, 318 useable responses were received.

The subject population is a self-selecting sample of the Australian business population by virtue of the substantial financial commitment required to maintain membership of the Association, leads to the conclusion that this research cannot be easily extrapolated to the whole Australian business population. The subject population is a group of those particularly interested in customer service, and while it can be argued that a proportion of these individuals are opinion leaders there is no guarantee that this is so, or that the proportion of opinion leaders is a significant part of the population that was surveyed.

*The Vietnamese survey:* Careful attempts were made to select a target population with approximately similar psycho-demographic characteristics to the Australian. There is no Vietnamese customer service association, and in addition there is no tradition in Vietnam of completing mail questionnaires. Consequently the obvious match was not possible. The population chosen for surveying was a group of professionals who had
demonstrated their commitment, and/or that of their employers to upgrading customer service and marketing practice generally by enrolling in one of the University graduate business programmes in Vietnam. The cost of a one-week programme is approximately three times the average annual per capita GDP in Vietnam, so the economic commitment is relatively much greater than for the Australian population. The language of instruction was English, but to maximize comprehension the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese (and back-translated into English by a different translator as a check of accuracy) and provided to the respondents in both languages. Informal feedback was that the Vietnamese language version was a useful backup, although most respondents actually completed the English-language version. The questionnaires were personally distributed by the researcher for completion by the respondents in private and returned to the researcher the next day. Forty-nine useable responses were received out of 56 questionnaires distributed.

Results and Discussion

In order to compare the responses from Australian and Vietnamese business managers to the SERVQUAL survey instrument, two types of analyses were undertaken. The first focused on comparing the distribution of the responses to each of the SERVQUAL dimensions. Respondent had been requested to indicate their belief on what they thought their customers regarded as important 'customer expectations'. Respondents were presented with a five point Likert scale for each of the dimensions (from most important to least important).

The index of dissimilarity provides a useful measure to compare the percentage distribution of responses from each country for each of the SERVQUAL dimensions. The resulting indexes are given in Table 1. The index can be interpreted as follows. For the dimension of ‘tangibles’ the index of dissimilarity is 13.76. This implies that for the distribution of responses for both Australian and Vietnamese to be identical, 13.76 per cent of the respondents would need to change their score on the Likert scale. For
the dimension of ‘access’ over 40 per cent of the respondents would need to change their score in order for the two countries to have an identical distribution of responses.

Table 1. Index of Dissimilarity by SERVQUAL Dimensions: Australia-Vietnam Comparison

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Servqual Dimensions</th>
<th>Index of Dissimilarity (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>13.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>9.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>24.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>12.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>25.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>15.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>17.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>40.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>30.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the customer</td>
<td>26.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three distinct patterns emerged from the data in Table 1. Firstly, the SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibles, reliability, competence, credibility, and security have minor variations in the distribution of responses (Cluster 1). The dimensions of responsiveness, courtesy and communication are somewhat more variable (Cluster 2) and the dimension of access varies considerably between the two countries (Cluster 3).

The dimension of access is defined as approachability and ease of contact. It could be speculated that the lower perceived importance of this to Vietnamese is possibly carried forward from the days of traditional Communist control. The author of this paper have observed on numerous occasions and in many different encounters the acceptance of long delays for service access among the Vietnamese consumers. However, it must be considered that the application of the survey instrument is flawed. For the sake of consistency and to avoid distortion, the explanatory examples used by the authors of SERVQUAL were used; in the case of the ‘access’ dimension this reads: “How easy is it for me to get through to my broker over the telephone? Does the credit card
company have a 24 hour toll-free telephone number?”. The fact that there are no stockbrokers in Vietnam was not considered a serious difficulty in this instance since the respondents were well aware of the nature of the service provided, and were able to equate it with other financial services. The technology is available for toll-free telephone access, and although it is as yet little used, it has been publicized widely to the business community by the telecommunication providers in the country. Again, credit cards are not yet widely used by the Vietnamese population, but are available through both foreign and Vietnamese banks and are of course used extensively by foreign visitors.

The areas of responsiveness, courtesy and communication may have historical and cultural reasons for the significant differences shown. The researcher himself has observed that there are differences in the way in which clerks and officials treat foreigners (with an assumption of respect for their importance and/or wealth) and local Vietnamese. Locals are treated with noticeably less professionalism in these regards. The perception by managers that their customers find these aspects relatively unimportant, by comparison with their Australian counterparts, is an interesting finding. This area has been identified by the author for further research.

### Table 2: Differences Between Australian and Vietnamese Managers’ Perceptions of the Importance of the SERVQUAL Dimensions to Their Customers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Servqual Dimensions</th>
<th>Significant Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>.815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>.407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtesy</td>
<td>.016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the customer</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second level of analysis compares the mean scores on each SERVQUAL dimension for the respondents as a whole from each country. The analysis was carried out using the conventional independent t-test. The results of this analysis are given in Table 2, and show that there are significant differences between each of the countries on all SERVQUAL dimensions with the exception of tangibles, reliability and competence. This analysis is at least consistent with the results in Table 1 but extend further the possibility of real differences between the two countries.

CONCLUSIONS AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

Australia and Vietnam are countries that are very different in many ways. The SERVQUAL construct, developed in the USA for American conditions has been successfully used in other environments such as Hong Kong (Lam, 1997). With the rapid globalisation of business, there is a strong need for understanding of customers’ needs in a variety of environments.

The research methodologies, although different for the two countries are considered to be the most appropriate in view of the different conditions applying in the two countries.

The results of the index of dissimilarity test provide interesting conclusions. Cluster 1, with small variations in the distribution of responses indicates that attitudes to the SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibles, reliability, competence, creditability and security are of similar importance to managers in the two countries. To some extent, this validates the underlying assumption that it is valid to apply a concept from the developed world to a developing country. Cluster 2, showing variation in attitudes towards the dimensions of responsiveness, courtesy and communication, has intuitive appeal to anyone from a market-driven economy who has had dealings with from a centrally controlled regime. These dimensions are those in which service quality gaps can occur in highly regulated bureaucracies. Cluster 3, the dimension of access has the largest variation between the two populations. The magnitude of this variation is due in part to methodological issues, but the major problems with infrastructure described in this paper may well have led to a lowering of expectations in this regard.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A longitudinal study to measure whether cluster 2 approaches cluster 1 over time would be an interesting way to establish signs of continued globalisation of attitudes of Vietnamese managers.

A comparison of attitudes to those dimensions that fell into cluster 2 for Vietnamese managers with managers in large bureaucratic organizations in developed economies would also provide interesting insights into whether the dissimilarities are based on some form of national characteristic or a form of business culture.

A test of the dimension of access using different examples and descriptions would remove the possibility of methodological problems and provide more confidence to the conclusion reached above.

The next stage of research for the author of this paper is to attempt correlation of these findings with various documented characteristics of national business culture.
REFERENCES


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