



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### IMPACT OF PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY ON BUSINESS CUSTOMERS SATISFACTION “AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF TUNISIE TELECOM OPERATORS”

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to present customers satisfaction perception towards service quality provided by Tunisie Telecom operators in Tunisia. For many years, the telecommunications industry has been seeking to adapt its technology to help operators remain competitive in a competitive environment fraught with sophisticated new services. Today, we witness a real shift from supply-oriented marketing to demand-oriented marketing, from product-oriented marketing to customer-oriented marketing, also known as push marketing, a loyalty marketing that is increasingly becoming relational in focus. This form of marketing is suitable for customers who require more services, more facilities and an increasingly customized communication. In this paper, our starting point is a review of the literature in which we try to define some relevant key terms such as perceived quality and satisfaction and the nature of the relationship that may bind these two concepts. Second, we report on an empirical study conducted in order to better understand the impact of perceived quality on the satisfaction of industrial customers with their phone operator "Tunisie Telecom". To this end, a questionnaire-based quantitative study was conducted. Our study consisted of the following stages: the sampling stage, questionnaire development and administration, analysis via SPSS, an analysis stage and the results reporting stage. Indeed, the study confirms the presence of a causal relationship pointing to the positive impact of quality on satisfaction. Indeed, Tunisie Telecom could improve the quality of its offerings and determine its customers' needs in terms of service delivery. Moreover, Tunisian companies showed a great deal of satisfaction with the performance of Tunisie Telecom's sales service while wishing for a continuous improvement of its offers. These results will enable Tunisie Telecom to be able to identify its offerings and meet well the needs and expectations of its target customers. In addition, Tunisie Telecom should focus on managing service quality and customer satisfaction to provide a sustainable competitors and insure an ongoing business development tool.

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## INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the service sector, as seen in an increased competition and investments in this sector, have led service providers companies to seek effective ways to differentiate themselves on the market. The role of customers in any business cannot be under-estimated and every business has the prime objective of satisfying customers its existing and attracting new customers (Murali *et al.*, 2016). In such an environment, Tunisian firms have evolved mostly in saturated markets, where products are no longer commodities.

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Thus, product differentiation has become increasingly complex in a context where customers are increasingly becoming more demanding. In the past, the dominant belief was a customer was acquired forever, simply because alternatives are almost absent. However, since the late 80s, an increasingly competitive environment took over and companies grew aware that customers start to perceive company value differently (some are more profitable than others). Accordingly, a better understanding of customers is of an order so as the customer should be placed at the center of the company's interest, and take into account their expectations and why not establish long-term relationships with them. Under this perspective, the Tunisie Telecom operator had to move in similar lines to better know and understand its customers in view of better identify

their needs and respond to them. This approach turned out to be complex in particular for the services and B2B marketing sectors because of their specific characteristics. Overall, quality is manifested in the ability of the company to meet customer expectations various dimensions of the service, including sales and the after-sales service. These service features of customer purchasing behavior and commitment in the long term. Accordingly, in this study, we will try to answer what is the impact of corporate customers' perceived service quality on their satisfaction?

### **Meaning of Perceived service quality**

Zeithaml (1981) defines perceived quality is "the consumer's judgment of the degree of excellence or superiority awarded to an entity" (Zeithaml, 1981), while for Grönroos (1984) "perceived service quality is the result of a comparison between customer expectations and the actual experiences of a service". Similarly, Parasuraman et al stress that it the result "of a difference between customers' expectations and perceptions". In a perfect world, perceived quality is similar to expected quality. However, this latter is hard to achieve because of the important role of customers' irrational and subjective norms in perceiving expected quality and achieved quality. Measuring quality is both the starting point and the end of an approach that aims for customer satisfaction. In the marketing literature, quality has been the subject of a great debate. For some, it should be defined in terms of the gaps between customer expectations and their assessment of the service performance. For others, quality is the unique result of customers' assessment of service performance. The company then should measure its service quality to make the necessary adjustments for the sake of continuous improvement. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) defineservice quality as the gap between expectations and perceptions of the service. Expectations represent customers' desires and needs. They are normative and represent a compromise between an ideal service and an adequate service (Prakash, 1984; Perron, 1998). To identify the main pitfalls in service quality management, researchers have developed a model called SERVQUAL (Service Quality) consisting ofthe five dimensions of tangibility, reliability, empathy, utility, and insurance.

### **Meaning of Satisfaction**

In recent years, consumer satisfaction is recognized as a key concept in marketing, as seen in its growing role in corporate strategy and in the academic literature (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001;Kombo, 2015). Companies endure most of the economic movements, fluctuations and globalization of markets as well as changes in consumer behavior. Accordingly, customer satisfaction has become essentially and strategically important. To survive, companies had to satisfy their customers, and eventually influence their future behavior (purchasing behavior, positive word of mouth) and corporate profits (Fornell, 1992; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Zahorik and Keiningham, 1995; Anderson, et al., 1997; Ngobo, 2000; Rust.). In the literature, the different attempts to define the concept of satisfaction converge on one particular dimension of satisfaction; "the feeling of pleasure or displeasure that arises from comparing consumer past expectations and a consumption experience" (Lendrevie et al., 2006). We can also define satisfaction as "a positive or a negative impression expressed by a customer towards a shopping and / or a consumption experience. Satisfaction thus results from

comparing expectations about a product and its perceived performance (KOTLER et al., 2006). Nevertheless, consumers' assessment and judgment of a service rests on a set of criteria that should be identified: subjectivity, relativity and durability.

### **Objective of research problem**

In a multi mobile-operator market, Tunisian consumers grew tempted to be on edge with technological innovations and to acquire the latest marketed mobile services. The aim of this study then is to empirically determine the impact of service quality of the telephone operator Tunisie Telecom by examining a representative sample of business customers. We will thus assess the service quality of Tunisie Telecom and this through the quality of its offers and servuction. Meanwhile, we will try to determine the effect of service quality on satisfaction which is measured by the service delivery process and that of the commercial service. Moreover, in this study, we will try to measure satisfaction degree with the services offered by the telephone operator Tunisie Telecom. Hence, the main goal of our studyis to provide some answers to the following question: To what extent does service quality, measured by the quality of offers and servuction, influence satisfaction of Tunisie Telecom'susers? Our questions can be formulated as follows:

- Are Tunisie Telecom'soffers attractive enough?
- Are Tunisian corporate customers satisfied with Tunisie Telecom's services?
- What is the impact of service quality on the service delivery processes?
- What is the impact of service quality on the commercial service intervention process?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To reach our objectives, we adopted a quantitative approach through a questionnaire-based survey to be described in this section. Thus, in what follows, we will present the methodology, the sampling method, questionnaire design and administration and the used measurement instruments. In this study, our target population is Tunisian companies from different industries and adopting Tunisie Telecom as their operator. To facilitate data collection, we opted for a convenience sampling method which involves randomly selecting the business customers that can provide relevant data. Our interest is Tunisie Telecom's business customers operating in the whole country. We limited ourselves to a sample size of 50 companies, as we believe that such a size is sufficient to conduct our study in the best conditions. To conduct our study, we designed a questionnaire administered to business customers under contract with Tunisie Telecom. We took care of formulating simple questions, intelligible for Tunisie Telecom's business customers. Therefore, our questions moved from the most general to the most specific. Indeed, our questionnaire (Appendix 1) consists of four main sections presented in a six-page form. The first section focuses on service quality, the second targets satisfaction of business customers and the last section focuses on the respondents' socio-demographic data. Note that the measurement scales used in our study were taken from the literature and as such, they were valid as measurement instruments. To measure all the variables, we chose to use

five-point Likert type scales. Before collecting the final data, we pre-tested the questionnaire on a convenience sample of five (5) Tunisian companies adopting Tunisie Telecom as their operator. This stage was very useful as it allowed us to check intelligibility of our instructions and statements and to decide on the questionnaire's reliability. With acceptable results, we proceeded with the data collection. The questionnaire was administered by email to business customers of Tunisie Telecom. The collected data was analyzed by the "SPSS 20.0" software.

**DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS**

In this section, we first describe our sample then we move to analyze and interpret the results.

center and transportation sectors represent 4% of the total sample. Finally, 2% of the respondents belong to the retailing, insurance, finance, petrochemicals and export sectors.

**Selection criteria of Tunisie Telecom**

As for the selection criteria of Tunisie Telecom as a telephone operator, 21% of the respondents found that its service was good, 19% of them highlighted service quality, while 36% believe that it is a historic operator and presents advantageous offers. 13% of the respondents highlighted the advantageous tariffs per minutes as selection criterion while promotions were cited by 8% of the total sample. Finally, a minority of 3% chose the operator for other reasons.

**Table 1. Purification and reliability of the "Service Delivery" scale**

Items	Variance explained	Factor loadings on component 1
I know about all Tunisie Telecom's offers	0.435	0.660
Tunisie Telecom's offers are better than those of other competitors.	0.759	0.871
The services of Tunisie Telecom meet our initial expectations.	0.593	0.770
The offers of Tunisie Télécom may meet our future expectations.	0.755	0.869
Promotions and offers may incite us to switch operator.	0.363	-0.603
Reliability		0,625
KMO		0,751
Bartlett's Sphericity test		0
% of variance		58,115%

**Table 2. Purification and reliability of the "servuction quality" scale**

Items	Weight	Factor loadings on component 1	Factor loadings on component 2
I like the company's staff welcome	0.592	0.115	0.761
Promises made by the salespeople are genuine	0.696	0.816	0.170
Tunisie Telecom's staff is trustworthy	0.668	0.722	0.383
Access to senior managers when needed is easy.	0.534	0.465	0.564
In case of problems, Tunisie Telecom adopts a friendly and a reassuring attitude.	0.729	0.579	0.628
The sales manager devotes an individual attention to us.	0.669	0.699	0.425
The salespeople update us on new offers.	0.697	0.835	0.013
Response time is acceptable.	0.651	0.560	0.580
The staff is friendly and always smile.	0.754	0.109	0.862
% of variance		36,266%	30,295%
Components		Service quality of the sales department	Service quality of other departments
Scale reliability		0,881	
KMO		0,750	
Bartlett's sphericity test		0	
% of total variance		66,561 %	

**Table 3. Purification and reliability of the «service delivery process» scale**

Items	Weight	Factor loadings on component 1
Analysis and comprehension of needs	0.749	0.865
Clarity and accuracy of the offer.	0.799	0.894
Meeting deadlines and planning	0.484	0.695
Friendliness of contact	0.590	0.768
Scale reliability	0,819	
KMO	0,759	
Bartlett's sphericity test	0	
% of variance	65,549%	

**Descriptive analysis of results: The sample**

We administered our questionnaire to 50 companies different in size and industry. The sample distribution by size indicates that large companies represent a majority of 58% of all respondents, 36% are medium-sized businesses, while small companies represent a minority of 6%. The sample distribution by industry indicates that the food industry represents a majority of 12% of the total sample, the banking sector meanwhile has 10%, 8% for the tourism sector and 6% for the communications sector, large corporate groups and public companies. The automotive, industrial, pharmaceutical, call

**Tunisie Telecom's Offers:** In this section, we will be reporting on the attraction degree of Tunisie Telecom's offers for the interviewed companies. In fact, the highest percentage represents respondents who consider Tunisie Telecom's offers as moderately attractive (52%).

This might be explained by the stiff competition of telephone companies that are always looking for more and more attractive offers for the consumer who became therefore demanding of offers that best meet their needs. Furthermore, 30% of the total sample consider that the offers are attractive,

which is a sign of satisfaction, but that does not prevent Tunisie Telecom from expanding its market share, which will be necessarily achieved by attractive offers. In addition, 18% of companies consider the offers unattractive. This percentage should be taken seriously by Tunisie Telecom's managers not to lose their customers and to attract others.

**Customers' standing use of Tunisie Telecom:** In order to measure satisfaction degree of businesses, it is interesting to know their long-standing use of Tunisie Telecom. Indeed, 38% use Tunisie Telecom between [1 year, 3 years] and [3 years, 5 years]. Furthermore, 24% of the total sample have been receiving offers by Tunisie Telecom for more than 5 years. These results allow us to conclude that the companies in question are very familiar with the services of Tunisie Telecom, which will be very significant in the overall assessment of their satisfaction.

**Overall satisfaction with offers / service delivery:** At this stage, we want to determine all customers' overall satisfaction with Tunisie Telecom's offers / delivery. It seems that most companies (86%) are satisfied. Only a minority of companies representing 14% are dissatisfied. It is therefore clear that overall satisfaction with Tunisie Telecom is generally acceptable because most companies expressed their satisfaction. However, no company is found to be very dissatisfied.

### *The "Service Delivery" Scale*

A factor analysis applied to 5 items allowed the extraction of a single factor that explains by itself 58.115% of variance. KMO is 0.751 and reliability is 0.625.

### *The "servuction quality" scale*

A factor analysis applied to 9 items allowed the extraction of two components explaining 66.561% of variance. KMO is 0.750 indicating an acceptable coherence between the items. Reliability is 0.989, indicating a good homogeneity of the measurement scale.

### *The "Service delivery process" scale*

Factor analysis is applied to 4 items allowing for the extraction of a single factor that explains itself 65.549% of variance. KMO is 0,759 indicating a significant coherence between items and reliability is 0.819.

### *The "sales service intervention process" scale*

A factor analysis is applied to eight items allowing the extraction of two factors recovering 69.339% of variance. KMO is 0.810 indicating a significant coherence between items.

**Table 4. Purification and reliability of the "sales service intervention process" scale**

Items	Weight	Factor loadings on component 1	Factor loadings on component 2
Availability of the sales service	0.752	0.854	0.152
Response time of the technical service	0.810	0.123	0.891
Network quality	0.524	0.648	0.323
Your satisfaction with salespeople	0.774	0.777	0.412
Assistance (phone, fax, mail)	0.556	0.727	0.168
Relational skills and quality of attendance	0.599	0.729	0.261
Efficiency and competence	0.754	0.329	0.804
Punctuality	0.778	0.411	0.781
% of variance		55,519%	13,424%
Components		Availability of technical service	Service reliability
Scale reliability	0,871		
KMO	0,810		
Bartlett's sphericity test	0		
% of total variance	69,339 %		

### *Purification of the scales*

Before interpreting our results, we performed a purification procedure of the constructs of our study, through a principal component analysis (PCA). PCA is a descriptive multivariate data analysis method, which aims at extracting the best a set of variables using a small number of principal components or factors. The measurement scales used are 5-point Likert type scales ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Indeed, such a scale is probably the best known format in opinion polls. Thus, to extract the factorial structure of our scales, we used PCA.

The extracted factors should explain more than 50% of total variance (Igalens and Roussel, 1998). To ensure the relevance of the PCA, the analysis amounts first to determining a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient greater than 0.6 (Hair et al, 1988). Second, Bartlett's sphericity test should be significant as well. Finally, an analysis of internal reliability, represented by Cronbach's Alpha, is necessary to estimate the reliability of the scales. This coefficient should be greater than 0.7

Reliability is 0.871, pointing to a good homogeneity of the measurement scale.

### *Validation of the relationship between tested variables*

- *Quality of offerings and services has a significant impact on customer satisfaction*
- *Quality of offerings and services has a significant impact on the service delivery process*

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) in Table 5 below indicates that the model is statistically significant as Fisher  $F = 7.418$  is higher than the tabulated value of  $2\alpha$  at a significance level of zero. The F test indicates significance at 0.000 which is lower than our statistical threshold, then we can generalize the results to the entire population by confirming the accuracy of our statistics. The table below shows the results on the relationship between service quality as measured by the quality of offers and servuction and service delivery processes. The results in Table 5 indicate that the quality of offers and services can explain by itself nearly 39.7% of the variance in the service delivery process, i.e. 39.7% the variance of the service delivery

process can be predicted by Tunisie Telecom's offers and quality of its service delivery.

**Table 5. The results on the relationship between service quality and the service delivery process**

Indices	Values
R <sup>2</sup>	0,397
β offer	0,445
P	0,002**
t student	3,240
β service delivery	0,122
P	0,009**
t student	3,012
β sales service quality	0,06
P	0,001***
t student	3,465
β other services quality	0,182
P	0,151
t student	1,461

The regression analysis shows that only Tunisie Télécom's services quality, except the sales service, has no significant impact on the service delivery process since t-Student (1,461) is below the tabulated value at a significance level (0.151) greater than the critical threshold of 5%. Furthermore, we can conclude at this level that Tunisian companies' satisfaction with service delivery is significantly and positively influenced by the telephone operator's offers, the service delivery and the servuction quality of the sales department. However, the offers are most influential of the service delivery process, followed by the services offered by the operator in question. All this leads us to confirm the positive relationship between satisfaction level with service delivery processes and Tunisie Telecom's offer / service quality. Offerings and service quality has a significant impact on the sales service response process.

#### ***Offers and services quality has a significant impact on the availability of the sales service***

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that the model is statistically significant as Fisher F = 8.835 is higher than the tabulated value of 2at a significance level of 0%. The F test indicates significance of 0.000 which is lower than our statistical threshold, then we can generalize the results to the entire population, confirming the accuracy of our findings. The table below reports the results of the relationship between service quality as measured by offers and servuction quality, and the availability of the sales service.

**Table 6. The relationship between service quality and availability of the sales service**

Indices	Values
R <sup>2</sup>	0,440
β offers	0,342
P	0,032**
t-student	2,216
β service delivery	0,340
P	0,039**
t-student	2,131
β Sales service quality	0,538
P	0,000***
t-student	3,828
β Other services quality	0,285
P	0,022**
t-student	2,379

The results reported in Table 6 indicate that offers and services quality can explain by itself nearly 44% of the variance of the

availability of the sales service, i.e. 44% of the variance of the availability of the sales service can be predicted by Tunisie Telecom's offers and the quality of its service delivery. The regression analysis shows that offers and service quality has a significant impact on the availability of the sales service since t-student values are higher than the tabulated values at a significance level below the threshold. Therefore, Tunisian companies' satisfaction with the availability of the sales service is significantly and positively influenced by the operator's offers, its service delivery and the servuction quality of the sales department. Therefore, we confirm the positive relationship between satisfaction with the availability of the sales service and Tunisie Telecom's offerings / service quality.

#### ***Offerings and service quality has a significant impact on the reliability of the sales service***

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates that the model is statistically significant as Fisher F = 4.039 is higher than the tabulated value of 2at a significance level of 0%. The F test indicates a significance of 0.007 which is lower than our statistical threshold, then we can generalize the results to the entire population, confirming the accuracy of our findings. The table below reports the results on the relationship between service quality as measured by offers and servuction quality and reliability of the sales service.

**Table 7. The relationship between service quality and reliability of the sales service**

Indices	Values
R <sup>2</sup>	0,514
β offer	0,149
P	0,405
t-student	0,840
β Service delivery	0,511
P	0,008**
t-student	2,794
β The sales service quality	0,142
P	0,004**
t-student	2,883
β Other services quality	0,019
P	0,892
t-student	0,136

The results reported in Table 7 indicate that offers and services quality can explain by itself nearly 51.4% of the variance in the reliability of the sales service, i.e. 51.4 % of the variance in the reliability of the sales service can be predicted by Tunisie Telecom's offers and quality of its service delivery. Furthermore, the regression analysis shows that the service and the sales service delivery have a significant impact on the reliability of the sales service since t-student values are higher than the tabulated values at a significance level below the threshold. Moreover, offers quality and other services delivery, except the sales service, have no significant impact on the reliability of the sales service. Therefore, we can conclude that the Tunisian companies' satisfaction with the availability of the sales service is significantly and positively influenced by service delivery and the servuction quality of the sales department. All of this leads us to confirm the positive relationship between satisfaction with the sales service reliability and Tunisie Telecom's offers / services quality.

#### **Conclusion**

Analysis of the results outlined that the progress of each of the operators functioning in the Tunisian market (Tunisie

Telecom, Tunisiana and Orange) is not ensured by simply broadening their customer, but rather by their ability to satisfy customers and especially corporate customers. Bearing this mind, in our study we tried to determine the impact of perceived quality on the satisfaction of Tunisie Telecom's corporate customers. First, through a literature review, we could eschew the different theories explaining the studied concepts. At this level, it seemed necessary to define some key terms such as the notions of perceived quality and satisfaction and the nature of the relationship between them. Second, in order to better understand the impact of perceived quality on satisfaction of corporate customers with their phone operator "Tunisie Telecom", a questionnaire-based survey was conducted over a sample of 50 companies. Accordingly, we found that this concept is very strategic for the company, and deserves further scrutiny. It is important to note that comparing theoretical with our empirical results allowed us to show the multidimensionality of the concept quality, the relationship between quality and satisfaction as well as the presence of a causal relationship between quality and satisfaction.

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