

The Opportunity for a Reconsideration of the Dimensions of the Assessment Model of the Customers Satisfaction

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Abstract:

This paper started from the implementation of the sustainable development concept, for every organization. This requests the reconsideration of the environmental protection and quality assurance policies role, inside of the organizations. The authors consider that the utilization of the specific methods, techniques and instruments request a new approach of the dimensions of the evaluation model for customer satisfaction by including a new one, called The Green Dimension.

Key-words: customer satisfaction, sustainable development, model of the dimensions of customer satisfaction, Green Dimension.

1. Problematic of the satisfaction investigation

In the last few years, a new trend emerged in the business environment, which means to give a special attention to the relationships with the customers, giving them the utmost importance and seeing them as an asset needing to be kept and taken into account. Managers have recognized the pressure of sustainable development as a serious challenge and a major strategic issue.

Although pressures vary across industrial and national contexts, they are increasingly changing the rules of competition, making existent competencies obsolete, creating winners, losers and opportunities for niche players.

A sustainable, low carbon economy will require a paradigm shift in thinking and *doing*. A global sustainability strategy often focuses on risks and compliance; however, the imperative for change requires new approaches to strategic business development and product innovation. Customers – whether they are consumers, retailers, businesses or government – are demanding *sustainable solutions*. Organizations must Adapt or Die.

Major companies make important efforts to analyze the customers' satisfaction, in order to maximize it, leading to the clients' loyalty and keeping or, eventually, raising the level of the relationships.

This kind of analysis must offer objective and relevant results, that can be directly applied in order to optimize an offer; it has as main purpose to find the factors determining the customers' behaviour. In order to do these, new conceptual tools are necessary, based on a methodology which points out the optimal choice of those sets of questions used in surveys and which integrates and processes, by adapted models, the answers [4].

The European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) model (fig.1) provides a potentially useful framework as it suggests a model of the relationships that lead to long-term loyalty. Kristensen, Martensen and Grønholdt [2] described the ECSI model as, "a structural equation model with unobservable latent variables...that link customer satisfaction to its determinants and, in turn, to its consequence, namely customer loyalty."

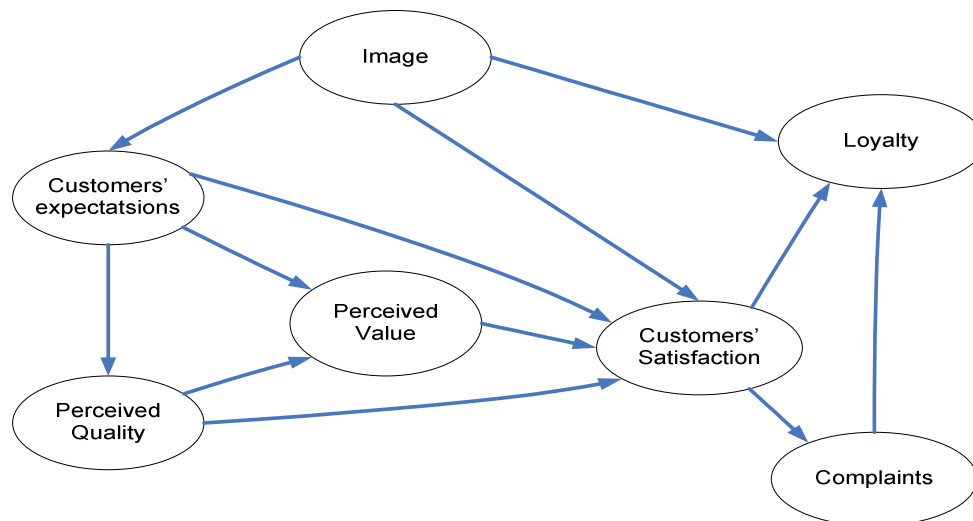


Fig.1 ECSI – European Customer Satisfaction Index
 Source: Kristensen, K., Martensen, A., and Grønholdt, L., 2000

The used method is based on verified theories concerning the customers' behaviour and its goal is to determine the perceived quality and the company's image by the customers or the loyalty of the clients.

The main questions imposed by the research of the customers' satisfaction, in relational marketing, can be resumed to four essential aspects:

- How can the customers' satisfaction be measured?
- What is the ratio of the satisfied clients in all customers?
- What are the main indicators of the measurement/assessment of the satisfaction?
- What is the evolution of the level of the customers' satisfaction?

The answers of these questions start from the comparison between the real performance and the desired performance. Bender's Model (1991) and Rapp's Model (1995), cited by Schneider [6] point on five dimensions for the customers' satisfaction assessment:

1. technical quality of the product;
2. quality of the reputation;
3. quality of the service;
4. quality of personal relationships and
5. perception of the price.

Satisfaction represents a veritable key of modelling the acquisition behaviour of the client, being supported by three groups of variables:

1. cognitive variables (based on the qualitative superiority of the products given by the performance);
2. affective variables (based on the emotions produced to the customers) and
3. conative variables (based on the interaction between the provider and the client in the buying act) [3].

he paradigm of cumulated satisfaction gradually replaced and improved the static vision upon the satisfaction as a status-quo in the relationship with the customer. This is the result of a learning process, which can be developed only in the presence of a stable client who repetitively asks for a specific product, brand or company in order to satisfy a specific need, this meaning a manifestation of the attachment to the benefits offered by the company.

2. For big companies, more green means cheaper

In the actual social-economical context, the products quality dictates the organizational competitiveness because it ensures the adaptive capacity to the more dynamic market conditions.

Actual conditions:

- The enhancement of the competition by markets globalization;

- The growth of the consumers exigency, determined by the technical progress, especially the communications;
- The growth of the society exigency, related to life, health and environment protection; in this respect, new restrictions and regulations regarding the ecological characteristics of the products and production processes appeared.

In this context, the competitive advantage can be obtained by:

- The consumers confidence in products – quality certification;
- The consumers confidence in the provider – the implementation and certification of a quality management system;
- The customers' satisfaction – the achievement of a product which meets the customer's demands. [7].

Sustainable development is not just about the environment, but about the economy and our society as well. Sustainable development means development based on patterns of production and consumption that can be pursued into the future without the degradation of people or environment. If sustainable development is to be successful, the attitudes of individuals as well as governments with regard to our current lifestyles and the impact they have on the environment will need to change.

A healthy environment is essential in order to ensure the welfare and the quality of life. Pollution generates important damage and costs. These determined the governments to promote a new concept in order to disconnect the economical growth from the environmental degradation, by promoting the eco-efficiency and by interpreting the high environment protection standards as a challenge for innovation, new markets generation and business opportunities.

Sustainable development offers a frame for communities in order to use the resources more efficiently, to create efficient infrastructures, to protect and improve the quality of life, which consolidate their economy. Sustainable development can help create a healthy community which can sustain both the current generation and the next ones.

A modern organization is evaluated beyond its economical performances, management quality and communication policy. The evaluation must take in consideration the contribution of the organization to the social life of the community. A company is part of public life and it has duties to the society, by its definition as *juridical person*. WBSCD (World Business Sustainable Council Development) defines *The Corporate Social Responsibility* as a concept which states that organizations, especially (but not only) corporations, have an obligation to consider the

interests of customers, employees, shareholders, communities and ecological consideration in all of their operations [5]. This obligation is seen to extend beyond their statutory obligation to comply with legislation. Such programs became veritable marketing appliances that bring incontestable image benefits for their initiators. Corporations acquire a “human face”, being more than simply products and services providers. [8]

The present investments bring the future performance. This expression is very appropriate in the case of the sustainable development projects, because the companies that have long term strategies, considered as visionary, always have more benefits than those based upon the classical management fundaments, orientated towards traditional resources.

“More green means cheaper”, pointed Jozsef Tarsoly, general manager of Coca-Cola Hungary, first beneficiary of a green plant.

People want an ecologic approach of everyday life, but they want personal benefits or at least an awareness that can be transposed in stimulations or facilitations. Beyond the awareness, these problems must be assumed.

The technological advance and new green politics of The European Union address companies to invest in “green products”, like an eco trend in business. As a consequence, “*green marketing*” will be more aggressive, affirm GreenBiz.com analysts [10].

All these aspects mentioned above made us take into consideration another dimension, called *The Green Dimension*, in order to model the customers’ satisfaction.

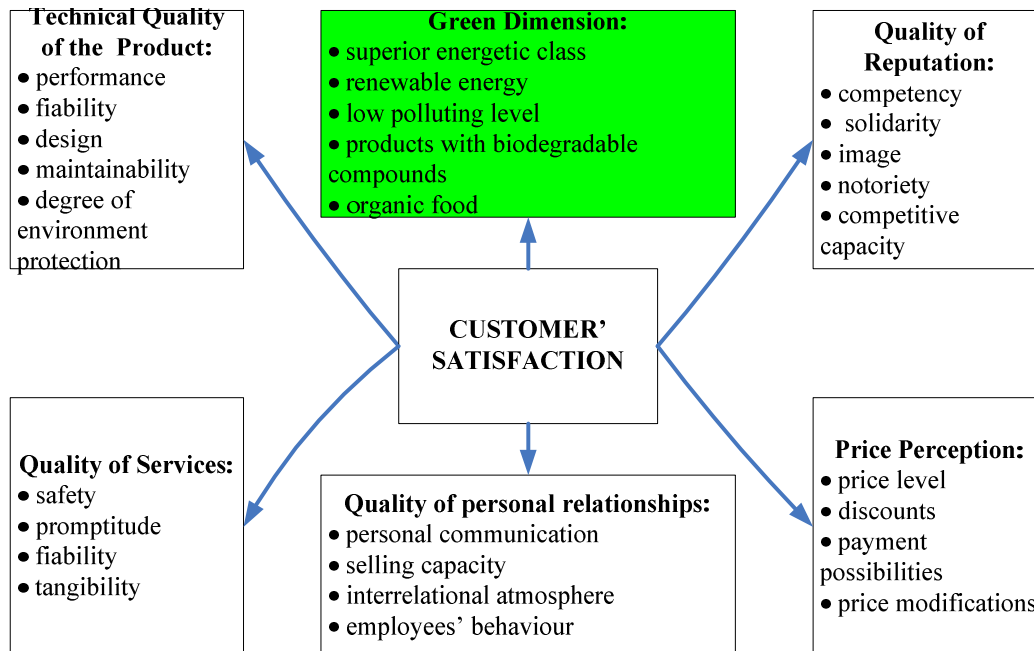


Fig. 2. A new Model of the assessment of customers' satisfaction

Reporting this dimension to the ECSI model, we can point out some aspects:

- In respect of image, the green dimension can be recognized in the concept of *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*. The CSR activities of a company bring benefits at two levels: a social level and a company level. The benefits at society level are the easiest to understand. They belong to the welfare and interests of the public. Knowing and analyzing the benefits at company level, by general business strategy, are essential.
- There are two factors which actually make CSR a redoubtable tool in a brand development:
 - Customers became more informed, more able to express their opinions and more preoccupied of topics like health, environment or social problems;
 - The market has become busier and brands were forced to find new and relevant methods to develop emotional links with the public. Just because they respond to these emotional problems, the CSR programmes represent a good opportunity to communicate the values of a brand in a memorable way.

- Regarding *perceived value*, *The Green Dimension* can be taken into consideration in many respects. So, Daedalus Consulting and Green Report, in partnership, performed the first Romanian quantitative research on environmental problems. The survey's result was published in February 2008. In respect of the willingness of the Romanians to pay for „green products”, organic food can be distinguished, because 73.1% of the respondents declared to be willing to pay more. Fewer than 50% would pay more for renewable energy (49.1%) or for products with biodegradable compounds (36.3%). A medium percent that would be added to the actual costs of the products is between 10% and 14%. 30% of the respondents declared willing to pay these extra costs for renewable energy, 28.3% for biodegradable products and 25.8% for organic food. [9]

3. Conclusions

The top management must ensure that the company's personnel know the customer's requirements and apply them to increase the level of customer satisfaction. The whole activity must be focused on understanding and anticipating the current and future needs of the customers, and trying to fulfil them by:

- observing the laws regarding quality, environmental protection, health and occupational safety, applicable to the activities that take place within the organization, international conventions to which Romania has adhered, as well as compliance with the E.U. Directives;
- continuous monitoring of the problems regarding quality, environmental issues, hazards, as well as health and occupational safety risks;
- minimization of loss and consumption optimization for natural resources, materials and energy.

Organizations must collect and analyze information regarding: technical quality of the product, quality of reputation, quality of the service quality of the personal relationships, price perception and green dimension. After these analyses, new objectives can be established in order to determine growth of the customers' satisfaction degree, taking into consideration the six dimensions of the enounced model.

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