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Features' Evaluation of Goods, Services and E-Services; Electronic Service Characteristics Exploration

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Abstract

The term service has several meanings depending on the field of expertise and the viewpoint it is considered from. Although the exportation of services is not new the degree to which information and communications technologies are facilitating the rapid acceleration of service exportation are new. Today, trade in services is one of the hot issues on international trade and the world economy. Numerous enterprises have already moved or planning to move their traditional services and goods to the electronic environment. In this regard, it is vital to know the characteristics of each type of products. This research is going to explore the characteristics of electronic services and then evaluating the features of goods, services and e-services.

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1. Introduction

In today's intensive competitive environments the design and delivery of innovative, flexible, and effective services is of paramount importance for business success [1, 2]. The term "service" has many different meanings depending on the field of expertise and the perspective it is considered from [3].

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During the last ten years a large amount of services have been launched to electronic markets and the same kind of development will certainly continue. In many cases traditional services have simply moved to electronic environment and human work is partly substituted by computers and software [4, 5]. This was predicted to revolutionize the way of doing marketing in a short period of time. However, the development has been slow, but the trend towards e-services is clear. As Lovelock et al. [6] point out Internet Revolution is still in its early stages.

Electronic services are likely to strengthen the competitiveness of organizations as these technologies may change the relationship with clients by creating a stronger connection between organizations and its customers [7]. Although in terms of electronic services, there is no unique definition and scholars have been viewed it from various perspectives, thus they define e-service in a variety of ways, in this research E-services known as services which are delivered with the mediation of information technology [8].

Increases in labor costs and innovations in technology have contributed to the growth of Internet-based e-service [9]. Although e-service would reduce the cost of any transaction it can adjust the customer desires by movement from time and location based activities to nonlocational and nontemporal behaviours [10]. However a system can improve the job performance but sometimes users are not eager to use the systems [11, 12].

The main distinguish between electronic service and traditional services are the channels they use to deliver their services, further they interact with their users with different methods. In real world, customers need to go to the companies or store physically to receive the firms services, while they are able to get e-services via the electronic channels (Internet, PDA, Mobile phone ...) [7, 13]. E-service initiatives have been proven to deliver significant benefits, both for suppliers of electronic services (public authorities and organizations) and for the public, to whom services are addressed [7]. This paper is going to present the characteristics of electronic service and then evaluate the feature of goods, services and e-services based on the introduced characteristics.

2. Services and electronic services

The boom around service characteristics started in the late 1970's, but after the boom period very little has happened in this area. Recently, some scholars (e.g., [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]) have presented justified criticism against some of the earlier statements.

The starting point of our article is to revisit the rather early article of [18]. In that article he defined services as follows:

"Service, actually a service-like marketed entity, is a benefit providing object of transaction that is a more or less abstract activity or process of activities essentially produced, marketed and consumed in a simultaneous interaction."

More recently some other service scholars have also adopted the interactive element in their definitions, e.g., [19] defines services "as an act or performance offered by one party to another (...)". Also Grönroos [20] stresses process nature and interaction between customers and service providers. Moreover, Liljander and Strandvik [21] divide services to episodic and relational ones, where the latter comprises the interactive nature of services.

3. Electronic services' characteristics

In this section, we continued by discussing the commonly referred service characteristics from the electronic service perspective. These characteristics which typically are connected to services have been extracted from the previous studies are listed belows:

- Intangibility (abstract naturalness) [17, 18, 22, 23]
- Process nature [17, 18]
- Heterogeneity [22-24]
- Inseparability which is the simultaneousness of consumption, production and marketing [17, 18, 22, 23]
- Perishability [22-24]
- Ownership [14, 17, 23, 24]
- Interactive nature [17, 18, 21] call the latter relational nature.
- Self-service [25, 26]
- Non-rival [23, 27]

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