

Review

## E-Service Quality: A Meta-Analytic Review

Markus Blut<sup>a,\*</sup>, Nivriti Chowdhry<sup>b</sup>, Vikas Mittal<sup>c</sup>, Christian Brock<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Newcastle University Business School, 5 Barrack Road, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 4SE, UK

<sup>b</sup> Jones Graduate School of Business, Rice University, McNair Hall, Room 402, United States

<sup>c</sup> Jones Graduate School of Business, Rice University, McNair Hall, Room 250, United States

<sup>d</sup> University of Rostock, Ulmenstr. 69, 18057 Rostock, Germany

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### Abstract

The dominance of the internet as a shopping and distribution channel also necessitates an understanding of e-service quality. Using means-ends-chain theory, we develop a conceptual framework to understand the different models and the associated multiple measures that have been developed to examine this construct. We test the measures empirically using meta-analytic techniques. We also summarize the impact of e-service quality on key outcomes—customer satisfaction, repurchase intentions, and word-of-mouth, as well as the moderating impact of three contextual factors: country culture, regulatory environment, and industry context. Results indicate that e-service quality has four underlying dimensions (website design, fulfilment, customer service, and security/privacy) though their relevance for overall e-service quality is moderated by country-specific (uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, power distance, individualism), regulatory environment-specific (financial secrecy, rule of law), and industry-specific (services/goods, retailing/banking) factors as well as research-design factors.

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E-channels are fast replacing traditional channels as a means of shopping and consumption, with annual growth rates exceeding 18% over the last decade in the U.S. (McKinsey & Company 2013). Consider Amazon and Wal-Mart, two of the most successful retailers. Wal-Mart began investing in its e-commerce website in 2000; by 2014 it had online sales of 10 billion (out of 500 billion USD total revenue) where “e-commerce operation represents its fastest-growing business” (The Wall Street Journal 2014). Amazon publicly launched in 1997 with a stock price of 1.73 USD per share; today, Amazon has a market cap exceeding 150 billion USD surpassing most retailers (Forbes 2015). Large swaths of services (e.g., travel and tourism, financial services, airlines) have embraced online channels. Services such as education and healthcare are being increasingly delivered online. In all these, e-service quality—the quality of service customers experience in online channels—is critical.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra (2005, p. 5) define e-service quality as the “extent to which a website facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery.” Wolfinger and Gilly (2003, p. 183) define e-service quality as “the beginning to the end of the transaction including information search, website navigation, order, customer service interactions, delivery, and satisfaction with the ordered product.” Though they may overlap, e-service quality can substantively differ from service quality in brick-and-mortar settings; e-service lacks interpersonal contact and may pose greater perceived risk and privacy issues for customers (Bitner, Brown, and Meuter 2000; Dabholkar 1996). Thus, findings from service quality may not be readily transplanted to the e-service quality domain.

Against this background, the goal of this research is to develop a conceptual framework relating different components of e-service quality to its outcomes (see Fig. 1). The framework is rooted in means-ends-chain theory (Gardial et al. 1994). The framework is tested using a meta-analysis of 89 independent samples representing 31,264 individual observations. For researchers, these results provide a better understanding of the components, consequences, and moderators of e-service quality,

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 0191 208 1707.

E-mail addresses: markus.blut@ncl.ac.uk (M. Blut), nc9@rice.edu (N. Chowdhry), vmittal@rice.edu (V. Mittal), christian.brock@uni-rostock.de (C. Brock).

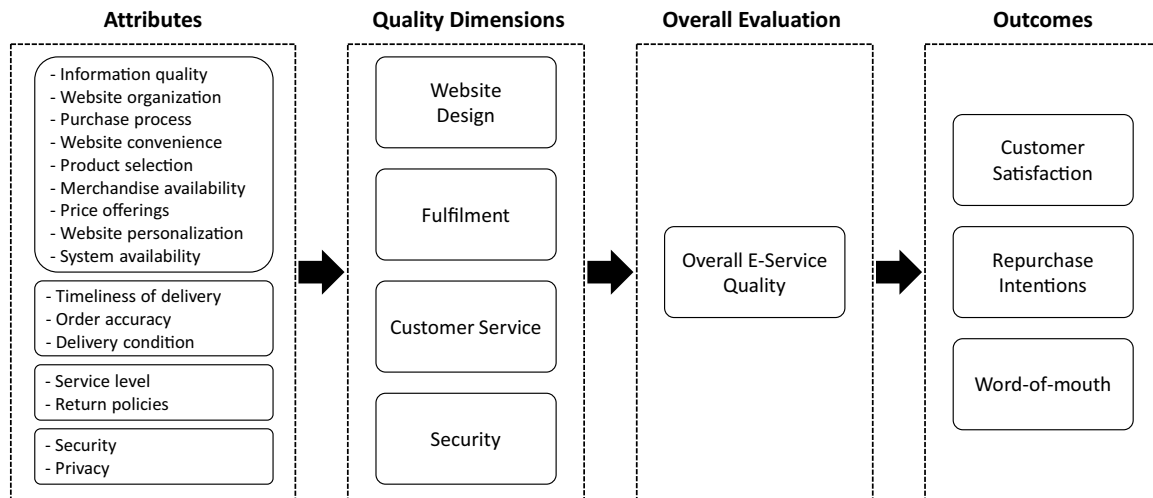


Fig. 1. Conceptualization of e-service quality.

and a stronger basis for further theorizing and conducting empirical research. Managerially, our findings can help firms to refine their strategy by (i) prioritizing specific components of e-service quality to optimize outcomes such as customer satisfaction, repurchase intentions, and word-of-mouth, (ii) implementing specific strategies in countries with different cultures and regulatory regimes, and (iii) understanding how the relationships change based on different industries.

More specifically, this paper makes four contributions. First, using means-ends-chain theory it develops a conceptual framework (Fig. 1) to synthesize the existing theoretical and empirical literature. Second, our results from testing this framework provide guidance to managers and researchers about the conceptualization and measurement of e-service quality, and its association with specific antecedents and consequences. In this regard, we test alternative models of e-service quality dimensions, and examine specific moderators of key relationships. Our moderator analysis provides guidance about boundary conditions (country culture, regulatory environment, and industry) that can mitigate or enhance key relationships. Third, our results clarify measurement issues (appropriate scale items and e-service quality dimensions), sampling issues (e.g., student versus non-student sample), and issues regarding potential covariates. Fourth, typical of a meta-analysis, we provide many useful empirical generalizations such as those regarding the association between e-service quality dimensions and overall e-service quality, and how these associations are moderated by differences in a country's culture, regulatory system, and industry type. Kamakura, Kopalle, and Lehmann (2014, p. 121) underscore the importance of empirical generalizations in retailing: "grouping related studies (replications) can provide a more powerful test of specific theories than any single study as well as help identify boundary conditions for them." Bass (1995) clarifies that empirical generalizations enable researchers to (i) assess how far they have progressed in research, (ii) assess what they have learned through the processes, and (iii) develop unifying principles to guide future research. In this regard, our study not only assesses the current progress (what are the existing

measures of e-service quality) and the current learning (how these measures relate to key outcomes), but also helps advance research through the conceptual framework provided.

The remainder of this paper is divided into four sections. First, we briefly present our theory and conceptual framework to guide our meta-analysis. Second, we provide an overview of existing conceptualization of the e-service quality construct and hypothesize the effect of contextual factors that have the potential to influence the association between overall e-service quality and its dimensions. Third, we present our findings. Fourth, we develop a research agenda for future research on e-service quality.

## Theory, Conceptual Framework, and Hypothesis Development

### *Components and Consequences of E-Service Quality*

Rooted in the customer satisfaction (Mittal, Ross, and Baldasare 1998) and service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985) literatures, a multi-attribute approach (Wilkie and Pessemier 1973) provides the conceptual basis to understand e-service quality. Theoretically, the multi-attribute approach is rooted in the means-ends-chain theory which describes how customers evaluate their consumption experiences—from specific means to more abstract ends (Gardial et al. 1994; Johnson 1984; Jung and Kang 2010; Zeithaml 1988). In the means-ends-chain theory, each specific attribute is associated with a higher-order dimension; each dimension is associated with a higher-order, overall, summary construct such as e-service quality. From a consumer psychology perspective (Gardial et al. 1994) the means-ends-chain theory suggests that consumers are able to evaluate their experiences in terms of specific and concrete occurrences (at the attribute level) which may then be synthesized and related to higher order dimensions, the latter being relatively more abstract (Johnson 1984). More importantly, these dimensions may represent various meta-categories which can be based on consumer goals (Jung and Kang 2010), consumption

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