Measuring perceived service quality in urgent transport service

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Abstract

In marketing literature, the study of service quality has focused on customer evaluation. The knowledge of consumer perceptions with regard to this complex construct constitutes powerful information for measuring company performance and for managing strategic projects. This fact is a critical factor in industries, such as the urgent transport service sector, in an environment in which a growth in the number of quality certifications has been prominent in recent years. The development of a valid tool for measuring perceived quality in this specific service has been proposed testing a hierarchical and multidimensional model, where service quality is a higher-order construct underlying four primary dimensions, which are defined by nine subdimensions. This conceptualization has been conceived after a qualitative research and the literature revision. The authors test this multilevel structure through a series of confirmatory factor analysis based on the partial disaggregation technique, and support the results with the cross-validation study. The implications and limitations of this research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Since the eighties, service quality has been one of the most important issues in marketing literature and is considered as a vital element in management strategies in order to succeed and/or to outlive in competitive environments (e.g. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1990). The pressure of competition in most industries has forced managers to look for ways to enhance their competitive position. Many have decided to improve service quality in order to differentiate their services from those of their competitors.

The growing importance of service quality is independent of the type of industry. Specifically, the concern for quality in the urgent transport sector is evident. In fact, the proportion of ISO certifications has increased seriously. Maybe this is due to the economic importance of the urgent transport industry in Spain. This industry has grown by 8% in recent years, and unlike other countries, the business is dominated by national companies. Therefore, service quality is turned into an essential competitive element.

The focus of this paper is to present an alternative approach to measure service quality in the urgent transport service. Many business organizations have felt the critical need to use a tool for evaluating service quality in order to appropriately assess and improve their service performance. After the review of the literature, we have not found any study that measures quality perception in this type of service. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a reliable and valid instrument to determine which aspects of a particular service define its quality. The proposed instrument incorporates performance-based measures on the basis of scales developed by Dabholkar et al. (1996) and Brady and Cronin (2001).

2. Conceptualization and operationalization of service quality

Service quality has been studied for a long time in the field of business management. However, the service literature suggests that there is no consensus on how to conceptualize or operationalize perceived service quality (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Rust and Oliver, 1994). Two different perspectives have been adopted regarding this issue.