
AN ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH AFTER-SALES SERVICE

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Abstract

The study examines the influence of after-sales service (ASS) on customer satisfaction, focusing on empirical findings and conceptual models. This research highlights the critical role that after-sales service plays in enhancing customer loyalty, repurchase intentions, and overall satisfaction. Through an extensive review of existing literature, this study identifies the most relevant dimensions of after-sales service quality, such as responsiveness, reliability, and empathy. Furthermore, the paper discusses the application of established service quality models like SERVQUAL and the Kano model to after-sales service contexts. It concludes by proposing a comprehensive conceptual framework to guide future empirical research in this area.

Keywords

After-sales service, service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, SERVQUAL, Kano model, service recovery, consumer behaviour, repurchase intentions.

1. Introduction

Customer satisfaction has long been a key factor in understanding consumer behaviour and developing strategies for customer retention. Among the various determinants of satisfaction, the quality of after-sales service (ASS) has emerged as one of the most significant, particularly in industries where customer loyalty and brand perception are heavily influenced by post-purchase experiences. After-sales services are integral in maintaining customer relationships, enhancing brand loyalty, and creating a competitive advantage, especially in markets characterized by high competition and customer expectation.

In the Indian market and other emerging economies, the role of after-sales service is increasingly important, given the rising disposable incomes, expanding consumer base, and the proliferation of global brands. The after-sales experience has the potential to build stronger emotional connections with customers and even compensate for any shortcomings during the initial sale. However, the empirical research on the link between after-sales service quality and customer satisfaction remains varied, particularly in the context of emerging economies. This paper thus aims to explore the relationships between after-sales service quality and customer satisfaction by reviewing research and proposing a framework for future investigations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Customer Satisfaction: Definition and Importance

Customer satisfaction refers to a consumer's overall assessment of the service or product provided. According to Oliver (1997), customer satisfaction is a cumulative affective response to the consumption experience, which includes both cognitive and emotional factors. This definition suggests that satisfaction is not only a reflection of the product or service's performance but also the feelings it evokes in the customer. Several theories, including the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), highlight that customer satisfaction arises when the actual performance of a product or service meets or exceeds the customer's expectations.

2.2 After-Sales Service (ASS): Definition and Scope

After-sales service refers to the services provided by the company after the product has been sold, including installation, maintenance, repair, warranties, and customer support. It is a critical component of customer satisfaction, particularly for durable goods industries like automobiles, consumer electronics, and appliances. Effective after-sales services can influence repeat purchases, reduce customer churn, and build a positive brand image (Rust & Zahorik, 1993).

Types of After-Sales Service:

Installation and Setup: Ensuring the product is properly set up and functioning.

Maintenance and Repairs: Ongoing support to ensure the product functions as expected over its lifecycle.

Warranty and Return Policies: Offering assurances that customers can receive support if the product fails to meet their expectations or breaks down.

Spare Parts Availability: Ensuring customers have easy access to replacement parts for continued product performance.

Customer Support and Communication: Ensuring timely and effective responses to customer queries and complaints.

2.3 Service Quality and After-Sales Service Quality

Service quality in the context of ASS can be evaluated using the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), which identifies five key dimensions:

1. Tangibles: The physical appearance of the service facilities, equipment, and personnel.
2. Reliability: The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
3. Responsiveness: The willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
4. Assurance: The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
5. Empathy: The provision of caring, individualized attention to customers.

In after-sales service, specific factors related to technical competence, response times, and availability of spare parts are critical to shaping customer perceptions of service quality.

2.4 Conceptual Models Linking ASS Quality → Satisfaction → Behaviour

The SERVQUAL model is a widely used framework for measuring service quality across various service industries. For after-sales service, several studies have adapted SERVQUAL dimensions to examine customer satisfaction. Additionally, Kano's Model of Customer Satisfaction (1984) classifies service attributes into:

Basic Needs (Must-be quality): These are non-negotiable service qualities that customers expect. Their absence causes dissatisfaction but does not necessarily lead to satisfaction if fulfilled.

Performance Needs (One-dimensional quality): The better these needs are fulfilled, the higher the customer satisfaction.

Excitement Needs (Delighters): Unexpected, extraordinary service elements that can delight customers and drive loyalty.

2.5 Empirical Evidence from Research

2.5.1 Evidence in Durable Goods

Rigopoulou et al. (2008) conducted a study in the Greek market to explore the role of after-sales service in the customer satisfaction process. The study found that after-sales service, including service reliability and technician competence, had a significant impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Similarly, Agarwal (2010) highlighted the importance of after-sales

services in consumer durables, finding that the availability of spare parts and technician responsiveness were critical factors in customer satisfaction.

2.5.2 Evidence in Automotive and Real Estate

Several studies in the automotive sector have examined the link between after-sales service and customer satisfaction. For example, a study by Chou et al. (2009) in the Taiwanese automotive sector demonstrated that the responsiveness of service staff and the speed of service delivery were significant predictors of customer satisfaction.

2.6 Research Gaps

Despite extensive research on customer satisfaction and after-sales service, several gaps remain:

Lack of cross-cultural studies: Most studies have been conducted in Western contexts, with little research in emerging markets, such as India and Africa.

Sector-specific studies: There is limited comparative research across different sectors (e.g., automotive vs. electronics).

Customer segmentation: Most studies treat customers as a homogenous group, whereas there may be important differences based on customer characteristics (e.g., income, purchase frequency).

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

3.1 Conceptual Framework

The proposed conceptual framework posits that after-sales service quality is a key antecedent of customer satisfaction, which, in turn, influences customer behaviour. The model suggests that the relationship between after-sales service and satisfaction is mediated by multiple dimensions of service quality.

After-sales service quality → Customer satisfaction → Customer loyalty / repurchase intention / word-of-mouth

3.2 Hypotheses

H1: Higher perceived quality of after-sales service positively influences customer satisfaction.

H2: Customer satisfaction with after-sales service positively influences customer loyalty and repurchase intentions.

H3: Certain after-sales service dimensions (e.g., responsiveness, spare parts availability) have a stronger effect on satisfaction than others (e.g., tangibles).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study will adopt a quantitative survey approach, which will help capture customer perceptions of after-sales service quality and its relationship with satisfaction and loyalty. The study will target customers who have interacted with a particular brand's after-sales service within the past six months.

4.2 Sampling and Data Collection

A stratified random sampling method will be used to select a representative sample of 300-500 customers across multiple regions. The survey will be distributed through online platforms and at service centers, ensuring a diverse response pool.

4.3 Measurement Scales

The following measurement scales will be adapted:

SERVQUAL scale for measuring service quality dimensions.

Customer Satisfaction Scale (Oliver, 1980) to assess satisfaction with after-sales service.

Customer Loyalty and Behaviour Intentions Scale (e.g., repurchase intention, word-of-mouth) based on established scales in marketing literature.

4.4 Data Analysis

Reliability analysis: Cronbach's alpha will be used to assess the internal consistency of scales.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA): To validate the dimensional structure of the SERVQUAL and satisfaction scales.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM): To test the relationships between after-sales service quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioural outcomes (repurchase, loyalty).

5. Discussion and Managerial Implications

The findings from previous studies underline the importance of after-sales service in customer satisfaction. To maximize customer satisfaction, firms should focus on the following aspects:

Training and competence of service staff: Skilled technicians are key to satisfying customers, particularly in industries like automotive and electronics.

Service speed and availability of spare parts: Long waiting times or unavailability of spare parts can lead to significant dissatisfaction.

Post-service follow-ups: Effective communication and follow-ups can reinforce positive perceptions of the brand.

6. Conclusion

After-sales service quality plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction, particularly in durable goods and high-involvement industries. Firms that invest in improving service quality dimensions like responsiveness, reliability, and technician competence can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Further research should investigate cross-cultural and sectoral differences in after-sales service perceptions and extend this research to emerging markets.

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