

A study of electronic service quality on fitness firms: A customer perspective

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Electronic service quality (ESQ) and customer orientation (CO) have become key tools to succeed in the competitive marketplace. Thus, the purpose of this research was to study how CO as perceived by the customers impacts their perception about the firm's ESQ and to study the impact of this perceived ESQ on the outcomes at the customer level. There has been minimal research conducted on the components of ESQ in the fitness industry. Therefore, this research was focused on fitness firms wherein the participants for this study were the everyday gym goers. A quantitative survey was conducted in order to collect the data, and regression analysis was used to test the validity of the proposed model. The findings showed that there is a positive relationship between perceived CO and perceived ESQ, and a positive relationship between perceived ESQ and customer level outcomes such as customer satisfaction, customer trust and word-of-mouth.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has been rapidly growing since its inception, and it is now commonly used in all sectors of society around the globe. The Internet has become one of the most valuable assets in modern technology and is developing into an integral part of modern commerce (Sceulovs & Gaile-Sarkane, 2010). The Internet has become a useful tool for selling, buying, and distributing goods and services globally since the Internet has little or no restrictions on the potential market either geographically or by time, and therefore poses a huge impact on any company considering to run its business online via the internet (Sceulovs & Gaile-Sarkane, 2010). E-commerce is changing the competition forms, operation speed, and ways of interactions of services, products, and money from customers to firms and from firms to suppliers. Those changes have influenced the firms to adapt e-commerce as a principal entity (Etzion & Pang, 2014). The retail sales at e-commerce sites in the United States for 2010 reached \$169 billion and the sales have continued to increase in 2012 reaching \$227 billion (www.census.gov) thereby indicating an increased rate of shopping over the internet. Recent advances in Internet technologies, such as Web 2.0 and social technologies (Li & Bernoff, 2008) provide firms with new types of value added services to their customers (Etzion & Pang 2014) and due to the growing importance of service industries in many countries around the world, service quality has become one of the most researched topics in the area of services marketing

(Connolly, 2007). “Service quality is normally related to customers’ behavioral intentions and actual behavioral patterns in product and service settings” (Liang, 2012, p.949). Therefore, electronic service quality is expected to be a determinant of e-commerce success (Etzion & Pang, 2014) which also implies that the electronic service quality will play a major role on all businesses (both product and services) running across the internet.

CHAPTER II

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Electronic service quality (ESQ) is essential for the good performance of a firm's electronic channels thereby a great deal of research has been done on conceptualizing and measuring ESQ (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Malhotra, 2005). Hence we build this study based on the ESQ research stream. According to Chiou and Droge (2006), service quality investment has become a priority for many firms wherein the major purpose of service quality investment is to improve customers' perceptions of an overall service quality and enhance their services experiences (He & Li, 2011). In addition to ESQ, customer orientation has become a key philosophy for companies to succeed in the competitive marketplace and is critical for developing long-term relationship with customers, gaining competitive advantage, and business success (Bejou, Ennew, & Palmer, 1998). Moreover, Geigenmueller (2011) claims that previous research studies have placed a great emphasis on customer orientation from a firm's perspective whereas only little effort has been made to look at customer orientation from a customer perspective. Hence, the purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions: (1) How a fundamental component of marketing, customer orientation (Brockman, Jones, & Becherer, 2012), as perceived by the customers impacts their perception about the firm's ESQ? (2) What is the impact of the perceived ESQ on the outcomes at the customer level, namely customer satisfaction, customer retention, customer trust and word of mouth?

Fitness clubs are continuing to grow and their competitiveness has led clubs to find ways to differentiate themselves in order to retain existing members and to attract new customers (Moxham & Wiseman, 2009). There is often only little perceived differentiation between service offerings in the health and fitness market, having been described as a bland premium market indicating that perceived quality has become the biggest factor in achieving competitive advantage (Moxham & Wiseman, 2009). There is minimal research conducted on the components of service quality in the fitness industry despite the growth of the sector (Moxham & Wiseman, 2009). Therefore, this research will focus on fitness firms in an attempt to find the impact of the ESQ from the customer perspective. Fitness firms for this study refer to firms that provide fitness training and nutrition advices and use digital information i.e. email, website, social media etc. for providing additional services.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Perceived Customer Orientation

Customer orientation (CO) has been considered as the fundamental component of marketing for decades, serving as the foundation for numerous marketing relationships (Brockman, Jones, & Becherer, 2012). When goods are produced in order to satisfy customers' needs and wants, it is termed as CO (Junaid-ul-haq, Ijaz, & Mehmood, 2011). At the individual level, CO, can be defined as the “degree to which salespeople practice the marketing concept by trying to help their customers make purchase decisions that will satisfy customer needs” (Saxe & Weitz, 1982, p. 344).

Central to the studies of CO is that the firm and its entire personnel place the customer's need for satisfaction in the center of its business endeavors (Doyle, 2002; Doyle & Stem, 2006). Numerous studies have examined the concept of CO and found it to be an important characteristic of high performers (Kelley, 1992). Also the underlying assumption for CO is that customer-oriented firms outperform competitors by learning and anticipating the needs of consumers and responding with goods and services, creating superior value and increased satisfaction to customers (Doyle & Wong, 1998; Brady & Cronin, 2001).

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is to examine customer orientation from the customer perspective. Anecdotic evidence exists that customers do

evaluate a firm's customer orientation by forming perceptions about the degree to which a company puts customer's needs first (Geigenmueller 2011). Additionally, (Deshpande et al., 1993, p.27) have observed that "...the evaluation of how customer oriented an organization is should come from its customers rather than merely from the company itself". Even though firms are considered to be customer oriented whereby they try to increase long-term customer satisfaction (Dunlap, Dotson, & Chambers, 1988; Kelley, 1992; Saxe & Weitz, 1982), an increase in a firm's status should correspond to a stronger customer perception that the firms are customer oriented (Dorsch, Swanson, & Kelley, 1998).

Perceived Electronic Service Quality

Service quality in general has been typically applied to traditional offline contexts. Service quality techniques are relatively new for online business, but it cannot be deemed unimportant because firms have started to reach out to customers over the internet using the digital information via the web channel and even more products and services are being offered and purchased online (Xu, Benbasat, & Cenfetelli, 2013). Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra (2000) also argue that e-commerce provides important advantages for firms and consumers.

Santos (2003) defines service quality in e-commerce as the consumers overall evaluation and judgment of the excellence and quality of service offerings in the virtual market place and Zeithaml et al (2000) define electronic service quality (ESQ) as "the extent to which a website facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing, and delivery of products and services." (p. 11). This study will not only look at the website aspect but also will extend to other internet aspects (digital information) such as email

and social media. With the emphasis on customer's perspective, service quality is defined as the difference between customer's service expectations and the customer's perceptions of the actual service received (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988).

One of the main aspects related to the service quality is the information quality (Xu et al., 2013) which influences perceived service quality. Grönroos, Helnomen, Isonemi and Lindholm (2000) claim the higher the customer perceives the quality of what is offered (i.e., content) and how it is offered (i.e., delivery) in a website, the higher the customer's perceived service quality. Further, Xu et al (2013) expect a customer's perspective for service quality will include both information quality (i.e., content) and system quality (i.e., delivery). So, when customers evaluate service quality, they will not only connect the relevant service quality elements but they will also draw on their perception of information quality and system quality (Xu et al., 2013). Accordingly, the service functionality can be felt to the extent to which a website uses information technology to provide services (including information provision) (Xu et al., 2013). In this study we will extend the service functionality to emails and social media along with the website use.

Familiarity with the Internet

The Internet is in a central position in the production of information/knowledge and communication because there are advantages in using the internet (Özcan, 2012). Özcan (2012) suggests that the Internet is the most important factor that contributes to the globalization process in this age. The Internet can meet any kind of need including entertainment, shopping, communication and banking. Also Özcan (2012) views the internet to be a large scale free communication and information sharing place having an

interactive area that may not be limited with the concepts of language, religion, age, culture, time and space.

Above communication, the Internet is an area that daily needs are met and solved (Özcan 2012). Therefore, we can assume familiarity with the internet plays a role in our everyday life. Familiarity can be defined as one's understanding of an entity, often based on previous interactions, experience, and learning of "the what, who, how, and when of what is happening" (Gefen, Karahanna, & Straub, 2003, p. 63). Accordingly, we define the digital information familiarity as one's understanding of the digital information such as website, social media, emails etc. often based on previous interactions, experience, and learning of "the what, who, how, and when of what is happening" across the internet.

Yang and Jun (2008) argue that it is necessary for companies who use the internet to investigate what existing and potential customers expect in terms of service quality in order to offer better services. In the context of internet commerce, existing customers are those who have used the internet to purchase products and services whereas potential customers are those who have used the internet as a source to search for information about desired products and services but have never purchased through the internet (i.e., they prefer to purchase through traditional channels) (Yang & Jun, 2008). Thus people differ in terms of internet usage based on the knowledge and exposure they have to the internet. Hence we can assume that the familiarity of digital information (website, social media, emails etc.) across the internet varies from customer to customer.

Communication Intensity

The ongoing development of information-processing technology has facilitated advertisers in the shift from traditional mass advertising to focus more on personalized

advertising to deliver messages customized for each individual (Baek & Morimoto, 2012). Since service quality includes information provision (Xu et al., 2013), this study will look at the intensity of the information communicated to the customer.

The literature on advertising repetition and variation is historically founded in early work of Berlyne (1970), Cacioppo and Petty (1979, 1989) and Zajonc (1968). These early works provide valuable inputs to conceptualize communication intensity in today's digital information era. Cacioppo and Petty (1979, 1989) proposed a two-stage process based on their Elaboration Likelihood Model. During the first stage (wear-in stage), motivated people use additional exposures as opportunities to process the positive thoughts suggested by the advertisement. After repeated exposures, however, negative thoughts arise. Batra and Ray (1986), Campbell, Kevin, David and Wayne (2003), and Raj (1982) analysis are based on the idea that the second stage (wear-out stage) can be accelerated or delayed according to the speed and intensity of cognitive processing.

In considering consumer perceptions to an excessive volume of emails, we draw on information overload and categorization theory in which the individuals (customers) protect themselves from information overload through categorization and selective attention. Authors have also offered technological solutions to overcome this burden (Bellotti, Victoria, Ducheneaut, Howard, Smith, & Grinter, 2005). The same can be assumed for excessive volume of tweets (twitter) or news feeds (facebook) (other digital information channels).

CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS

In this section, the authors present the research model (Figure 1) and the corresponding research hypothesis

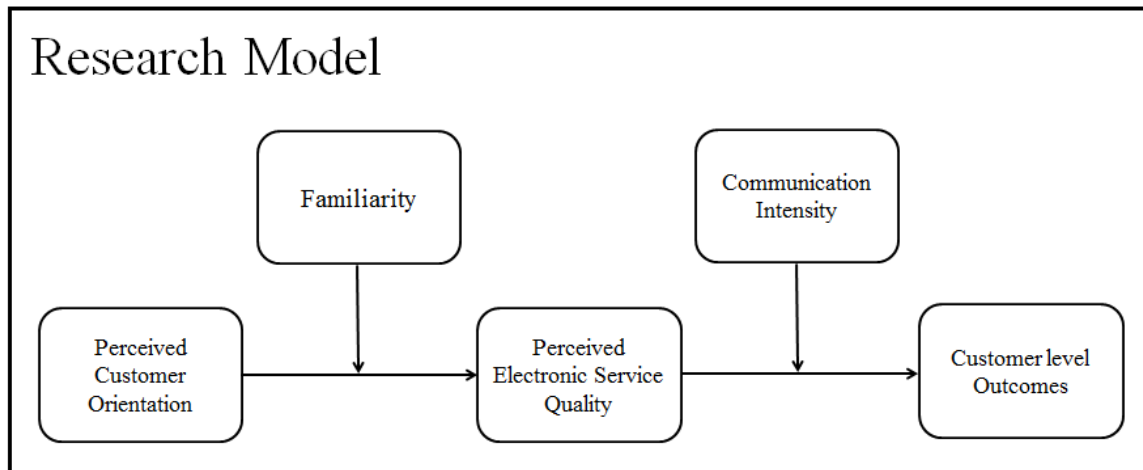


Figure 1. Research Model

Relationship between perceived CO and perceived ESQ

According to Rust and Chung (2006), service customization relates to a provider's efforts "to personalize and individualize service products and service delivery" (Rust & Chang, 2006, p. 561), and when these products and services are produced with the aim to satisfy customer needs and wants, it can be termed as CO (Junaid-ul-haq et al., 2011).

Brady and Cronin (2001) argue that the performance evaluations and behavioral consequences can be determined by the perceptions of a service provider's CO. Also investments in technology might be best measured by knowing how the enabled processes affect customer perceptions of the firm's customer orientation (Ha & John, 2010). Thus based on the research findings, we claim that the perceived CO will have an influence on the perceived ESQ. Therefore we hypothesize:

H₁: Perceived CO will have a positive influence on perceived ESQ.

Familiarity as a moderating factor

The purpose of having the familiarity factor as a moderator is to possibly explain whether the knowledge and the familiarity of the digital information such as website, social media, emails etc. is perceived as a barrier or an assistance among internet users towards attitude of using e-service. As observed in the literature, the usage of digital information (website, social media, emails, etc.) across the internet varies from customer to customer. Hence we assume that the familiarity of the digital information factor comes into play while trying to evaluate the perceived electronic service quality. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H₂: Customer's familiarity with the digital information will moderate the relationship between perceived CO and perceived ESQ.

Relationship between the perceived ESQ and the customer level outcomes

ESQ plays a vital role in explaining consumer value perceptions in Business-to-Consumer (B2C) e-commerce contexts (Barrutia & Gilsanz, 2012) and it has been noted that perceived service quality by customers is a significant driver of various customer

perceptions and behavior (He & Li, 2011). Dabholkar's (1996) view of CO is that the customers can be viewed as 'partial employees' whose participation in service delivery can be used by the firm to improve its operation quality (Dabholkar, 1996). Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra (2002) developed ESQ in which they state ESQ as the degree to which a website can efficiently and effectively be used to deliver products and services. Thus we can extend this idea of ESQ to digital information on a whole and not to just websites. The digital information here comprises of websites, social media, emails etc.

The reason service quality is considered an important competitive edge is because it generates repeat sales and positive word of mouth (Wong & Tjosvold, 1995). An important determinant of how interactions with service providers are evaluated is 'customer expectations' (Trisca, 2013). The importance of word-of-mouth (WOM) in building customer expectations about the service of a firm is well documented (Donnelly, 2009; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985). These WOM statements made by the individuals other than the company influence perceptions of prospective customers regarding the service and what can be expected from the service. Also, WOM has more weight because it is perceived as unbiased source of service performance information (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993).

Among the researchers involved in e-commerce, customer satisfaction is another variable that has gained significant attention (Anderson & Srinivasan, 2003; Tsai & Huang, 2007). Service quality is usually related to satisfaction in both product and service settings (Wolfenbarger & Gilly, 2003). An important reason for firms to achieve high levels of satisfaction is to retain customers for long-term business success

(Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005; Verhoef, 2003). Also, trust is another variable that has an influence on the customer's long-term orientation by decreasing the risk perception linked to the business conduct (Erdem, Swait, & Louvieret, 2002; Ganesan, 1994). Thus, in order to evaluate the impact of perceived ESQ for this study, we examine the impact of four variables at the customer level: customer satisfaction, customer trust, customer retention and WOM. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H₃: Perceived ESQ will have a positive impact on the customer level outcomes of: customer satisfaction, customer trust, customer retention and WOM

The above hypothesis can be further expanded as,

H_{3a}: Perceived ESQ will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

H_{3b}: Perceived ESQ will have a positive impact on customer retention.

H_{3c}: Perceived ESQ will have a positive impact on customer trust.

H_{3d}: Perceived ESQ will have a positive impact on word of mouth.

Communication intensity as a moderating factor

The nature of the interaction between companies and customers (i.e. functional quality) is a key contributor to the customers' evaluations of ESQ (Barrutia & Gilsanz, 2012). As mentioned in the literature background the individuals have started to take steps to protect themselves from information overload. This indicates that the amount of digital information used to communicate to customers has become a factor that should be considered by companies in order to improve customer perceptions in terms of providing digital information as part of providing electronic service quality. Hence, in this study, we will consider how the communication intensity affects the relationship between the

perceived electronic service quality and customer level outcomes- namely customer satisfaction, customer retention, customer trust and WOM. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H4: Communication intensity will moderate the relationship between perceived ESQ and customer level outcomes.

The above hypothesis can be further expanded as,

H4a: Communication intensity will moderate the relationship between perceived ESQ and customer satisfaction.

H4b: Communication intensity will moderate the relationship between perceived ESQ and customer retention.

H4c: Communication intensity will moderate the relationship between perceived ESQ and customer trust.

H4d: Communication intensity will moderate the relationship between perceived ESQ and word of mouth

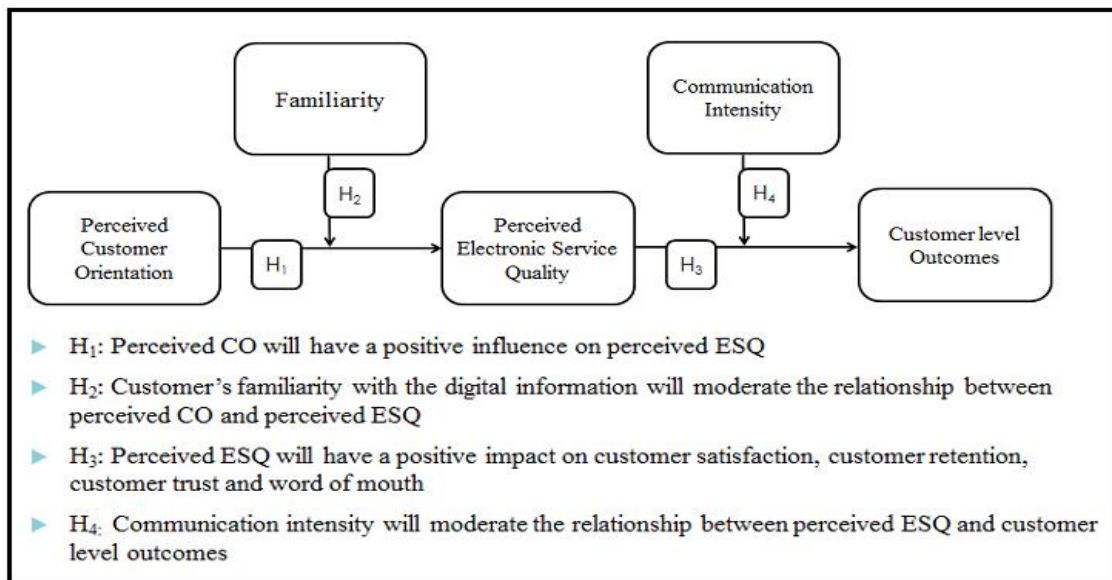


Figure 2. Research Hypotheses

CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

A quantitative survey was conducted in order to collect the data and regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses. Since this study looked at fitness firms, the participants for this study were the everyday gym goers. Potential participants for online survey panel were recruited online via the internet and Amazon MTurk online survey panel. Based on the regression model adopted for this study, the target sample size is 120 participants.

Measures

There were eight different constructs measured in order to conduct the regression analysis and the measures were based on the review of the previously validated scales. Each scale item was revised and edited in accordance to the proposed research model and in order to test the proposed research hypotheses. The constructs were as follows: (1) Perceived Customer Orientation (CO): Customer orientation was measured using the customer orientation scale adopted by Li, Chau, and Lai (2010). This scale comprised of three items and implemented a 5-point Likert scale. (2) Familiarity (FAM): Familiarity was measured using the familiarity scale adopted by Oliver and Bearden (1985). This scale comprised of three items and the authors had used a 10-point Likert scale whereas for this study, the investigators have converted the scale to a 5-point Likert scale. (3)

Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ): ESQ was measured using the scale adopted by Barrutia and Gilsanz (2012) for their study on ESQ and value. This scale had three items and used a 5-point Likert scale. (4) Communication Intensity (CI): CI was measured using the scale adopted by Micheaux (2011) in his study on e-mail advertising frequency. Since this study considered both Facebook and Twitter along with emails in evaluating the communication intensity, the scale adopted by (Micheaux, 2011) was extended to include both Facebook and Twitter applications. This scale had three items, each for checking the intensity on email, Facebook and Twitter and hence a total of nine items. Each of the scale items used a 5-point Likert scale. (5) Customer Satisfaction (CS): CS was measured using the scale adopted by Hsu, Chang and Chen (2012). They had adopted a 7-point Likert scale whereas for this study, the researchers converted the scale to a 5-point Likert scale and the scale had three items. (6) Customer Trust (CT): CT was measured using the scale adopted by Chang, Lee and Lai (2012). They had adopted a 7-point Likert scale whereas the researchers for this study converted the scale to a 5-point Likert scale and the scale had three items. (7) Customer Retention (CR): CR was measured based on the scale adopted by Ranaweera and Neely (2003). They used a 7-point Likert scale with three items. However, for this study, the researchers have changed the three items to two items and used a 6-point Likert scale. (8) Word of Mouth (WOM): WOM was measured based on the scale adopted by Cengiz and Yayla (2007). The scale was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with three items.

Study Sample

As previously mentioned, the researchers used the Amazon MTurk application for data collection. The potential participants were everyday gym goers and it comprised of

both male and female of different age groups from the United States. The survey was conducted online for 2 days and 166 responses were used for data analysis. Outliers in the data were identified using the SPSS ‘Identify Unusual cases’ tool. Two cases were identified and deleted; hence the total number of valid data of 164. The respondent demographics (age and gender) are shown below in Table 1. Table 2 and Table 3 further categorizes the respondents via the type of fitness center they were a part of and membership price respectively.

Table 1

Respondent Demographics

Age	N = 164
< 21	5
21 - 30	87
31 – 40	48
> 40	23
Unknown	1
Gender	
Male	108
Female	55
Unknown	1

Table 2

Type of Fitness Center the respondents were a part of

Franchise	119
Independent	35
University Facility	8
Unknown	2
Total	164

Table 3

Membership price (per month) paid by the respondents

< \$10	5
\$10	22
\$11 - \$14.99	0
\$15	8
\$16 - \$19.99	4
\$20	20
\$21 - \$24.99	3
\$25	11
\$26 - \$29.99	6
\$30	22
\$31 - \$34.99	4
\$35	6
\$36 - \$39.99	1
\$40	9
\$41 - \$44.99	0
\$45	3
\$46 - \$49.99	2
\$50	7
\$51 - \$54.99	1
\$55	1
\$56 - \$59.99	1
\$60	4
\$61 - \$99	9
\$100 and more	5
Unknown	10
Total	164

CHAPTER VI

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data analysis consisted of the following steps in the respective order: (1) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity (2) scale validation (3) testing for assumptions of linear regression (4) regression analysis. The data analysis was conducted using IBM's SPSS 21.0 software.

Measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity suggested the data is suitable for structure detection. The KMO statistic indicated the proportion of variance in the variables and a value closer to 1.0 suggested that factor analysis might be useful with the current sample data. The analysis showed a statistic value of 0.851 and suggests that factor analysis maybe useful. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicates whether the current variables are related and suitable for structure analysis. Significant values less than 0.05 indicated that factor analysis might be useful with the current data and the output for the current data showed a value less than 0.05. Therefore, exploratory factor analysis for scale validation was implemented. The results for KMO and Bartlett's test are displayed below in Table 4 for reference.

Table 4

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.851
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3721.630
	df	325
	Sig.	.000

Scale Validation

The scale validation consisted of testing for reliability, unidimensionality, convergent validity and discriminant validity.

Reliability:

The reliability check involved checking the value of Cronbach alpha (α) for each of the nine constructs. Per Nunnally (1978), alpha values exceeding 0.7 show acceptable reliability. Alpha values for all constructs in this study were greater than 0.7. The values are provided in Table 5 for reference.

Unidimensionality validity:

The unidimensionality for each of the scale items was validated using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and per Anderson and Gerbing (1988), all items loaded on their respective constructs with sufficient effect ($\lambda > 0.70$). The values are displayed below in Table 5 for reference.

Table 5

Scale Items, Reliability, Unidimensionality validity

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>Component (FA)</i>
Perceived Customer Satisfaction (CO):		0.88	
CO1	I perceive that my fitness firm constantly monitors my level of commitment to serving my needs		0.89
CO2	I perceive that my fitness firm checks my satisfaction level frequently enough		0.92
CO3	I perceive that my fitness firm pays close attention to providing good service to me		0.88
Familiarity (FAM):		0.83	
Fam1	In general, would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with digital information (website, social media, emails etc.)		0.83
Fam2	Would you consider yourself informed or uninformed about digital information		0.86
Fam3	Would you consider yourself knowledgeable about digital information		0.90
Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ):		0.85	
ESQ1	Overall, the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) provided by my fitness firm have excellent quality		0.90
ESQ2	The digital information service quality provided by my fitness firm matches my expectations		0.87
ESQ3	The digital information quality provided by my fitness firm is very competitive against other fitness firms		0.87
Communication Intensity (CI):		0.96	
CI1	My fitness firm sends me too many Twitter tweets		0.82
CI2	My fitness firm sends me too many Facebook promotions news feeds		0.75
CI3	My fitness firm swamps me with Twitter tweets		0.86
CI4	My fitness firm swamps me with Facebook promotions news feed		0.87
CI5	My fitness firm's digital information are annoying for Twitter feeds		0.80
CI6	My fitness firm 's digital information are annoying for Facebook promotions news feeds		0.83

Table 5 (Continued)

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>α</i>	<i>Component (FA)</i>
Customer Satisfaction (CS):		0.91	
CS1	I am very satisfied with the information I receive from the fitness firm's digital information (website, social media, email etc.)		0.91
CS2	I have a positive attitude towards the fitness firm's digital information		0.94
CS3	My interaction with the fitness firm's digital information is very satisfying		0.92
Customer Trust (CT):		0.87	
CT1	My fitness firm's digital information (website, social media, email etc.) is trustworthy		0.78
CT2	My fitness firm keeps promises it makes to me through the digital information		0.78
CT3	I believe in the digital information given by my fitness firm		0.83
Customer Retention (CR):		0.90	
CR1	Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive from my fitness firm, what do you think are the chances of you ending your relationship with your fitness firm Within the next six months (or		0.95
CR2	before your contract ends? Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive from my fitness firm, what do you think are the chances of you ending your relationship with your fitness firm Within the next year (or) when the contract end?		0.95
Word of Mouth (WOM):		0.92	
WOM1	Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive, I intend to recommend my fitness		0.86
WOM2	firm to others Based on the digital information I receive, I spread my fitness firm's good reputation		0.89
WOM3	Based on the digital information I receive, I inform others about my fitness firms services		0.85

*Indicates deleted item

Convergent and Discriminative validity:

The convergent and discriminative validity check was done in order to make sure all of the scale items converged to their respective construct and did not overlap with the other scale items of other constructs; thereby making sure the scale items measured a unique value. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted for validation, and according to Gerbing and Anderson (1988) values greater than 0.5 constitutes a significant factor score. Three scale items measures 'Email' of the 'Communication Intensity' construct cross-loaded on other scale items; (See Table 6) therefore, these three items were deleted. For Communication Intensity, only data for Facebook and Twitter were analyzed. After deletion of three scale items, another EFA was performed providing evidence of convergent and discriminant validity. The output for the second run is displayed on Table 7.

Table 6

Convergent and Discriminant Validity – Round 1

	Component							
I perceive that my fitness firm constantly monitors my level of commitment to serving my needs				879				
I perceive that my fitness firm checks my satisfaction level frequently enough				858				

Table 6 (Continued)

	Component								
I perceive that my fitness firm pays close attention to providing good service to me				798					
In general, would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with digital information (website, social media, emails etc.)-Very Unfamiliar: Very Familiar					824				
Would you consider yourself informed or uninformed about digital information-Not at all informed: Highly informed					841				
Would you consider yourself knowledgeable about digital information-Know nothing at all: Know a great deal					877				
Overall, the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) provided by my fitness firm have excellent quality						729			

Table 6 (Continued)

	Component								
The digital information service quality provided by my fitness firm matches my expectations			409			607			
The digital information quality provided by my fitness firm is very competitive against other fitness firms						790			
My fitness firm sends me too many-Twitter tweets	888								
My fitness firm sends me too many-Facebook promotions news feeds	875								
My fitness firm swamps me with-Twitter tweets	924								
My fitness firm swamps me with-Facebook promotions news feeds	934								
My fitness firm's digital information are annoying for-Twitter tweets	848								

Table 6 (Continued)

	Component								
My fitness firm's digital information are annoying for-Facebook promotions news feeds	879								
I am very satisfied with the information I receive from the fitness firm's digital information (website, social media, email etc.)									660
I have a positive attitude towards the fitness firm's digital information									660
My interaction with the fitness firm's digital information is very satisfying		452							600
My fitness firm's digital information (website, social media, email etc.) is trustworthy			842						
My fitness firm keeps promises it makes to me through the digital information			680						
I believe in the digital information given by my fitness firm			806						

Table 6 (Continued)

	Component								
Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive from my fitness firm, what do you think are the chances of you ending your relationship with your fitness firm? - Within the next six months (or) before your contract ends?							934		
Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive from my fitness firm, what do you think are the chances of you ending your relationship with your fitness firm? - Within the next year (or) when the contract ends?							875		
Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive, I intend to recommend my fitness firm to others		809							

Table 6 (Continued)

	Component								
Based on the digital information I receive, I spread my fitness firm's good reputation		863							
Based on the digital information I receive, I inform others about my fitness firms services		852							
**My fitness firm sends me too many-Emails	583							745	
**My fitness firm swamps me with-Emails	601							721	
**My fitness firm's digital information are annoying for-Emails	576							687	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

**Indicates deleted items

Table 7

Convergent and Discriminant Validity – Round 2

	Component (EFA)						
I perceive that my fitness firm constantly monitors my level of commitment to serving my needs				877			
I perceive that my fitness firm checks my satisfaction level frequently enough				858			
I perceive that my fitness firm pays close attention to providing good service to me				798			
In general, would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with digital information (website, social media, emails etc.)-Very Unfamiliar: Very Familiar					822		
Would you consider yourself informed or uninformed about digital information-Not at all informed: Highly informed					846		
Would you consider yourself knowledgeable about digital information-Know nothing at all: Know a great deal					875		
Overall, the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) provided by my fitness firm have excellent quality						732	
The digital information service quality provided by my fitness firm matches my expectations						578	
The digital information quality provided by my fitness firm is very competitive against other fitness firms						808	
My fitness firm sends me too many-Twitter tweets	907						

Table 7 (Continued)

	Component (EFA)					
My fitness firm sends me too many-Facebook promotions news feeds	869					
My fitness firm swamps me with-Twitter tweets	936					
My fitness firm swamps me with-Facebook promotions news feeds	938					
My fitness firm's digital information are annoying for-Twitter tweets	864					
My fitness firm's digital information are annoying for-Facebook promotions news feeds	879					
I am very satisfied with the information I receive from the fitness firm's digital information (website, social media, email etc.)						701
I have a positive attitude towards the fitness firm's digital information						704
My interaction with the fitness firm's digital information is very satisfying	436					628
My fitness firm's digital information (website, social media, email etc.) is trustworthy			838			
My fitness firm keeps promises it makes to me through the digital information			686			
I believe in the digital information given by my fitness firm			801			

Table 7 (Continued)

	Component (EFA)					
Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive from my fitness firm, what do you think are the chances of you ending your relationship with your fitness firm?- Within the next six months (or) before your contract ends?						
Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive from my fitness firm, what do you think are the chances of you ending your relationship with your fitness firm?- Within the next year (or) when the contract ends?						
Based on the digital information (website, social media, email etc.) I receive, I intend to recommend my fitness firm to others		802				
Based on the digital information I receive, I spread my fitness firm's good reputation		857				
Based on the digital information I receive, I inform others about my fitness firms services		849				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

Testing the assumptions of linear regression

Four principal assumptions of linear regression were tested: (1) linearity (2) independence (3) homoscedasticity, and (4) normality. Normal P-P Plots and Scatterplots were used for testing the four principal assumptions. The below figures (*Figure 3 – 12*) show the plots for all the relationships that are a part of the regression analysis for testing the hypotheses. All the normal p-p plots had all the points scattered around a straight line thereby verifying the linearity and normality assumptions. The scatterplot showed a random scatter and hence there was no problem in terms of independence and homoscedasticity assumptions for further regression analysis.

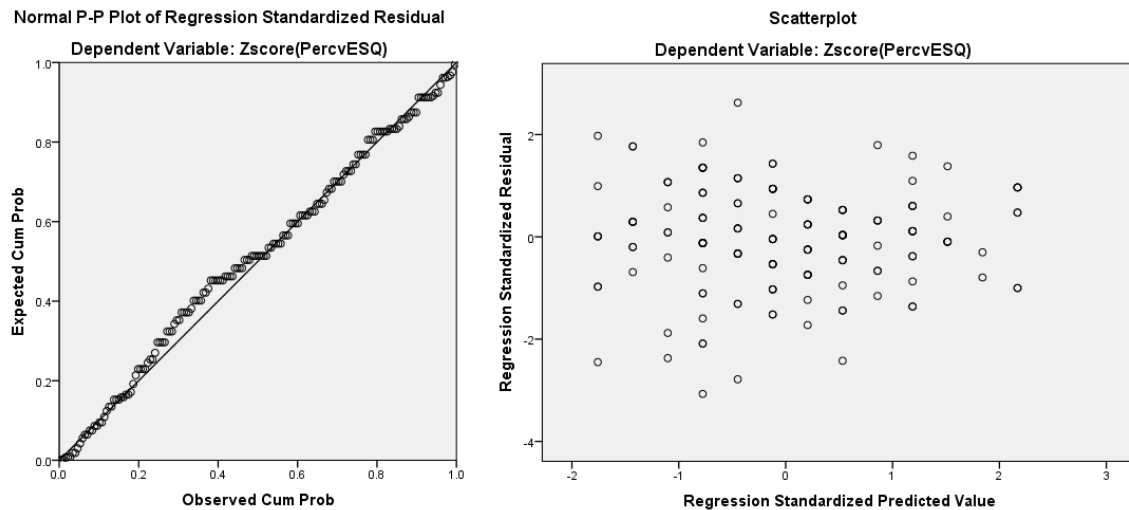


Figure 3. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – ESQ & CO

Dependent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)

Independent Variables: Perceived Customer Orientation (CO)

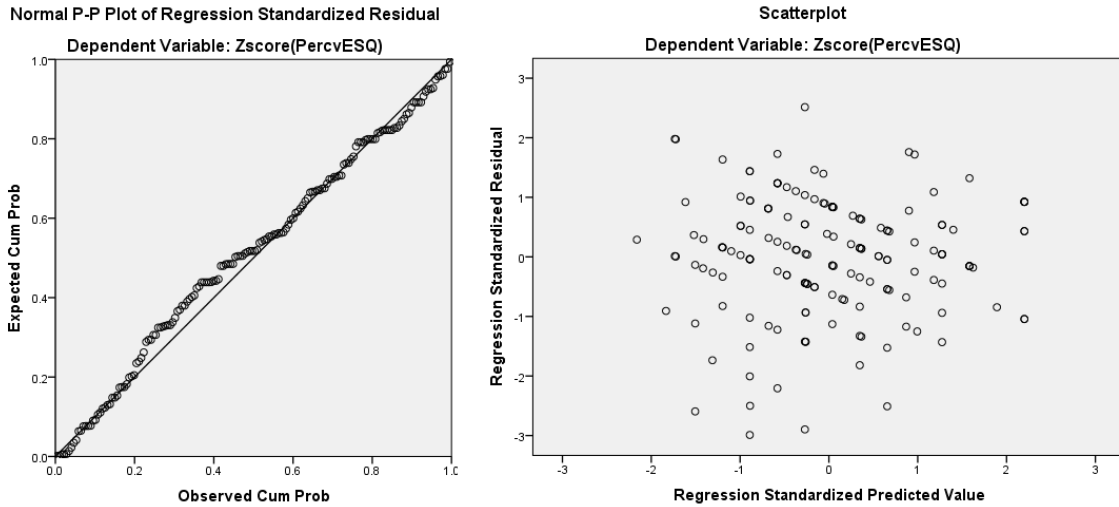


Figure 4. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – ESQ & CO/FAM

Dependent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Customer Orientation (CO)
 Moderator Variable: Familiarity (FAM)

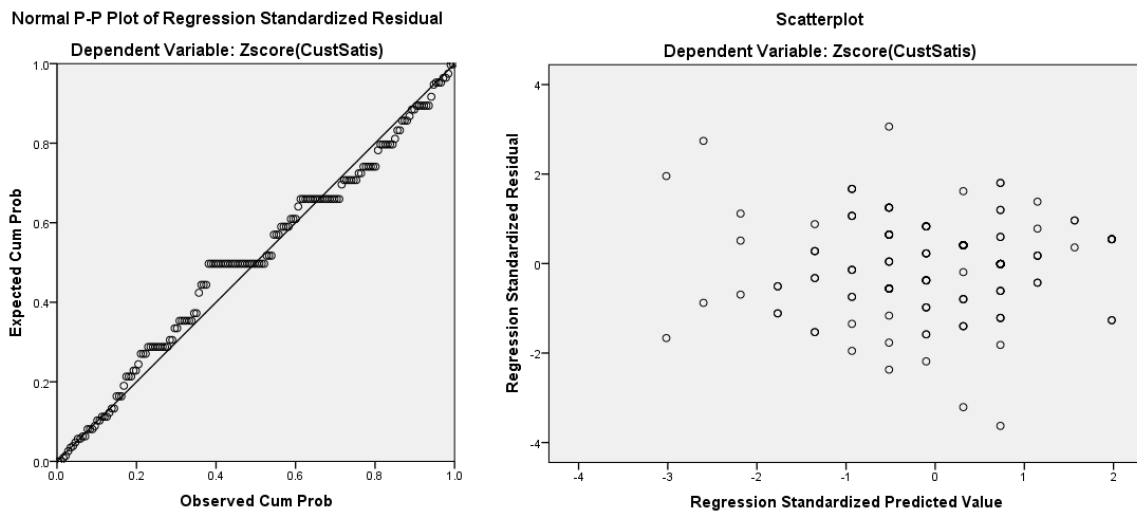


Figure 5. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – CS & ESQ

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction (CS)
 Independent Variables: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)

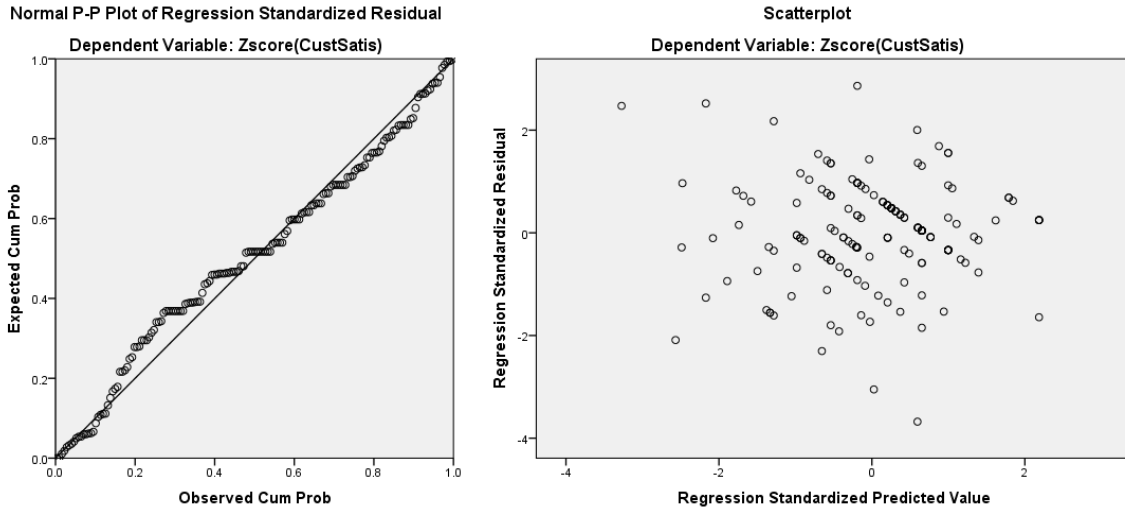


Figure 6. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – CS & ESQ/CI

Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction (CS)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)
 Moderator Variable: Communication Intensity (CI)

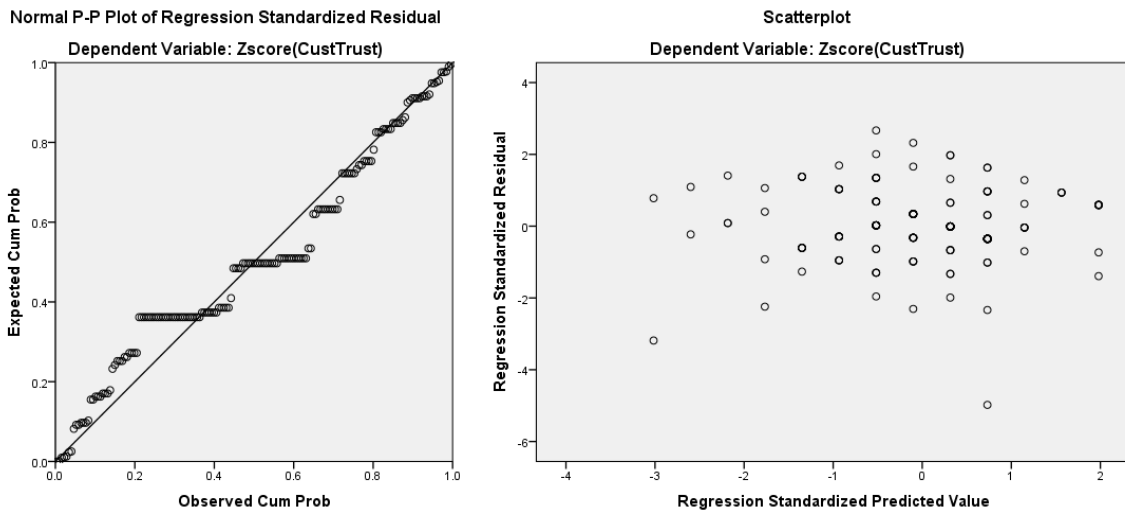


Figure 7. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – CT & ESQ

Dependent Variable: Customer Trust (CT)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)

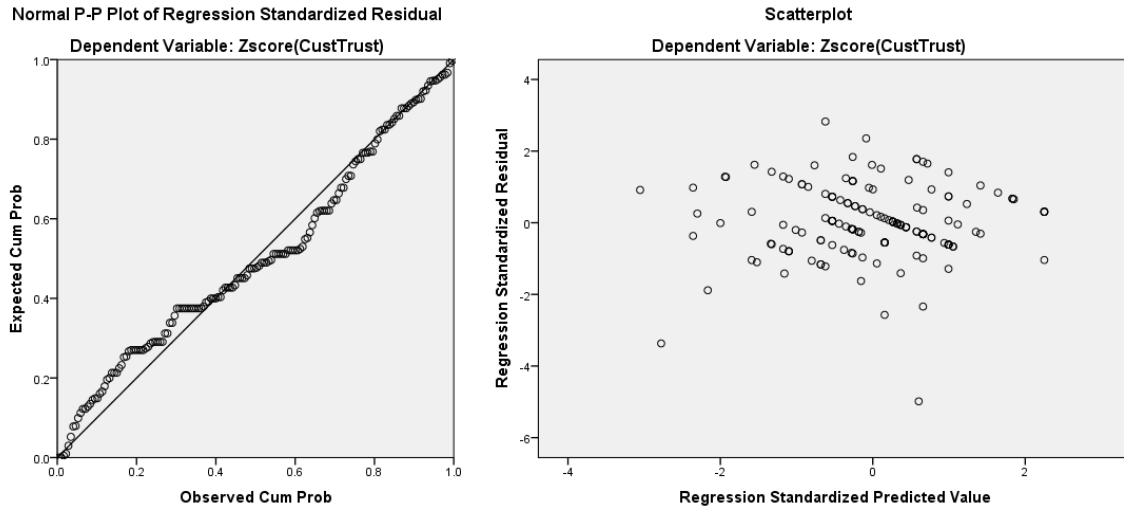


Figure 8. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – CT & ESQ/CI

Dependent Variable: Customer Trust (CT)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)
 Moderator Variable: Communication Intensity (CI)

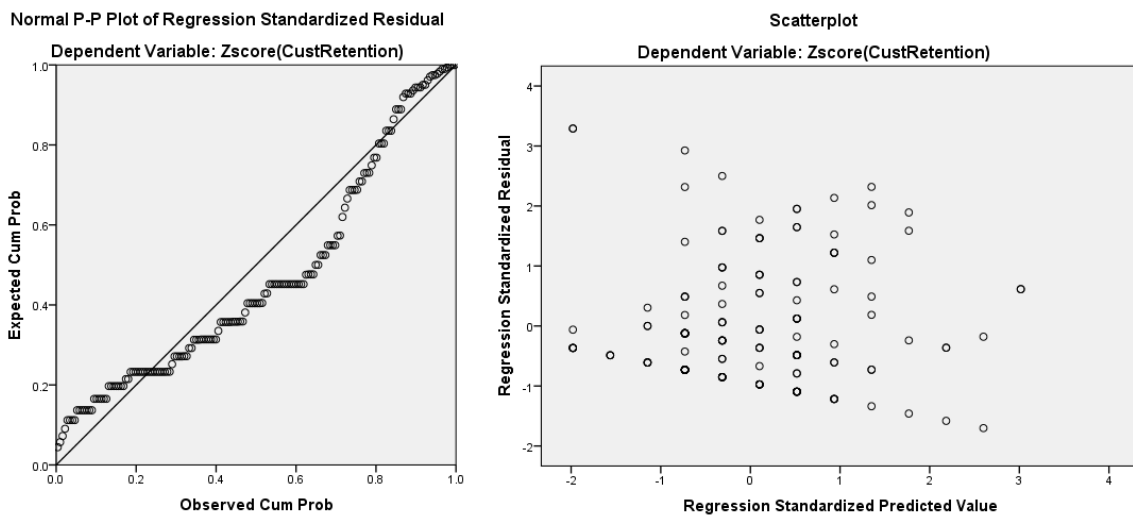


Figure 9. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – CR & ESQ

Dependent Variable: Customer Retention (CR)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)

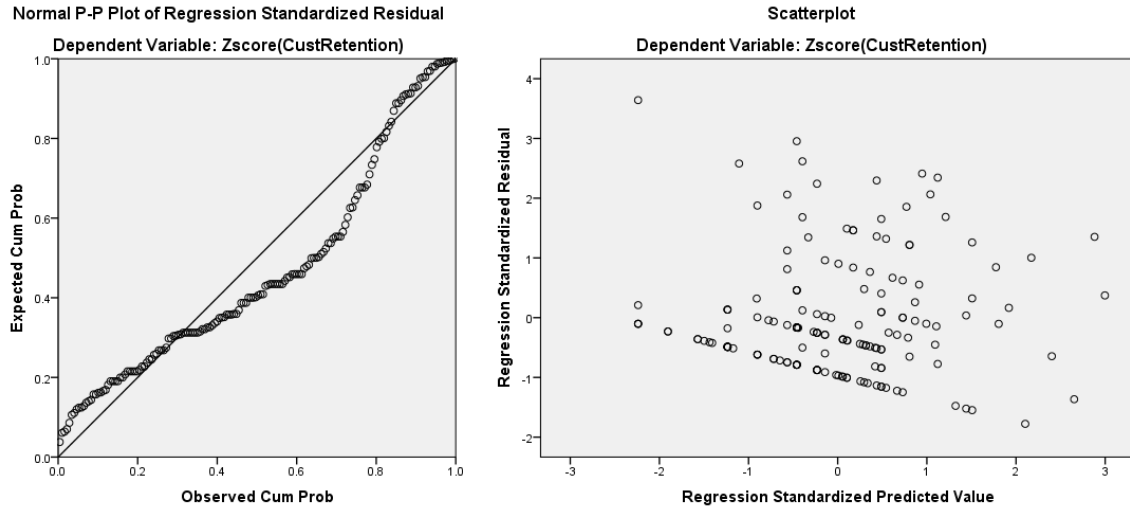


Figure 10. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – CR & ESQ/CI

Dependent Variable: Customer Retention (CR)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)
 Moderator Variable: Communication Intensity (CI)

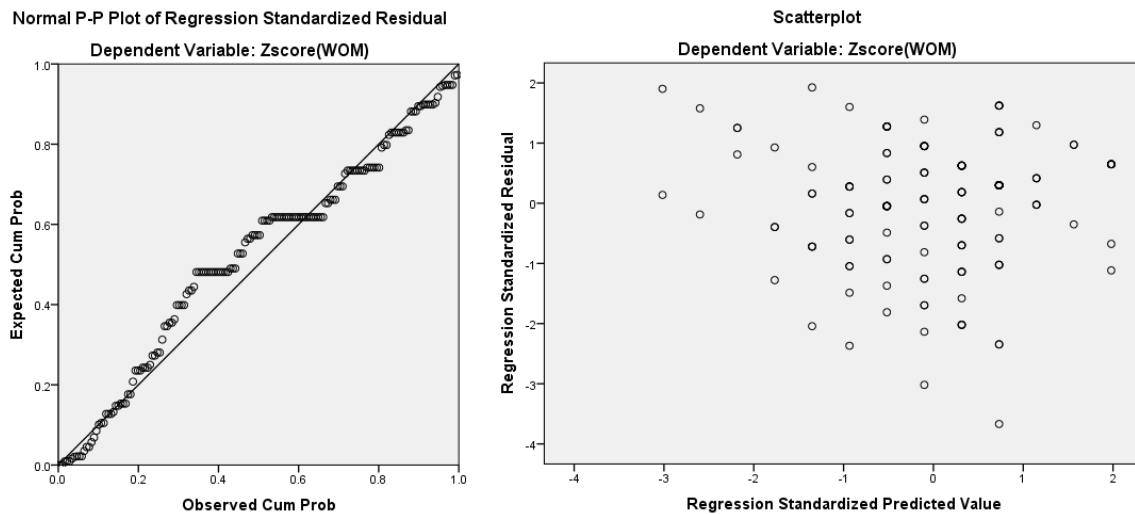


Figure 11. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – WOM & ESQ

Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth (WOM)
 Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)

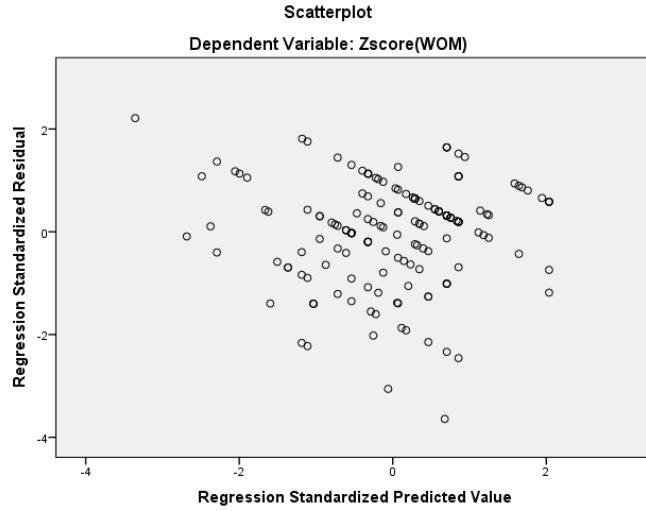
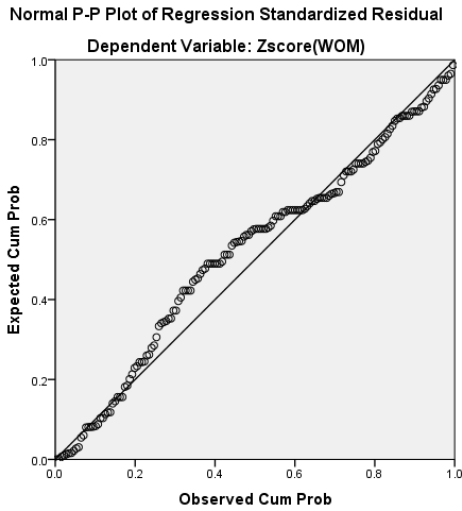


Figure 12. Normal P-P Plot and Scatterplot – WOM & ESQ/CI

Dependent Variable: Word of Mouth (WOM)
Independent Variable: Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ)
Moderator Variable: Communication Intensity (CI)

Regression Analysis

The below Table 8 shows the results for the regression analysis for each of the relationships involved in the testing for the hypothesis.

Table 8

Hypothesis Tests

<i>Hypothesized Relationship</i>	<i>R Square (t-value)</i>	<i>Hypothesis Supported</i>
H_{1i} : CO \rightarrow ESQ	0.287 (.000)	Yes
H_{2i} : CO \rightarrow ESQ (FAM ^M)	0.297 (.074)	No
H_{3a} : ESQ \rightarrow CS	0.505 (.000)	Yes
H_{4a} : ESQ \rightarrow CS (CI ^M)	0.553 (.034)	No
H_{3b} : ESQ \rightarrow CT	0.410 (.000)	Yes
H_{4b} : ESQ \rightarrow CT (CI ^M)	0.439 (-.069)	No
H_{3c} : ESQ \rightarrow CR	0.079 (.000)	No
H_{4c} : ESQ \rightarrow CR (CI ^M)	0.132 (.225)	No
H_{3d} : ESQ \rightarrow WOM	0.380 (.000)	Yes
H_{4d} : ESQ \rightarrow WOM (CI ^M)	0.391 (.512)	No

^M- Moderator, CO – Perceived Customer Orientation, ESQ – Perceived Electronic Service Quality, CS – Customer Satisfaction, CT – Customer Trust, CR – Customer Retention, WOM – Word of Mouth

The above regression results are discussed in the below discussion section.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION ON THE REGRESSION RESULTS

Based on the above results, the predicted hypotheses for this research study are verified.

Testing for Hypothesis 1

The R-square value for the relationship between the dependent variable Perceived Electronic Service Quality (ESQ) and independent variable Perceived Customer Orientation (CO) is 0.287, thereby supporting the first hypothesis. Thus the perceived CO has a positive relationship with perceived ESQ.

Testing for Hypothesis 2

In this relationship model, the variable Familiarity (FAM) acted as a moderator between CO and ESQ. The R-square did not show a significant change and hence the second hypothesis is not supported. Therefore, customer's familiarity with the digital information did not moderate the relationship between perceived CO and perceived ESQ.

Testing for Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis has four different dependent variables and hence for the third hypothesis there are four different relationships being tested. Firstly, we check the relationship between the independent variable ESQ and dependent variable customer

satisfaction (CS). The R-square value for this relationship has a significant value of 0.505 and hence the hypothesis is supported. Therefore the perceived ESQ has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

Secondly, the relationship between the independent variable ESQ and dependent variable customer trust (CT) was analyzed. The R-square value for this relationship had a significant value of 0.410 and hence the hypothesis was supported. Therefore the perceived ESQ has a positive relationship with customer trust. Thirdly, the relationship between the independent variable ESQ and dependent variable customer retention (CR) was evaluated. The R-square value for this relationship had a considerably low value of 0.079 and hence the hypothesis is not supported. Therefore, the perceived ESQ does not have a relationship with customer retention in this sample. Fourthly, the relationship between the independent variable ESQ and dependent variable WOM demonstrated an R-square value of 0.380 for this relationship, supporting the third hypothesis. Therefore the perceived ESQ has a positive impact on word of mouth.

Testing for Hypothesis 4

In this relationship model, the variable Communication Intensity (CI) acted as a moderator between ESQ and customer level outcomes (CS, CT, CR and WOM). While the R-square value increased from 0.505 to 0.553 in case of the dependent variable CS with moderator CI, the change in R-square value was considerably low (0.048). Likewise, for other dependent variables, there was no significant moderating effect. Therefore, Communication Intensity did not moderate the relationship between perceived ESQ and the customer level outcomes.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The three primary constructs of the regression model showed a significant relationship among them, which makes this a valid model that can be used for some practical considerations in business and marketing decisions. Therefore, there is a positive influence from perceived customer orientation (CO) towards perceived electronic service quality (ESQ) and a positive influence from perceived electronic quality towards customer level outcomes such as customer satisfaction (CS), customer trust (CT) and word-of-mouth (WOM). Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined service quality as the difference between customer's service expectations and the customer's perceptions of the actual service received. Based on our results, and the strength of the relationships among the components (i.e. perceived customer orientation, perceived electronic service quality, customer satisfaction and customer trust), we can extend this definition for electronic service quality as, "the difference between the customer's electronic service expectations and the customer's perceptions of the actual service received".

Accordingly, as mentioned in the background literature, CO has proved to be the fundamental component of marketing relationships and has shown a positive relationship in this study with electronic service quality as well. From the strength of the relationship, it can be inferred that the customers who perceived their fitness firms to be customer oriented were more likely to assume that they can expect good service quality thereby

indicating the importance of placing the customer in the center of the business endeavors. Also, the ESQ has proved to be a valid component even though service quality is relatively new for the online business. Once again, the claim made by Ha and John (2010) have be proven to be correct in that the investments in technology might be best measured by knowing how the enabled processes affect customer perceptions of the firm's customer orientation.

ESQ and most of the customer level outcomes also showed a positive relationship as the research results are in accordance with the study made by He and Li (2011). He and Li (2011) perceived electronic service quality by the customers to be a significant driver of various perceptions and behaviors. Therefore, from the results of this study, it can be inferred that the customers who expect quality customer service can look at the level of the electronic service quality, in which they can expect, in order to make their decision. This can be beneficial to the firm as well as when the customers spread positive WOM about the firm to others as the relationship between ESQ and WOM is strong and leads to a win-win situation for both the customers and the firms.

Lastly, both the moderators, 'Familiarity' and 'Communication intensity,' did not show any significant impact on the relationships. Even though the assumption that the familiarity of the digital information factor may act as a significant moderator in the relationship between CO and ESQ may not be supported in this study, the familiarity factor can still play an important role in the marketing relationships. This revelation has been discussed in the implications for future research section along with a discussion about the communication intensity factor.

CHAPTER IX

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Grönroos, Helnomen, Isonemi and Lindholm (2000) claimed the higher the customer perception about the quality of what is offered (i.e., content) and how it is offered (i.e., delivery) in a website, the higher the customer's perceived service quality. As mentioned, this study not only included the website aspect but extended to additional Internet tools that a firm may adapt to, such as email and social media. Therefore, this model has been formed as a basis for further studies on online marketing relationships. Additionally, the future studies can involve each of the social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter as separate entities wherein the communication intensity of Facebook, communication intensity of Twitter or communication intensity of any other individual social media platform can be adopted for testing as an individual independent entity instead of invoking the social media on a whole as one entity.

Even though the communication intensity factor did not show a significant impact on the relationship as a moderator, further studies can be done to check whether communication intensity will show a significant effect on the marketing relationships as an independent variable. Also, this study involved only social media for communication intensity (Facebook and Twitter) and, in the future, researchers could extend this model to other Internet marketing and communication tools as well.

This research model adapted the ‘Familiarity’ component as a moderator between perceived customer orientation and perceived electronic service quality. Since it did not show a significant effect on the relationship, future studies can use the ‘Familiarity’ component as an independent variable to see whether that variable has any direct impact on the perceived electronic service quality. Furthermore, in this study, the ‘Familiarity’ component included only the familiarity of the Internet. Thus, future studies could include the familiarity of the firm in the ‘Familiarity’ component to see whether it can have any significant effect as a moderator or as an independent variable.

Lastly, as another implication for the managers and executives, this study can be extended to a study on the internet business or the e-business from a firm’s perspective. Li, Chau, & Lai (2010) argue that even though many firms have implemented e-business in business operations, a better understanding of the factors that successfully drive the assimilation of e-business will provide insights for firm executives and practitioners to develop effective strategies for e-business. Therefore, a study can be done from the firm’s perspective to investigate the impact of e-business assimilation on the online fitness firms using a strategic orientation approach.

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