

# Descriptive Content Analysis on E-Service Research

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## ABSTRACT

The current study systematically and thoroughly reviewed the extant literature on e-service quality research to examine 1) how e-service is defined by researchers, 2) how e-service quality is defined by researchers, 3) what e-service quality scales and dimensions have been identified, 4) what outcome variables have been assessed in the e-service quality literature, and 5) what theories have been applied in the literature. A total of 72 articles published between 2003 and 2013 were content analyzed. The selected articles focused primarily on e-service quality in the context of B2C e-retailing. The findings of the study provide valuable information to e-service researchers by identifying gaps and disparities in the e-service quality literature. This study provides several crucial suggestions and directions for future research.

## KEYWORDS

Content Analysis, Dimensions, E-commerce, Scales, Service, Service Quality, Theory

## INTRODUCTION

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) emerged in the mid-1990s (Toufaily, Ricard, & Perrien, 2013). Over the last 20 years, with the rapid advent of the Internet and e-commerce and as more and more people become involved with online shopping, a growing number of research studies focused on e-service quality. Researchers developed various scales and dimensions to measure key elements of e-service quality. However, those e-service research studies oftentimes either did not provide a clear definition of e-service quality or the definition provided was unclear and ambiguous. Key dimensions of e-service quality were also frequently inconsistent across studies (Kim & Lennon, 2012; Ladhari, 2010; Yaya, Marimon, & Fa, 2012).

The concept of service quality is one of the most significant research topics in marketing because of its relation to financial performance, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and customer reassurance (Zahedifard, Mohebi, & Dastrain, 2014). Due to its importance e-service quality is one of the most investigated research topics in the context of e-commerce, and many researchers have identified new dimensions and developed new scales as a means of assessing e-service quality. In spite of these efforts, Akinci, Atilgan-Ina, and Aksoy (2010) pointed out that research on e-service quality is at a preliminary phase compared to the traditional service quality literature. There is little research conducted specifically to provide a systematic review of the extant research that provides a holistic overview of current e-service research and provides direction to the e-service quality literature. Without a holistic and comprehensive review of previous research on e-service quality to identify gaps and disparities in the literature, e-service quality research will not advance beyond the preliminary phase.

Recently in an attempt to address this issue, Kim and Lennon (2012) reviewed extant research articles on e-service quality to define e-service and to review dimensions of e-service quality. However, their research did not comprehensively content analyze the reviewed articles and did not conduct a systematic search to locate empirical research for analysis.

To address this limitation, the current study systematically and thoroughly content analyzed the extant literature on e-service quality research published during a 11 year period (January 2003 to December 2013) to examine 1) how e-service is defined by researchers, 2) how e-service quality is defined by researchers, 3) what e-service quality scales and dimensions have been identified, 4) what outcome variables have been assessed in the e-service quality literature, and 5) what theories have been applied in the literature. Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) used in various fields to analyze text data (Cavanagh, 1997). It is an unobtrusive and nonreactive approach to provide knowledge and understand phenomena of interest (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Using content analysis, researchers can systematically and objectively understand a phenomenon by describing and quantifying it (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007).

## **THEORETICAL /CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **Theoretical Background of Service Quality**

The service quality model proposed by Grönroos (1984) is the first theory developed in the field of service quality (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015). Grönroos's service quality model was developed to understand the components of service quality and how the quality of services is perceived by consumers (Grönroos, 1984).

In this model, consumers' expectations towards a firm's service and their actual perceptions of the service are the two components of service quality. A firm's promises to consumers and the consumers' previous experience affect consumers' expectations for service, while the perceived service is the outcome of the consumers' perceptions of the service itself. There are two dimensions of quality that affect consumers' evaluations of service quality: technical quality (i.e., what services consumers receive) and functional quality (i.e., how consumers receive services). The model puts more emphasis on functional quality than on technical quality in affecting consumers' perceived service quality. In keeping with this note, in an empirical study by Zaibaf, Taherikia, and Fakharian (2013) using Grönroos service quality model in an offline retail environment, no significant relationship between technical quality and perceived quality was found.

In the context of e-retailing where the interaction is only between human and a machine, how a consumer interacts with a retailing site to get a desired product (i.e., functional quality) is particularly important. Thus, based on the emphasized relationship between functional quality and perceived service in Grönroos' service quality model, the current study conducted a content analysis of e-service quality research to thoroughly understand the antecedents and consequences of e-service quality. Definitions of e-service, e-service quality, and theories employed were also examined.

### **E-Service**

Service quality is an indispensable component in today's highly competitive business. It affects almost all aspects of consumer behavior such as customer's value, trust, commitment, long term customer loyalty (Thaichon, Lobo, Prentice, & Quach, 2014), purchase intention, satisfaction, attitudes toward the website, and perceived risk (Vila & Kuster, 2011). Rust (2001) defined e-service as "the provision of service over electronic networks" (p. 283). Sanayei, Shaemi, and Nasirzadeh (2011) defined

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