нововведением будет добавление двойного подтверждения при подключении платных услуг, а нововведением с наименьшей значимостью обладает инновация по уведомлению об ответе службы поддержки в чате.

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УДОВЛЕТВОРЕННОСТЬ ПОТРЕБИТЕЛЕЙ

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Аннотация. В статье анализируется концепция удовлетворенности потребителей. Выполнен литературный обзор и обоснована значимость удовлетворенности клиентов для представителей бизнеса. Поставлена задача измерения удовлетворенности потребителей, дана характеристика ключевых работ по данной проблеме. Проанализированы сильные и слабые стороны различных методов оценки удовлетворенности клиентов. Даны рекомендации по совершенствованию маркетинговой деятельности организаций с учетом концепции удовлетворенности потребителей.

Ключевые слова: удовлетворенность потребителей, измерение удовлетворенности, методы оценки удовлетворенности потребителей, маркетинг.

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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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***Abstract**.* Concept of customer satisfaction is analyzed in the article. A literature review was realized, and the significance of customer satisfaction for business representatives is substantiated. The problem of customer satisfaction measuring is set, and the characteristics of key works on this problem are given. The strengths and weaknesses of various methods for evaluating customer satisfaction are analyzed. Recommendations for improving marketing activities of organizations taking into account the concept of customer satisfaction are given.

***Keywords**:* customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction measuring, customer satisfaction evaluating methods, marketing.

1. Introduction

In the marketing and business world, customer satisfaction plays a very central role. If you have a product or service that you want to sell, you need someone who is in need of this offering to actually buy it. Satisfying someone else's needs is therefore at the core of each business transaction. For one-time customers to come back and purchase again, however, they need to be completely satisfied by their user experience. For that reason, businesses have to find ways to guarantee long-term customer satisfaction. This report aims to more specifically define customer satisfaction, present ways to analyse and best reach it, consider its limitations and what implications can be drawn for marketing efforts.

2. The concept of customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be defined as "the extent to which a product's perceived performance matches a buyer's expectations" [4, p. 13]. A buyer is satisfied when expectations are met and dissatisfied when they are not. Customers whose expectations have not only been met, but exceeded are "highly satisfied" or "delighted" [4, p. 13]. Knowing what customers need and want is consequently key to providing satisfactory service. The importance of customer satisfaction lies in the subsequent postpurchase behaviour. As Kotler et al. [4, p. 163] outline, almost every customer experiences some level of "cognitive dissonance" and "buyer discomfort" after completing a transaction. The reason for this is the usually large number of competing offerings that the customers decided against which is a compromise they might regret, even if they are happy about the benefits their purchase offers them. If a brand manages to leave the customers highly satisfied or even delighted after consumption, their discomfort will be considerably lower and more positive feelings will be connected with the brand. The goal is to make the customers choose the offering again and again and to subsequently build up customer loyalty. Kotler et al. [4, p. 13] stress that studies have found a positive correlation between high customer satisfaction and higher customer loyalty. This, in turn, has a direct impact on revenue and profit. Williams & Naumann [9, p. 27] found while studying a company that "the average total revenue per account and the average revenue growth rate per account increased as satisfaction scores increased". This corroborates previous research that "customer satisfaction is

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positively linked to loyalty, revenue, and profitability" [9, p. 22]. While all this, on the one hand, makes satisfied customers highly desirable, dissatisfied customers, on the other hand, should be avoided at all costs. Complaints and negative word-of-mouth "can quickly damage consumer attitudes about a company and its products" [4, p. 163]. There are even key figures to quantify the losses a company faces because of dissatisfied customers: "Lost Customer Revenue", "Lost Opportunity Revenue" and "Customer Replacement Costs" [2, p. 9]. Lost Customer Revenue is the money lost to competitors because of bad service, Lost Opportunity Revenue refers to the money you might lose when customers are not satisfied or even discourage others from doing business with you, and Customer Replacement Costs is the price you pay to win new customers as substitutes for the lost ones. Dissatisfying customers can consequently be very expensive and this shows the importance of reaching customer satisfaction. However, Gerson [2, p. 12] emphasises that a company cannot know what exactly customers perceive as good quality and service and, moreover, "[m]ost unhappy customers never tell the company about their problems" [4, p. 163]. This makes it very difficult for a company to meet customer's expectations and satisfy them. Therefore, it is recommended to measure customer satisfaction and ask customers directly for their opinion.

2.1. Measuring customer satisfaction

There are a variety of ways to approach the measurement of customer satisfaction. Gerson [2, p. 6] directly links customer satisfaction to quality and customer service and suggests methods how to measure these two to allow conclusions about how satisfied customers are.

In order to measure quality, events that indicate low quality, e.g. mixed-up orders, wrong shippings, wrong order entries, wrong stock selections or employees' sick days, can be tracked by, for instance, using check sheets, pareto charts, histograms or other kinds of diagrams [2, pp. 33 – 41]. These allow for easier identification of the most important issues that need to be handled first and possible correlations between problems. Another technique for quality improvement is "benchmarking" which means looking at possibly the best or one of the best competitors in your field and considering which needs of the customers they satisfy that you do not [2, p. 43]. Simply copying their approach, however, will not work because you have to also clearly distinguish yourself from competitors and strive to be unique. These methods provide only limited conclusions about customer satisfaction since they only take the internal perspective and look at what the company considers to be good quality. Yet, customers may put most value on very different aspects.

Therefore, you need to get in direct touch with customers to measure their satisfaction. This can be achieved by gathering quantitative data that allows to calculate an average, compare data over time and have a reference value on which to base future developments [3, p. 8]. Quantitative data can be

collected through questionnaires, surveys, telephone surveys and personal interviews conducted with customers [2, p. 58]. Customers can be asked to rate certain attributes on a numerical scale (e. g. [1 – 5]), narrative scale (e.g. dissatisfied-highly satisfied) or by rating two attributes in comparison with each other to create a map of customers' perceptions [2, pp. 59 – 69; 76 – 77]. Questionnaires and surveys need to be constructed carefully to collect relevant data. Scales should always include an uneven number of possible answers to include a "neutral point" for reference and questions should only ever ask to rate one attribute at a time since it is otherwise impossible to tell which attribute the response refers to [2, pp. 61 – 62]. In order to analyse the results and gain an overview, Gerson [2, p. 71] suggests developing a Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) which compiles all ratings into one percentage or number. In addition to quantitative data, qualitative data can be collected through analysing interviews with focus groups, customer purchasing preferences, warranty claims and customer complaints and generally asking open-ended questions [3, p. 15]. Such questions cannot be answered by rating attributes on a scale, but require individual customer responses. This gives "the ability to understand the underlying reasons for customer needs" instead of just pointing out problematic areas [3, p. 15]. Therefore, it is recommended to include both quantitative and qualitative questions in surveys.

An interesting aspect of creating customer satisfaction is handling customer complaints. As Kotler et al. [4, p. 163] put it, companies should "encourage customers to complain" so they can learn how to do better and keep customers from simply going to competitors. Yet, companies and employees dislike having customers complain directly to them and often, customers are "unable to find anyone who will take responsibility" [8, p. 2]. At the same time, companies "falsely equate low rates of complaints with customer satisfaction and overlook the fact that […] they only poll customers who have not yet switched at the time of the survey" [8, p. 3]. To avoid falling into this trap, companies should welcome customer complaints, train employees on how to deal with them, evaluate the criticism and take active steps in improving [8, p. 3]. That way, customer satisfaction is not measured wrongly and by dealing with complaints in a welcoming and serious way, dissatisfied customers can potentially be kept from switching and even become satisfied customers in the future. As the case of complaints shows, employees are central to satisfying customers and providing a good service quality. Therefore, the performance of employees should be measured as well and a rewards system built up to provide incentives for good work [2, p. 17].

One example of a company renowned for its customer satisfaction is Ritz-Carlton. Its hotel staff "go to legendary extremes" to meet customer needs and wants and "discreetly observe and record even the smallest guest preferences" and immediately try to respond and fulfil them [4, p. 14]. Anoth-

er good example is the American supermarket Trader Joe's which was ranked second by the American Customer Satisfaction Index in 2018 because of its uniqueness, range of products and service quality [1].

In summary, standardisation of service quality, staff trainings, rewards programmes, added values beyond customers' expectations, continuous contact with and feedback from customers and, where possible, building alliances and partnerships with customers are good ways to increase overall quality and customer satisfaction [2, pp. 19 – 20]. Williams & Naumann [9, p. 29] additionally stress "continuous process improvement" as very important.

2.2. Limitations

Even though there are a lot of ways to measure customer satisfaction, both they and the concept itself come with some limitations. First of all, the aforementioned CSI and quantitative data as a means of indicating a company's level of customer satisfaction can only give a general idea and do not give direct implications on what exactly needs to be improved and how. Moreover, surveys as a measure of satisfaction are biased since only some customers respond (who may or may not be representative of all customers) and the company might only ask about attributes they consider important [3, p. 1]. In order to get relevant data, customers need to first be interviewed about what they perceive as quality [2, p. 71] which makes measuring satisfaction a time-consuming and demanding process. Additionally, big companies need to measure satisfaction in exactly the same way in all of their departments to be able to come to meaningful conclusions [9, p. 23].

Furthermore, Williams & Naumann [9, p. 25] registered a "dramatic drop in customer retention rates" for all measured levels of customer satisfaction below highly satisfied which means that even satisfied customers are not guaranteed to come back. Goldstein [3, p. 28] also recognises that satisfaction does not equal loyalty and loyalty is in fact "measured by the intersection of satisfaction and willingness to both repurchase and recommend". So even if a company measures high satisfaction, it does not mean that they have high customer loyalty and that there is no more room for improvement.

Yet, even constant improvement in the pursuit of customer satisfaction has its limitations. As Rubera & Kirca [7, pp. 742 – 743] point out, companies need to also satisfy shareholders who often value and pursue different things than customers. Consequently, "it may be difficult for firms to maximally satisfy customers while also maximizing the value they create for shareholders through innovation" [7, p. 743].

2.3. Implications for marketing

Despite its limitations, customer satisfaction still remains a very important concept and worth focusing marketing efforts on. Considering the marketing mix of 7 Ps (e.g. [6]), the following implications can be drawn.

In terms of product, physical evidence and place, companies should invest a lot in market research to find out who their potential customers are and what they need and want in terms of product characteristics and distribution. As Kotler et al. [4, p. 163] put it, "[m]any marketers go beyond merely meeting the expectations of customers; they aim to delight the customer" which is key to retaining them.

Concerning price, the same applies. Research has to be done to find out customers' price expectations as well as their willingness-to-pay. Only when a company has high brand equity and offers high perceived quality are customers willing to pay a price premium which is a strong "indicator of brand loyalty" [5, p. 211].

Regarding people and process, the previous chapters have shown that staff should be well trained to provide excellent service, using companies such as Ritz-Carlton as a benchmark, and be especially competent in complaints management. Employee performance should be measured regularly and a rewards system put in place for motivation.

The last P, promotion, might be one of the most important. As the definition showed, customer satisfaction revolves around customers' expectations. These are set by the company itself through communication and should be neither too high nor too low [4, p. 7]. As Kotler et al. [4, p. 13] put it, "[s]mart companies aim to delight customers by promising only what they can deliver and then delivering more than they promise". Additionally, if a product fails to attract customers, "marketing might launch advertising messages that trigger the need and show how the product solves customers' problems" [4, p. 163]. Similarly, the company's communication efforts can be used to change the public perception and attitude towards a product and improve them to convince more people [4, p. 163). Promotion activities therefore need to be carefully planned to both attract people and raise the right kind of expectations that will ideally lead to delighted customers.

3. Concluding Discussion

This report has shown that customer satisfaction is a complex concept that offers large benefits for a company's equity and profits. It is, however, quite difficult to measure without making mistakes or ignoring customers' own perceptions. Communicating directly with customers and asking them about their expectations and perceptions of quality is essential. Quantitative data can give interesting insights, while qualitative data is best for gaining meaningful implications. Since it is such a complicated and time-consuming process, however, not every company will have the means and resources to competently analyse it. In summary, direct customer contact and feedback, standardisation of services and processes, employee trainings and rewards systems and prompt and effective reaction to feedback help contribute to developing customer satisfaction. Most of the books on measuring satisfaction used in

this report date some years back, and therefore new methods of analysis and customer contact provided by the internet and increasingly complex software as well as new ways of complaining and bad-mouthing a company online were not taken into consideration. In my opinion, customer satisfaction still remains difficult to achieve and measure. It is based on expectations and feedback of individuals who might want and value different attributes in a product. Kotler et al.'s benchmark example Ritz-Carlton includes that employees try to get ahold of a picture of guests' pets to frame and put in their hotel room [4, p. 14]. While some might be delighted by this, others might perceive it as creepy and an invasion of privacy. Therefore, it is important to ask a very large group of people for feedback to be able to draw somewhat reliable conclusions about target groups. Putting customers' needs and wants first can never be wrong, however, and constant quality and customer service improvement is a good way to start. The whole marketing mix should consider market research about customers and a special focus should be put on communication as it influences customers' perceptions and expectations. When striving for customer satisfaction, external factors such as expectations from shareholders should not be forgotten and the importance of customer satisfaction for loyalty and subsequent customer lifetime value made clear to them. All in all, customer satisfaction is a difficult to grasp concept, but measuring and constantly trying to improve it offers a lot of advantages to companies.

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