Interfaces between service quality and the nature of fast food services

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Abstract

Services quality is influenced by the comparative between customer's perceptions and expectations, and customer participation in production-consumption process of a service can contribute to influence perception. This article aims to analyze the service environment in franchises and quality of services, in light of services classification. using analysis method to test 5 hypotheses about service quality and the type of service, with a sample of 211 respondents. It presents as final considerations a classification for franchises in the food segment and results point out opportunities to manage the services assertively, regardless of the classification of services.

Keywords: Services environment, Service quality, service classification.

Introduction

Clients have expectations regarding the service they receive, and satisfaction usually results from satisfied expectations (ZEITHAML, BERRY, PARASURAMAN 1993). The search for customer satisfaction is sought by organizations in general, which has been well studied in academia. Perceptions and expectations are the basis for assessing quality of service. Therefore, quality must be analyzed from the client's point of view considering that it acts based on their perceptions. Consumers analyze everything they can observe, environment details, looking for a signal of quality including who provides the services and how it is provided, where they are provided and how it is done or whether they judge people, environments and processes in service organizations (JOHNSON, MAYER, CHAMPANER, 2004; BAKER, GREWAL, PARASURAMAN 1994; REIMER, KUEHN 2005; BAILEY, ARENI 2006). They expect to find a service location that communicates the level of concern the company has to satisfy them.

But, depending on the type of service, client perception may be influenced. In this sense, in service management, it is important to analyze the classification proposed by Silvestro (1999) who mentioned three classifications for services: professional services, services shop, and mass services, giving rise to different management concerns, and that service strategy, control and performance measurement will differ between each one.

To conduct a study on an economic sector, this research deals with food services. Brazil is among the countries where most franchising found opportunities to grow. Today, companies of all sizes franchise their business. They are companies of the most diverse branches of activity, which require initial investments from R $ 30 thousand to large sums, in excess of R $ 1 million (SEBRAE 2017). In this sense, this work analyzes the quality of service in food franchises and its interface with the classification of services. Thus, this article aims to evaluate the interfaces between quality of services and different types of fast food services, using the classification scheme proposed by Silvestro et al (1999), considering the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model.

Faced with this, some hypotheses were stated: Hypothesis 1: is it possible to classify the types of services according to Silvestro's classification for fast food, using the suggested variables?; Hypothesis 2: Do customers perceive services classification, although approximated, for fast food franchise? Hypothesis 3: is there a difference between the dimensions of quality services for fast food? Hypothesis 4: is there is some difference between the dimensions of quality services depending on the type of service according to services classification? Hypothesis 5: customer responses support service classification, using the frequency of use?

In this sense the present work faces the five hypothesis for fast food segment.

Fundament

Service quality
Due to its characteristics, it is important to observe the way services are provided, bringing the context of services quality to discussion. Service quality is influenced by the comparison between customer expectations versus customer perception (NOBREGA 2015; GRONROOS 1990, ZEITHAML, BERRY, PARASURAMAN 1993).

Perceptions and expectations are basis for assessing service quality of. Therefore, quality must be taken from the customer's point of view considering that it acts based on their perceptions. For the clients, physical aspects assume a degree of greater importance, according to other studies (PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML e BERRY, 1993; LOVELOCK e WRIGHT, 2006; GRÖNROOS, 1990).

To Campos (1992), "a quality product or service is one that perfectly meets, reliably, affordably, safely and at the right time the customer's needs". According to Lovelock and Wright (2006) quality of service is the degree to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations. If customers perceive service delivery as better than expected, they will be satisfied; if service delivery is perceived below expectations they will be upset and the quality of service evaluation will be done according to their degree of satisfaction with service.

Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2010) define service quality by comparing the perception of the service provided with the expectations of the desired service. According to BERRY and PARASURAMAN (1992), customer expectations are the true standards for evaluating service quality. They state, based on the results of cross-industry surveys, that customers evaluate service quality by comparing what they want or expect with what they experience.

People's expectations about services are influenced by their own past experiences as customers, and if they do not have prior experience, customers can base their expectations on such factors as word of mouth or advertising (LOVELOCK e WRIGHT 2006; PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML e BERRY, 1985). Lovelock and Wright (2006) comment that such expectations involve several different elements, including desired

service, adequate service, predicted service and a zone of tolerance that extends between the desired and appropriate levels. To Nobrega (2012), each client has needs, knowledge, past experiences, values, limitations and desires that can strongly affect their experiences and perceptions.

Service quality has been classified in some dimensions to facilitate understanding and better understanding The dimensions are: a) reliability - ability to deliver promised service with confidence and accuracy; b) responsiveness - willingness to assist customers and provide service promptly; c) security - knowledge and courtesy of employees, as well as their ability to convey trust and confidentiality; d) empathy - show interest, personalized attention to the client; e) tangible aspects - appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials (PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML, BERRY, 1991; FITZSIMMONS; FITZSIMMONS, 2010). These dimensions are known as the Servqual scale.

Servqual scale works with these dimensions and is an instrument that corresponds to an attempt to construct a standardized approach aimed at measuring users' perceptions regarding quality of service, based on the discrepancy between expectations and performance (PARASURAMAN, ZEITHAML, BERRY 1985, STAUSS, NEUHAUS 1997).

Services classification
When evaluating a service it is important to understand the classification: services are not the same, however they have characteristics in common that allow to classify (GRONROOS,1990; FITZSIMMONS, FITZSIMMONS 2005). There are different approaches to classifying services. Silvestro (1999) proposes a matrix of classification of services based on the productive volume of the organization - which in the service process model is defined as the volume of clients processed per business unit per period. This classification emphasizes the number of clients served with the degree of involvement not only of the service provider, but also of the user, on a scale that goes from mass services, where there is great demand and low interaction, while on the other side are professional services, with a lower request frequency, however with high degree of customization.

In this proposed model of service processes which is analogous to the model of the production process in the operations literature, Silvestro et. al (1992) proposed that there are three types of service processes. Each type of service is characterized in terms of six dimensions: focus on people / equipment, customer contact level, front office value added, degree of customization, degree of employee discretion and focus on the product / process. These dimensions correlate with the volume of clients processed, considers high as professional services, medium or mixed as service shop and low as mass services.

Methodology
This work is characterized as descriptive, with the purpose of evaluating the impact of the environment on the quality of food franchise services, taking into account the dimensions of the Servqual model, proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml e Berry (1985) and the characteristics of services proposed by Silvestro (1999). For this purpose, a theoretical survey was carried out on the main publications on service management, in order to evaluate the variables that can directly influence the service, the service delivery, as well as customer perception.

The analytical variables observed came from Servqual dimensions: tangible aspects, reliability, readiness, safety, and empathy. The fast food restaurants were selected and

classified according to the classification of services proposed by Silvestro (1992): professional, shop, and mass, according to the characteristics of services. Three fast food franchises were selected: PittsBurg, Subway and McDonalds, classified respectively as: professional, shop, and mass.

Thus McDonald's has been classified as mass services which reflects low customer contact level, low degree of customization, high volume of customers served, and low degree of autonomy. Regarding professional services, it was represented in the article by fast food restaurant: PittsBurg characterized within the classification by high level of contact with customer, high degree of customization, and low volume of customers served. To conclude, service shop classification was represented by Subway characterized by mixed focus on people and equipment, medium-time contact and process-oriented.

A questionnaire was used with questions associated to variables, previously tested, through the application of 57 questionnaires where the importance of each variable was inquired according to the type of service. Frequencies of use in each restaurant were also raised. Likert scale was used, with scores varying from 1 (low importance) to 7 (high importance). Respondents were selected for convenience, a non-probabilistic sample, and 211 questionnaires were applied to Administration undergraduate students of a private Faculty, located in the metropolitan region of a Brazilian Northeast capital. Percentages of responses were compared for end of analysis.

Results and discussion
Regarding frequency, professional services present the lowest frequency of respondents. Mass and Job services presented frequency of use identical, but larger than professional services. The fact that professional services have lower frequency rates reinforces the fact that professional services have low volume of clients served, while mass services are characterized by high volume of clients served, as recommended in the classification model (SILVESTRO et al., 1999).

Professional services presented slightly higher results regarding relative importance of the dimensions when compared to the others. Regarding the frequency of responses related to the minor importance bands, shop and mass services have slightly higher results. This may be associated with the fact that professional service clients have higher expectations regarding the service provided. On the other hand, despite the fact that professional services pointed out a percentage slightly above the others, it can be observed that the three types of services, in the sum total, present similar percentages, which may be associated to the fact that fast food restaurants tend to present high levels of standardization. This suggests a replication of the survey next to restaurants with higher level of distinction, such as fast food, a la carte restaurant and gourmet restaurant.

Results showed that it is possible to observe the particularities of the service process of each of the food franchises and to carry out their respective classifications, where the suggested variables are described in Table 1. In this way, Hypothesis 1 was reached, once that it was possible to classify the types of services according to Silvestro's classification for Fast food, from the suggested variables.

Hypothesis 2 punctuated whether customers had an even approximate perception of Silvestro's classification for fast food. Results show positive conclusion, once classification from 57 consumers responses, in the first phase of the research, confirmed previous classification made by the research team, using the model proposed variables.

Table 1: The types of services according to Silvestro's classification.

Dimension	Criterion	Professional	Shop	Mass
Product	Variety of products on the menu	High	Middle	Low
	Product customization	High	Middle	Low
Attendance	Contact Time with Attendant (includes contact frequency)	High	Middle	Low
	Impact of quality of attendance	High	Middle	Low
Customer	Degree of standardization	Low	Middle	Low
	Customer autonomy	High	Middle	Low

And according to the classification of services of Silvestro, the research in its first phase presented in fast food restaurants the following results:

- Regarding variety in the menu, customization of service, employees' interaction, perception of greater autonomy, PittsBurg presented high indicators (7), while the perception of standardization in this restaurant was low. These characteristics, using Silvestro's classification of services, classify fast food PittsBurg as Professional Services.
- In the middle appears Subway with average rating, standing as a service shop.
- At the other end, McDonalds has a high level of standardization and a low level of personalization, interaction with employees, quality impact and perception of autonomy. This evaluation classifies this restaurant as mass service.
- Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is accepted, indicating that customers perceive services classification, although approximated, for fast food franchise.

Analyzing the high importance given by the respondents regarding quality, responding to Hypothesis 3, mass services presented averages of greater importance, especially in security dimension. This fact shows that there are differences between quality services dimensions between mass services and professional services. So, Hypothesis 3 is accepted, indicating difference between the dimensions of quality services for fast food.

Table 2 shows the frequency obtained with the application of the scale, in which results 6 and 7 were considered to be of high importance, results 3, 4 and 5 as median importance, while results 1 and 2 were considered as low importance.

Table 3 presents the result of the means and the t test that was performed to compare the means between the groups. In the Sig column it is observed that if it is greater than 0.05 (Sig> 0.05) it means that the variances are homogeneous. If the Sig (p-value) is less than 0.05 (Sig <0.05) it means that the variances are not homogeneous. Observing the Sig (2-tailed) column, we conclude that there are no statistically significant differences between the groups.

The fact that the results for Servqual dimensions presented high indexes of importance in the evaluation of services in the three types of classification may have been due to the fact that the food services were well represented in the franchise sector and consequently standardized. It may be justified by the fact that the environment in services permeates evaluation processes with a high subjectivity load.

Table 2: Frequency for level of importance for service quality

Servqual dimension	Level of importance	Professional	Shop	Mass
		PittsBurg	Subway	Mc Donalds;
Tangible aspects	High	100,00%	0,00%	91,77%
	Middle	0,00%	100,00%	87,12%
	Low	87,28%	0,00%	100,00%
Reliability	High	92,75%	100,00%	0,00%
	Middle	82,56%	0,00%	100,00%
	Low	100,00%	95,76%	0,00%
Responsiveness	High	100,00%	88,32%	0,00%
	Middle	0,00%	92,17%	100,00%
	Low	96,17%	100,00%	0,00%
Security	High	100,00%	95,77%	0,00%
	Middle	0,00%	94,49%	100,00%
	Low	100,00%	0,00%	100,00%
Empathy	High	100,00%	0,00%	87,70%
	Middle	0,00%	100,00%	96,58%
	Low	0,00%	96,39%	100,00%

Results were evaluated and based on the perception of the respondents, where through the classification of Silvestro (1999), it is emphasized that the attributes of SERVQUAL have great indices of importance in the evaluation of the services of the food franchises. This result recognizes that there is no difference between the dimensions of quality services according to the type of service according to the classification, which predisposes the non-confirmation of Hypothesis 4. So, Hypothesis 4 was not accepted, indicating non existence of evidence of difference between the dimensions of quality services depending on the type of service according to services classification.

Hypothesis 5 raised by this survey questioned if customer responses allow a classification of services according to Silvestro's classification to pick up frequency of use. The answer is yes, by analyzing the frequency it is noted that 10.63% of the respondents never attended the franchises classified in professional services, to the extent that only 4.5% are unaware of the franchises allocated in mass service. It is important to note that mass services serve the largest number of clients. So, Hypothesis 5 is accepted, indicating that customer responses support service classification, using the frequency of use.

Regarding frequency, professional services slightly presented the lowest frequency of respondents.

Table 3: Statistical Analysis

	Service Shop x Mass Services			Service Shop x Professional Services			Mass services x Professional services		
Tangible Aspects	Average	Sig.	Sig.(2-tailed)	Average	Sig	Sig.(2-tailed)	Average	Sig	Sig.(2-tailed)
	4,66	,825	,754	4,66	,027	,367	4,73	,014	,228
	4,73		,754	4,46		,367	4,46		,228
Reliability	4,78	,353	,439	4,78	,188	,063	4,61	,025	,245
	4,61		,439	4,36		,063	4,36		,245
Responsiveness	4,31	,634	,595	4,31	,120	,748	4,43	,042	,404
	4,43		,595	4,24		,748	4,24		,404
Security	4,71	,915	,885	4,71	,014	,095	4,74	,012	,072
	4,74		,885	4,34		,095	4,34		,072
Empathy	4,47	,977	,754	4,47	,014	,314	4,54	,017	,196
	4,54		,754	4,24		,314	4,24		,196

The fact that professional services have lower frequency rates reinforces the fact that professional services have low volume of clients served while mass services are characterized by high volume of clients served.

Final considerations

The present research has brought contributions by the application of the model of classification of similar services (restaurant fast food) as for the different types of service: professionals, shop and mass services. This article aimed to evaluate the interfaces between quality of services and different types of fast food services, using the classification scheme proposed by Silvestro et al (1999), considering the dimensions of the Servqual model. In order to do so, it considered important to test 5 hypotheses, from which 4 were accepted, and only hypothesis 4 was not confirmed.

Hypothesis 1 was reached, showing that it is possible to classify the types of services according to Silvestro's classification for Fast food. Hypothesis 2 is accepted, indicating that customers perceive services classification, although approximated, for fast food franchise. Hypothesis 3 is accepted, indicating difference between the dimensions of quality services for fast food. Hypothesis 4 was not accepted, indicating non existence of evidence of difference between the dimensions of quality services depending on the type of service according to services classification. Hypothesis 5 is accepted, indicating that customer responses support service classification, using the frequency of use.

Results for frequency of use of different services were consistent with the proposition of the model used. The identification of the slightly higher service importance in professional services suggests higher expectations in professional services, and the like for store and mass services. Larger differences can be identified if the research is replicated in the context of more distinct types of restaurants, since the fast food

business tends to have high levels of standardization. In this way, the proposed objectives have been achieved.

In terms of managerial implications, the research suggests that the use of planning and management mechanisms contemplating the different types of service can contribute to better perceptions in terms of service quality.

Limitations may be pointed by the food segment selection, not allowing generalization of results, but, at the same time, suggesting replication of this study to other segments. A certain limitation may be listed by the selection of fast food, once fast food may be classified, in a general manner, as medium to high standardized operation, and this may have contributed to Hypothesis 4 non confirmation. Due to this reason, a study may be conducted with most distinguished restaurants, leading to detecting possible differences between service quality dimensions versus each type of service.

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