ISMC 2017
13th International Strategic Management Conference

DETERMINING SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL COMMERCE WEBSITES

İrem Erdoğmuş (a)*, Taşkın Dirsehan (b), Melisa Karakaya (c)
* Corresponding author

(a) Marmara University, 34180, İstanbul, Turkey, ireme@marmara.edu.tr
(b) Marmara University, 34180, İstanbul, Turkey, taskin.dirsehan@marmara.edu.tr
(c) Marmara University, 34180, İstanbul, Turkey, melisa.karakaya@marmara.edu.tr

Abstract

Since the last decades of the past century, social media and Web 2.0 created radical changes in consumer behavior and business models used. Especially with increasing usage of social media tools among both customers and firms during the past few years, the nature of electronic commerce has changed to make sure that customers are more active and participatory in the process. Hence, a subset of electronic commerce, named as social commerce, occurred as a more social, collaborative, relational, and creative form. The most important point where social commerce differentiates from electronic commerce is its ability to facilitate social networking and information sharing among individuals through tools such as comments, assessments and valuations, in a way similar to social media channels. These differences highlight the necessity of adding new dimensions to the present electronic service quality dimensions and the manifestation of the extents of social commerce service quality. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to specify the service quality dimensions of social commerce platforms.

Keywords: Social commerce; electronic commerce; service quality; customer satisfaction; customer loyalty.

1. Introduction

The past few decades of our lives have witnessed radical changes in business and communication areas, credited to the introduction of the Internet, social media, and Web 2.0 successively into our lives. Now, there is a more open, user-centric and responsive environment, what empowers both firms and consumers and creates new business models such as social commerce (Cheong and Morrison, 2008; Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009). Social commerce refers to utilizing Web 2.0 in electronic commerce (Kim and Srivastava 2007), in other words, adding Web 2.0 features such as user-generated content to

electronic commerce platforms. With Web 2.0, customers' perceptions, preferences and decisions are not only based on their interaction with firms and brands on electronic commerce websites, but are also influenced by content generated by other people on social networks (Constantinides and Fountain 2008). Web 2.0 tools align with an emerging trend where users add value by generating and sharing content (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013).

Even though there are several studies that examine social commerce and its applications (e.g.; Kim and Srivastava 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Liang *et al.*, 2011), there is still need for research to understand how to best design a social commerce platform (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). This understanding may help the development of effective and efficient social commerce platforms. Accordingly, the goal of this paper is to identify the possible service quality dimensions of social commerce to fulfill its promise. A qualitative research approach is followed to understand consumer perspective of social commerce platforms. Four focus groups are conducted to understand the important service and design dimensions in social commerce. Extant literature lacks from a service quality measure of social commerce as a subset of electronic commerce. This paper can be considered as a first step of developing a social commerce service quality scale. Therefore, the results of the study are believed to provide significant information that adds to the extant literature and paves the way for future studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Commerce

The type of commerce where firms utilize social media to assist in e-commerce transactions and activities is defined as social commerce. It is considered as a subset of electronic commerce, a more social, collaborative, relational, and creative form, where the role of consumer is much participatory than ever before (Liang and Turban, 2011). Liang and Turban (2011) list three important attributes of social commerce as social media technologies, community interactions, and commercial activities. They also talk about two different types of social commerce: In the first type, social networking web sites such as Polyvore, Instagram ve Pinterest add commercial features that allow for advertisements and transactions. In the second type, traditional e-commerce Web sites such as Amazon.com adds social networking capabilities to create differentiation and provide better service to their clients. Zhang et al. (2014) also think using social media platforms for communication, promotion, and customer relationship management by online and offline firms as the third type social commerce.

The difference of social commerce from electronic commerce lies within its ability to be oriented towards social goals of networking and information sharing besides its focus on shopping efficiency (Wang and Zhang, 2012; Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). It includes a system that allows the customer to express themselves and share information with other customers and firms on an interactive basis compared with the classical one way browsing of electronic commerce (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013). Thus, Web 2.0 shifts market power from companies to customers (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). This is in line with the service dominant logic idea of Vargo and Lusch (2004), who indicate a more active role of the consumer than theorized before in value exchange process, whereby consumers and firms work together in value creation. Therefore, right design, that facilitates both firms and consumers, is critical for efficiency and effectiveness of social commerce and its success.

114

2.2. Electronic Service Quality

Service quality, the result of the comparison that consumers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the way the service has been performed (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; 1988), has been a critical principle in electronic commerce design. Extant literature includes a lot of work on dimensionalization of electronic service quality. Some of these dimensions can be listed as that aesthetics, functionality, ease of use, navigation, logistics (ordering, payment, delivery), personalization, privacy, and security (e.g; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2000; Novak *et al.*, 2000; Yoo and Donthu, 2001; Webb and Webb, 2004; Parasuraman *et al.*, 2005). A larger list of dimensions from literature review are presented in Table 1.

Among the different scales developed since 2000, electronic service quality (E-S-QUAL) by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra (2005) and electronic retailer quality (eTailQ) by Wolfinbarger and Gilly (2003) include a comprehensive list of attributes and are referred as among the most widely cited scales in the meta analytic review of electronic service quality conducted by Blut et al. (2015). Therefore, this study takes E-S-QUAL and eTailQ as the primary studies to build upon and understand social commerce service quality dimensions. The dimensions under E-S-QUAL include efficiency (the ease and speed of accessing and using the site), fulfillment (extent to which the site's promises about order delivery and item availability are fulfilled), system availability (correct technical functioning of the site), privacy (degree to which the site is safe and protects customer information), responsiveness (effective handling of problems and returns through the site), compensation (degree to which the site compensates customers for problems), and contact (availability of assistance through telephone or online representatives). Similarly, the dimensions under eTailQ include fulfillment (accurate display and description of a product so that what customers receive what they thought they ordered; delivery of the right product within the time frame promised), website design (all customer experience at the website- navigation, information search, order processing, appropriate personalization and product selection), customer service (responsive, helpful, willing service that responds to customer inquiries quickly), and security/privacy (security of credit card payments and privacy of shared information.

Table 01. Electronic Service Quality Dimensions

Author(s)	Scale	Dimensions
Joel R. Evans, Vanessa E. King (1999)	Business to Business Web Site Assessment Tool	Home page design, overall site design and performance, text content, audio-visual elements, interaction and involvement
A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml, Arvind Malhotra (2000)	E-SQ	Reliability, responsiveness, access, flexibility, ease of navigation, efficiency, assurance/trust, security/privacy, price knowledge, site aesthetics, customization/personalization
Novak, Thomas P., Hoffman, Donna L., Yung, Yiu-Fai (2000)	Compelling Online Experience	Easy to contact, easy ordering, easy payment, easy returns, easy to cancel, quick delivery, customer support, cutting edge, variety, quality info, reliability, security, low prices

Kaynama and Black (2000)	E-Qual	Content, accessibility, navigation, design/presentation, responsiveness/ feedback, background information, personalization, customization
Boonghee Yoo, Naveen Donthu (2001)	Sitequal	Ease of use, design, processing speed, security
Mary Wolfinbarger, Mary Gilly (2003)	E-TailQ	Website design, fulfilment/reliability, privacy/security customer service
Harold Webb, Linda Webb (2004)	Sitequal	Reliability, assured empathy, perceived usability, tangibility, navigability, relevant representation, trustworthiness, accuracy, security
A. Parasuraman, Valarie A. Zeithaml, Arvind Malhotra (2005)	E-S-Qual	Efficiency, fulfilment, system availability, privacy
	E-RecS-Qual	Responsiveness, compensation, contact
Eduard Cristobal, Carlos Flavián, Miguel Guinalíu (2007)	Perceived e-service quality (PeSQ)	Website design, customer service, assurance, order management
Nelson Kee Fu Tsang , Michael T. H. Lai & Rob Law (2010)	E-Service Quality	Website functionality, information content &quality, fulfilment and responsiveness, safety and security, appearance and presentation, customer relationship

2.3. Social Commerce Service Quality

The introduction of social commerce necessitates a revision of existing electronic commerce service quality dimensions to capture the relational and social aspect of social commerce as different from electronic commerce. Literature review shows that authors have already discussed several important features in social commerce for positive outcomes. Kim and Srivastava (2007) place emphasis on the importance of social influence on consumers' electronic commerce behavior, suggesting applications that enable social interaction among consumers are critical for success. Similarly, Liang *et al.* (2012) talk about social support (informative and emotional) as a relational element that affects consumers in social commerce behavior. Kang and Park-Poaps (2011) discuss the importance of social comparison in decision making, social shopping, opinion seeking, and bonding in social commerce. Olbrich and Holsing (2011), on the other hand, highlight the importance of features that enable content sharing such as tags, ''share'' and ''like'' buttons, and reviews in social commerce design, that help conversation and community building. Finally, based on Fisher's (2010) work on elements of social design, Huang and Benyoucef (2013) argue that a good social commerce platform needs to consider four elements in design. These elements are identity (creating a personal profile with picture, highlighting interesting social information), conversation (offering rich content and motivating to create content), community (community support, social suggestions, connection with other platforms,), and commerce.

Based on the discussions above, the aim of this research is to further analyze consumer perspective in social commerce and comply a set of service quality dimensions for social commerce platforms, which add social networking capabilities to traditional e-commerce Web sites such as Amazon.com through a

qualitative focus group technique. In order to avoid confusion, social networking web sites that conduct commercial activities are excluded from the scope of the study.

3.   Research Method

3.1. Research Purpose

The main research purpose of this study is to reveal consumer insights about social commerce and determine important service quality and design dimensions. More specifically, this study tries to understand the consumer motives, feelings and experience about different social commerce applications so that a scale is developed that can be used in further conclusive researches about this topic.

3.2. Focus Group Research Design and Sampling

An exploratory research design was formulated, following problem definition and development of the approach. Exploratory research aims to reveal the insights and comprehend the research problem deeply. Focus group procedure is used to investigate participants deeply and directly in a qualitative way (Malhotra, 2007). The ultimate goal in focus group interviewing is to provide insights into hidden marketing phenomena (Hair *et al.*, 2009). This technique is generally used in understanding consumers, product planning, new product development, and consumer perceptions toward advertisements (Kurtuluş, 2010: 45). The process of focus group interviewing can be divided into three phases as planning the study, conducting the focus group discussions, and analyzing or reporting the results (Hair et al., 2009: 165).

In focus groups, a self-disclosure is promoted among participants and attitudes and perceptions are developed in part by interaction with other people. So this types of research groups are interactive and dynamic and they allow participants to socially construct their views, which in turn can result in attitude change; more importantly, this types of groups are able to provide a supportive forum for expressing suppressed views and they allow you to collect a large amount of data fairly quickly (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). To ensure the validity, the focus group study of Parasuraman et al. (1985) in developing their pioneer Service Quality Model is adapted to the focus group study in this research.

Following these guidelines, four focus groups with six participants for each group were implemented for this study. The participants were selected based on their age (between 20 and 40); from B, C1 and C2 SES groups. They were current or recent users of the service in question, they shopped at least three times in the last one year (and at least once in the last three months) through social commerce applications (by using web sites or mobile applications); and holding at least one social media account. The interviews were video recorded and decoded after the interviews.

3.3. Data Analysis

Since the aim of this study is to reveal consumer insights about social commerce, the data were analyzed by using thematic analysis, which is described as "*a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79). Principally driven by key a priori themes drawn from the electronic service quality literature (E-S-QUAL and eTailQ), the analysis was conducted to allow additional themes appear. Details from recordings were used for analysis in

conjunction with the transcribed script. Members of the research team independently read the transcripts, listened to the recordings, and noted key ideas and recurrent themes. A consensus meeting followed to reach an agreement on key categories. A coding table depicting themes, categories and subcategories was prepared; common concepts, repetitious headings were combined together; quotations were also grouped together.

4. Findings

The findings of the research showed that the dimensions of E-S-QUAL and eTailQ find support for establishing social commerce service quality. Dimensions such as fulfillment, efficiency, website design, responsiveness, personalization, contact/ customer service and security/ privacy were mentioned by the focus group participants, too.

Table 02. Service Quality Dimensions of Social Commerce Websites Based on the Research Findings

Fulfillment	*Retailer*	- Having a good service standard - The delivery of the product as it is specified on the website. - Confirming received goods with a button if the firm fulfills its promise
	Third Party	- On-time delivery - Specification of delivery time - Information about the state of the delivery (tracking number etc.) - Delivery to the correct person/address - Courier company selection - Detailed delivery status notification - Option to take the delivery from the store
Website Design	*Efficiency*	- Clear directions of use - Effective filtering options - Ease of searching
	Flexible Payment	- Availability of '*pay at the door*' option - Mobile payment / online payment - Payment by credit card - Billing options /Installment possibility
	Aesthetics	- Vivid colors - Eye-catching design
	Content	- Detailed product specifications (size, dimensions, fabric quality, appearance, price etc.) - Realistic product visuals - 360-degree view options
Responsiveness		- Unconditional returns - Longer return periods - No charge for returns - Immediate cancellation (before the delivery)
Personalization		- Customized product offerings - Availability of loyalty programs - Offering privileges to certain groups in loyalty programs - Personalized suggestions
Contact		- Live support option / online customer representative - Ability to contact the seller

	- Ability to ask questions about the products - Availability of one-to-one communication with the seller - Call center and live support options
Security/ Privacy	- Original product warranty provided by the website - Mediation of the payment (the website makes the payment if the customer approves the products received) - Secure payment - Trust/Counting on the company more than the seller firm - Protection of personal information (phone numbers, addresses are never shared with anyone)
User Convenience	- Convenient reach to products - Saving time and effort - Open 24/7 - Benefitting from shopping online instead of getting into the store - Shopping for uncommon/rare goods
Multichannel Accessibility	- Availability of mobile application - Being active on several online platforms
Seller Identity (Seller Profile)	- Availability of comments about the seller - Seller rating system - Availability of a detailed seller profile containing name, profile picture, personal data, address, links to other social platforms, number of followers etc.
Social Interaction & Support	- Informative interaction between customers (comments describing the experience) - Objective comments (preferably long and detailed) - Positive and negative comments - Customer recommendations - Comparisons between similar items / suggestions
Promotional Activities	- Offering price advantages / discounted products - Periodic campaigns - Cargo charge free shopping - Occasional gifts with the delivery

Fulfillment dimension was split into two according to focus group results. One dimension was retailers' fulfillment of its promise of on-time delivery of the right product whereas the other dimension captured support from the courier company in terms of delivery efficiency. Website design category was also dimensionalized. Efficiency (ease of usage) and flexible payment options offered at the website, along with website aesthetics (vivid colors, design) and rich content of products (product information, visuals) were website design related subcategories that popped up a result of the research.

Other than these dimensions which find support in extant literature, new dimensions also appeared as a result of the study. These new dimensions include user convenience, multichannel accessibility, seller identity/ profile, social interaction and support among members, and promotional activities.

The focus group research revealed that knowing the seller's identity is significant for customers in making purchase decisions in social commerce websites, since it helps them to build trust. One participant described the importance as follows:

"*The seller is more important than the product itself. I can search for the product and find the best one but it's not easy to trust a seller.*"

The interaction with both the seller and the previous users is also valued by the customers. People wish to ensure that their purchase is the best decision by learning all the details and taking the support of other parties.

"..I liked a dress online and wanted to call the seller to ask some questions about it, she explained everything in detail and that made me feel reassured.", "I asked for another photo of the product.. she immediately sent me", "Asked whether the dress will fit me or not…", "I don't want to use customer services hotline, I want to contact the seller directly."

In some cases, people learn about the details of the new products just by reading the detailed and trustable comments made online. A participant claimed that he believed in the informative comment and trusted in the commenter's recommendation.

"I recently bought an e-cigarette.. I came up to a very detailed user comment there which explained both the pros and the cons.. He recommended the 5-star seller, that's the reason why I decided to buy from that seller"

Further, the promotional activities prompt the usage of websites, and help people to form positive word of mouth.

".. When your friend becomes a member, you gain a 10tl worth gift", "I started to use this application because they were offering good campaigns"

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Findings of this study are believed to shed light on design and service quality issues of social commerce platforms. Existing electronic service quality dimensions such as fulfillment, efficiency, website design, responsiveness, personalization, contact/ customer service and security/ privacy are distinguished as important factors for social commerce. Additionally, new dimensions such as multichannel accessibility, seller identity/ profile, social interaction and support among members, and sales campaigns are identified as parts of social commerce service quality dimensions.

The main limitation of this study is its exploratory nature which doesn't allow generalizations. The results of the study will provide dimensions that will be used in further research to form a social commerce service quality scale. Therefore, it is a preliminary research with promising outcomes. Listing social commerce service quality dimensions are significant for practitioners to form effective and efficient social commerce designs in the future.

Acknowledgment

References

Blut, M., Chowdhry, N., Mittal, V., & Brock, C. (2015). E-service quality: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Retailing*, *91*(4), 679-700.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*.*3*(2), 77-101.

Cheong, H. J., & Morrison, M. A. (2008). Consumers' reliance on product information and recommendations found in UGC. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 38-49.

Constantinides, E., and Fountain, S. J. (2008). Web 2.0: conceptual foundations and marketing issues. *Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 9, 3, 231–244.

Cristobal, E., Flavián, C., & Guinaliu, M. (2007). Perceived e-service quality (PeSQ) Measurement validation and effects on consumer satisfaction and web site loyalty. *Managing service quality: An international journal*, 17(3), 317-340.

Daymon, C., & Holloway, I. (2002). *Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations and Marketing Communications*. London: Routledge.

Deighton, J., & Kornfeld, L. (2009). Interactivity's unanticipated consequences for marketers and marketing. *Journal of Interactive marketing*, 23(1), 4-10.

Evans, J. R., & King, V. E. (1999). Business-to-business marketing and the world wide web: Planning, managing, and assessing web sites. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 28(4), 343-358.

Fisher, E. Social design. Facebook Developers, (2010). Available at developers.facebook.com/socialdesign.

Fu Tsang, N. K., Lai, M. T., & Law, R. (2010). Measuring e-service quality for online travel agencies. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 27(3), 306-323.

Grönroos, C. (1984). A Service Quality Model and Its Marketing Implications, *European Journal of Marketing*, 18(4), 36-44.

Hair, J. J., Bush, R., & Ortinau, D. (2009). *Marketing Research in a Digital Information Environment* (4th Edition b.). New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin.

Huang, Z., & Benyoucef, M. (2013). From e-commerce to social commerce: A close look at design features. *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 12(4), 246-259.

Kang, J., & Park-Poaps, H. (2011). Motivational antecedents of social shopping for fashion and its contribution to shopping satisfaction. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 29(4), 331-347.

Kaynama, S. A., & Black, C. I. (2000). A proposal to assess the service quality of online travel agencies: An exploratory study. *Journal of Professional Services Marketing*, 21(1), 63-88.

Kim, Y. A. and Srivastava, J.(2007). Impact of social influence in e-commerce decision making. In Proceedings of the *Ninth International Conference on Electronic Commerce, Minneapolis*, MN, August 2007, ACM Press, New York, NY, 293–302.

Kurtuluş, K. (2010). *Araştırma Yöntemleri*. İstanbul: Türkmen Kitabevi.

Lee, S. H., DeWester, D., and Park, S. R. (2008).Web 2.0 and opportunities for small business. *Service Business*, 2, 4, 335–345.

Liang, T., Ho, Y., Li, Y., and Turban, E. (2011). What drives social commerce: the role of social support and relationship quality. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 16, 2, 69–90.

Malhotra, N. (2007). *Marketing Research: An Applied Orientation* (5th International Edition Ed.). USA: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Novak, T. P., Hoffman, D. L., & Yung, Y. F. (2000). Measuring the Customer Experience in Online Environments: A Structural Modeling Approach, *Marketing Science*, 19(1), 22-42.

Olbrich, R., Holsing, C. (2011). Modeling Consumer Purchasing Behavior in Social Shopping Communities with Clickstream Data, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 16:2, 15-40

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research, *Journal of Marketing*, 41-50.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Malhotra, A. (2005). ES-QUAL: A Multiple-Item Scale for Assessing Electronic Service Quality, *Journal of Service Research*, 7(3), 213-233.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., Berry L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A-Multi-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality, *Journal of Retail*ing, 64(1), 12-40.

Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1-17.

Wang, C. N., and Zhang, P. (2012). The evolution of social commerce: the people, management, technology, and information dimensions. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, 1–23.

Webb, H. W., & Webb, L. A. (2004). SiteQual: An Integrated Measure of Web Site Quality, *Journal of Enterprise Information Management*, 17(6), 430-440.

Wolfinbarger, M. and Gilly, M. C. (2003). eTailQ: dimensionalizing, measuring and predicting etail quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 79, 3, 183–198.

Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. (2001). Developing a Scale to Measure the Perceived Quality of an Internet Shopping Site (SITEQUAL), *Quarterly Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 2(1), 31-45.

Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A., & Malhotra, A. (2000). Conceptual Framework for understanding e-service quality: Implications for future research and managerial practice, working paper, report No. 00-115, *Marketing Science Institute*, Cambridge, MA.

Zhang, H., Lu, Y., Gupta, S., & Zhao, L. (2014). What motivates customers to participate in social commerce? The impact of technological environments and virtual customer experiences. *Information & Management*, *51*(8), 1017-1030.