



Evaluation of consumer satisfaction using the tetra-class model

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Abstract

Background: A number of studies have shown the importance of consumers' satisfaction toward pharmacy services. The measurement of patient satisfaction through different elements of services provided is challenging within the context of a dynamic economic environment. Patient satisfaction is the result of long-term established habits and expectations to the pharmacy as an institution. Few studies to date have attempted to discern whether these changes have led to increased patient satisfaction and loyalty, particularly within developing nations.

Objectives: The objective of this study was to evaluate the elements of the services provided in Bulgarian pharmacies and their contribution to consumer satisfaction using a tetra-class model. Three main hypotheses were tested in pharmacies to validate the model in the case of complex services. Additionally, the contribution of the different service elements to the clients' satisfaction was studied.

Methods: The analysis was based on a survey of customers in central and district pharmacies in Sofia, Bulgaria. The data were analyzed through a correspondence analysis which was applied to the results of the 752 distributed questionnaires.

Results: It was observed that different dimensions of the pharmacies contribute uniquely to customer satisfaction, with consumer gender contributing greatly toward satisfaction, with type/location of pharmacy, consumer age, and educational degree also playing a part. The duration of time over which the consumers have been clients at a given pharmacy influences the subsequent service categorization.

Conclusions: This research demonstrated that the tetra-class model is suitable for application in the pharmaceutical sector. The model results could be beneficial for both researchers and pharmacy managers.

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Keywords: Consumer satisfaction; Pharmaceutical marketing; Tetra-class model; Pharmaceutical services; Community pharmacies; Retail pharmaceutical marketing

Introduction

After the change to a market-oriented economy among Eastern European countries, their pharmacy sector has been growing rapidly. This has led to significant market competition. As a result, the goods and services provided in pharmacies have changed accordingly.¹

Some private Bulgarian pharmacies have been trying to create a completely new image by overcoming the perception of being solely medicines dispensary by slowly becoming a provider of other health care goods and services, which has required huge investments in people and materials. However, no studies to date have attempted to discern whether these changes have led to increased patient satisfaction and loyalty.

A number of studies have shown the importance of clients' satisfaction for the performance of different companies.² From a methodological point of view, the measurement of patient's satisfaction through the different elements of services provided in the pharmacy is challenging in a permanently changing economic environment. Patient satisfaction is a result of long-term established habits and expectations to the pharmacy as an institution. According to a number of studies, the tetra-class model provides an avenue for measuring the service elements that lead to consumers' satisfaction and subsequently to their loyalty whenever complex services are provided. Research has also indicated that the utilization of the tetra-class model is appropriate in a situation of a complex service offering such as that in the pharmaceutical sector.³

The objective of this study is to evaluate elements of the services provided in Bulgarian pharmacies and the contribution of these elements to consumer satisfaction by using the tetra-class model. The study questions are as follows:

- How can the elements of these services be separated to show their importance in driving consumer satisfaction?
- What is the level of customers' satisfaction with the new type of pharmacies in Bulgaria? Is there any difference in clients' perception among "central" and "district" pharmacies?

Conceptual view of satisfaction

Researchers have defined consumer satisfaction in many different ways. Some authors perceive satisfaction as an emotional response or as a result of a simultaneously emotional and cognitive process.^{4,5} It depends on what kind of approach has been undertaken in the study: transitional or relational. The approach will influence the final conclusions made about satisfaction.⁶⁻⁸ Here, we consider satisfaction as a process using both cognitive and emotional judgments, using a definition proposed by Garbarino and Johnson, who describe satisfaction as "either an immediate post-purchase evaluative judgment or an emotional reaction to the firm used for the most recent transaction."⁹

Llosa¹³ demonstrated the fluctuating importance of various services that might contribute to consumer satisfaction. She proposed a tetra-class model where services are classified into 1 of 4 categories, according to the way in which they affect the clients' experiences¹⁰⁻¹⁴ (Fig. 1). The services are categorized as follows:

- (1) *Basic services*: contribute strongly to the clients' overall level of dissatisfaction when they are evaluated in an unfavorable fashion. However, when they are evaluated favorably, they contribute only weakly to client satisfaction.
- (2) *Plus services*: contribute strongly to the overall level of client satisfaction when they are evaluated favorably. When they are evaluated unfavorably, they contribute weakly to the client's dissatisfaction.
- (3) *Key services*: contribute strongly to the degree of dissatisfaction or satisfaction of the client, regardless of the type of evaluation by the client.
- (4) *Secondary services*: do not have a primary role in the level of overall client satisfaction or dissatisfaction, whichever way they are evaluated.

This model assuming that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are 2 independent dimensions rather than the 2 extreme of a 1-dimensional continuum builds on Grönroos's paradigm shift

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