



Assessing the effects of service quality and justice on customer satisfaction and the continuance intention of mobile value-added services: An empirical test of a multidimensional model

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction in the mobile communications market is important. This study explores the effects of service quality and justice on customer satisfaction, which, in turn, affects continuance intention of mobile services. Service quality, justice and customer satisfaction were measured by multiple dimensions. A research model was developed based on this multidimensional approach and was empirically examined with data collected from about one thousand users of mobile value-added services in China. Results show that all three dimensions of service quality (interaction quality, environment quality and outcome quality) have significant and positive effects on cumulative satisfaction while only one dimension of service quality (interaction quality) has a significant and positive effect on transaction-specific satisfaction. Besides procedural justice, the other two dimensions of justice (distributive justice and interactional justice) significantly influence both transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction. Furthermore, both types of customer satisfaction have significant and positive effects on continuance intention. Implications for research and practice are discussed.

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1. Introduction

With the rapid advancements of mobile network technologies, provision of various kinds of value-added services by mobile service providers is on the rise around the world. As the market becomes more and more mature, value-added services become more homogeneous and the competition for acquiring new customers and retaining existing customers becomes more intense. In this environment, customer satisfaction is a critical factor for mobile service providers to maintain or improve their market share and profitability. Prior studies have found that customer satisfaction contributes to a firm's profitability and customer retention [33,35].

In a reorganization of the communications industry in China between 2008 and 2009, the original six mobile network operators were reduced to three. Meanwhile, the availability of third-generation telecommunications technologies suggested that more mobile value-added services would be provided to the customers. A recent value-added services survey report on mobile communications conducted by Analysys in 2010 predicted that, the competition among existing mobile network operators would become fierce after the reorganization of the industry and the introduction of

third-generation services. Thus, for these mobile network operators, in order to retain customers, enhancing customer satisfaction is an urgent task to tackle with. Moreover, as new mobile value-added services are released, service providers need to focus on if these new services appeal to customers and on the willingness of customers to continue to use the services. Therefore, understanding the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction in regard to mobile value-added services is important. This study aims to investigate two factors that are closely related to customer satisfaction, service quality and justice. Although they are frequently investigated in service marketing and customer behavior research, these two factors are rarely examined at the same time in information technology (IT) use studies.

Many prior studies reported in the service marketing and consumer behavior literature have found evidence of the importance of service quality to consumer satisfaction [10,78]. Service quality is closely related to consumer satisfaction as it reflects the customers' evaluation of the performance of service providers. Service quality is a multi-dimensional construct and different researchers have proposed different dimensions to capture the essence of this critical factor in influencing customer satisfaction. Several researchers have explored specific quality dimensions of this type of service in the mobile services environment [20,54,65,95]. We incorporate these specific dimensions in our research model and examine how they influence customer satisfaction.

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Prior research also suggests that when customers evaluate their consumption experiences, they also consider justice since their consumption can be considered as an exchange between the service provider and the consumer [85]. Most users of mobile value-added services have an intrinsic motive to seek justice when engaging in an exchange with service providers because they have to pay for their subscriptions for these services. Justice involves a subjective fairness judgment of individuals if what they procured or how they were treated was fair under a specific context, especially in a situation with uncertainty [91]. Recent marketing studies have examined this service fairness aspect as a “justice” concept [49,85], and found that being treated fairly was an important consideration to customers when they were evaluating their satisfaction with the services provided [67]. Similar to service quality, justice can be determined from several dimensions that are related to the outcome or the process of the service provision. We also incorporate these dimensions into our research model.

Customer satisfaction leads to positive outcomes, especially in predicting future intention to use a service. For example, research in service marketing and consumer behavior has found strong support for the positive impact of customer satisfaction on repurchase intention [12,22]. Customer satisfaction is a dynamic, complex and context-specific construct [39] that has been divided into transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction [10,21]. Though the two types of satisfaction are highly correlated, they are different conceptualizations of satisfaction and serve different purposes [51,77]. In this study, we distinguish between these two types of customer satisfaction and investigate their antecedents and outcomes.

In summary, the contributions of this study are threefold. First, we incorporate two factors (service quality and justice) that have been rarely investigated together in technology adoption/acceptance studies into our research model and examine their possible influence on customer satisfaction. Second, we examine both factors as multi-dimensional constructs rather than treating them as uni-dimensional constructs. Third, we distinguish between transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction and examine how they might influence the adoption/acceptance behavior of mobile value-added services.

The paper is organized as follows. The theoretical background of the study is presented in the next section. The research model and corresponding hypotheses are then described, followed by a review of the study design and data collection procedures. The discussion section presents the results of the study. The paper concludes with a summary of the study's findings, its limitations and its implications for technology adoption research and practice.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Customer satisfaction

The psychological processes that motivate customer satisfaction response are complex. The formation of satisfaction can be considered as evaluative (cognitive), emotion-based or both [75]. Research on the emotional bases of satisfaction mainly investigates how customers' positive and negative emotions resulting from service encounters affect their satisfaction [74,86]. Research on the cognitive bases of satisfaction pays attention to the formation of cognition and how such cognition affects a user's emotional response and subsequent behavior [70]. In our study, we focused on the cognitive bases and regarded satisfaction itself as an affective state resulted from cognitive evaluation process. We adopt a definition of satisfaction from McKinney et al. [70] who stated that satisfaction is “an effective state representing an emotional response” to the service encounter.

From a cognitive perspective, satisfaction resulted from the customers' evaluation of their experience. For example, the expectation disconfirmation paradigm is widely used to investigate the

antecedents of satisfaction [73]. According to this paradigm, customers have expectations before consumption and evaluate the actual performance after consumption. Positive disconfirmation between the expectation and evaluation leads to satisfaction and negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction. Later, researchers found that performance evaluation also influenced customer satisfaction directly [10]. Because of the complex features of service, researchers considered that satisfaction should be attribute based. That is, customer satisfaction results from the performance of attributes of the service [74]. Thus, in this study, scales to measure end-user satisfaction are developed from this angle [29,66,72,93]. In their information systems (IS) success model, DeLone and McLena [27] found that IS user satisfaction was determined by system quality and information quality. After extended research, they added service quality to the IS success model as an antecedent of user satisfaction [28]. Besides quality evaluation, researchers have also found that justice is another important cognitive theme in satisfaction research [74]. In the mobile services context, the cognitive determinants of satisfaction, especially the joint influences of service quality and justice on satisfaction, have been scarcely studied.

An important perspective of looking at customer satisfaction focuses on the “dynamic” or temporal nature of customer satisfaction. From a “dynamic” perspective, customer satisfaction is conceptualized as transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction [52]. Transaction-specific satisfaction is an evaluative judgment of a specific service encounter at a single point in time whereas cumulative satisfaction is the overall evaluation of all services encountered over time [50,75]. In other words, transaction-specific satisfaction forms based on information about a service encounter and is influenced by specific attributes of the service. Cumulative satisfaction, on the other hand, provides information about an organization's service performance over time, and thus is influenced by factors across service encounters. Therefore, cumulative satisfaction can be considered as an accumulation of transaction-specific satisfaction at various points of time.

Johnson [51] pointed out that transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction are more complementary than competing, and the purposes they serve are different. For example, transaction-specific satisfaction is better to track the changes in performance and customers' reaction to these changes, while cumulative satisfaction is better to understand customer-company relationship over time [77]. Olsen and Johnson [77] found that when taking into account equity, the ways that transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction affected customers' behavior intention were different. Thus, distinguishing these two types of satisfaction would help us better understand how they affect customers' behavior and how to cultivate them in proper way. Many studies of mobile service acceptance/adoption have looked at factors affecting customer/user satisfaction [5,55,57,59,94]. These studies, however, did not distinguish between cumulative satisfaction and transaction-specific satisfaction.

2.2. Service quality

Service quality has been extensively investigated over the past three decades. In IS research, Pitt et al. [80] first pointed out that IS researchers should include a measure of IS service quality in the assessment of IS effectiveness. DeLone and McLean [28] extended their IS success model by highlighting the importance of service quality in IS success. Service quality is a complex concept and there are two main methods to measure this variable. The first method regards service quality as the discrepancy between customers' expectations and perceptions of the service [45,78]. The second method conceptualizes service quality as “the consumers' overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the organization and its services” [9, p.77]. In this study, we use the second method to measure service quality as

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