E-SERVICE QUALITY: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH
Ahmad Salih Alnaser, Mahmoud Khalid Almsafir and Hani O. Alshoura
College of Graduate Studies (COGS), Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Putrajaya Campus, 43000 Selangor, Malaysia.
mahmoud@uniten.edu.my

ABSTRACT
The current conceptual paper attempts to determine the major dimensions of e-service quality in a number of service industries and settings, and to examine how these dimensions affect customer satisfaction. A literature review covering these dimensions will be presented in the study. The paper is conceptual in nature providing guidelines to researchers on how to determine the most important e-service quality dimensions for each industry and setting. Suggestions for future research are made and limitations highlighted.

Keywords: SERVQUAL; service quality; customer satisfaction; higher education; Jordan.

Introduction
The internet has become an important medium for the sale of products (Corbitt et al., 2003). About 60 percent of web users make 36 web purchases a year. A majority of web users consider the web a critical information source (Kim et al., 2011). Thus, the evaluation of customer satisfaction and service quality is the primary goal for service firms that would like to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Wan and Cheng, 2001). Companies with good service quality will lead to higher customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, resulting in repeat purchases and profitability (Parasuraman, 2000; Rao and Keller, 1997).

For an organization to gain competitive advantage it must use technology to gather information on market demands and exchange it between organizations for the purpose of enhancing the service quality (Seth and Deshmukh et al., 2005). Researchers and managers thrive for learning details about components of service quality in their organization for obvious reasons of customer satisfaction, increased profitability, etc. In this context, model gains specific importance as it not only helps in learning the factors associated with it, but also provides a direction for improvements (Negi, 2010).

Over the past decade, there has been a growing body of work focusing on conceptualizing, measuring, and managing service quality and its effects in electronic environments. Akin to research on service quality in traditional retail and service environments, the
conceptualization and measurement of quality in electronic services (or e-service quality) has emerged as a strategic issue (Fassnacht and Koese, 2006).

While research into service quality, especially e-service quality continues to develop, attention has remained on how to conceptualize the construct, but more importantly has shifted to measurement and operationalization issues in e-service quality (Carlson and O'Cass, 2011).

The e-service quality describes overall customer evaluations and judgments of the quality of service delivery by a particular firm in the virtual marketplace (Santos 2003). Previous studies have often applied the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) for measuring e-service quality (Devaraj, Fan, and Kohli 2002; Kim and Lee 2002). But this approach suffers from a number of inadequacies: first, Differences between Web-based and traditional customer service make the SERVQUAL model less applicable to e-commerce (Li, Tan, and Xie 2002); second, The intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability of production and consumption (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985) characteristic of e-services make the model less appropriate; and thired, The context-bound and service-type-dependent characteristics of service quality on the Internet are also problematic (Bienstock, 1997; Van Dyke, Kappelman, and Prybutok, 1997).

For any organization, while remaining competitive in the market, the most common challenging task is to meet customer needs. There can be no alternative for interaction between services and customers. The collective experiences of many persons make an organization’s reputation for service quality. Landrum et al. (2008) mentioned that “service quality impacts customer loyalty, satisfaction, and business performance”.

In general, service quality is defined as the perceived discrepancy between customers’ expectations and their evaluation of what they get (Gronroos, 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1988). More specifically, Zeithaml et al. (2002) defined e-service quality as the extent to which a web site facilitates efficient and effective shopping, purchasing and delivery of product and services. In the same line, other researchers defined quality of e-service as a customer’s experience with the service provider through a given electronic channel without human intervention. The Internet considered as a primary channel for delivering e-service (Lu et al., 2010; Sousa and Voss, 2006; Parasuraman et al., 2005). So far, several instruments have been developed to assess the e-service quality, such as E-S-QUAL (Zeithaml et al., 2000), SiteQUAL (Yoo and Donthu, 2001), UPWQ (user-perceived web quality: Aladwani and Palvia, 2002), and QES (Fassnacht and Koese, 2006).

Marketing research has investigated the context of physical products but tends to overlook the effect of bundled e-services, even though the changing environment has made the ability to deliver such service one of the companies’ most critical activities. In particular, products are easy and concrete to evaluate but services are intangible and perceived different among people. Several issues related to service research, including taxonomy of services, service quality, and relationship marketing have emerged, but much of the extant research has taken
into account only physical goods, not services. Therefore, the paper aims to present a comprehensive review of the e-service literature, focusing on determine the major dimensions of e-service quality in a number of service industries and settings, and to examine how these dimensions affect customer satisfaction. Other types of challenges related to produce an e-service that meets the needs of all stakeholders. And improved to provide value-added services, and enable the organization to be more capable of change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted in the field of e-service quality. The advent of the internet in spread of information and communication technology (ICT) have encouraged researchers to investigate the impact of ICT on the delivery of e-service in such a way as to create satisfaction among customers who favor such services (Bekhet and Al-alak, 2011).

In the recent years, few studies have been published which measure the service quality of travel websites. Kaynama and Black (2000) developed an E-QUAL scale to measure the service quality of online travel websites, and also found that the most important seven dimensions/aspects were content and purpose, accessibility, navigation, design and presentation, responsiveness, background, personalization and customization. E-QUAL scale appropriately corrects and expands the SERVQUAL scale, developed by Parasuraman et al., (1988). But the dimensions in E-QUAL are different from the original SERVQUAL so that this issue needs to be discussed further. Van Riel et al., (2004) investigated the dimensions of online travel service quality by adapting and extending the SERVQUAL model, and found seven dimensions including accessibility, navigation, design, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and customization. To better understand the dimensions that constitute the online consumer’s TWSQ in virtual context, this study attempts to derive the dimensions of website service quality through modifying moderately the E-QUAL scale and the e-SERVQUAL scale and considering the travel and tourism contexts from the online customers’ perspectives to suit the travel website context.

Much of the studies in e-service quality take a combination of traditional service quality dimensions and web interface quality dimensions as the starting point. Dabholkar (1996) conducts a research work on the dimensions of eservice quality focusing on website design, and he argues that 7 dimensions of eservice quality can be illustrated as the basic parameters in the judgement of eservice quality, including website design, reliability, delivery, ease of use, enjoyment and control (Dabholkar 1996).

Various researchers have identified several dimensions of e-service quality. But, the consistency in the proposed dimensions is lacking. Most of the e-services quality measurement research is limited to e-retailing only. A few researchers have proposed measurement instrumentation for measuring website quality (Loiacono et al, 2002; Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Substantial researches providing a generalized scale developed using a variety of industries; also, comparative studies to find the best approach (discrepancy/gap, or,
perception based) to measure e-service quality are nonexistent (Agrawal, 2007). There is a predominance of perception based measurement approaches only. However, the comparative study by Agrawal (2007) suggests that discrepancy/gap based approach is superior to the perception based approach in measuring e-service quality.

Liao (2011) believes that the performance of customer relationships depends highly on the characteristics of the e-service. But the strength of relationships could be impacted when businesses employ multichannel services (e.g., offering online and offline services). He further argues that multichannel services, any inconsistency in perceived quality across channels might result in customer distrust toward a service provider. In another study by Chang and Wang (2011) investigated the influence of e-service quality, customer perceived value, and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty in an online shopping environment. It was found that e-service quality and customer perceived value impacted customer satisfaction, and then influences customer loyalty. Besides, it was revealed that customers with a high perceived value had a stronger relationship between satisfaction and customer loyalty than customers with a low perceived value.

According to study by Fang and Chiu et al., (2011) it was found that trust, net benefits, and satisfaction were significant positive predictors of customers’ repurchase intentions toward online shopping. It was also shown that Information quality, system quality, trust, and net benefits were significant determinants of customer satisfaction. Moreover, it was shown that online trust was built through distributive, procedural, and interactional justice.

Studies conducted by (Ekinci et al., 2008; Carrillat et al., 2007; Jamal and Naser, 2002; and Cronin and Taylor, 1992) revealed that the influence of perceived service quality on customer satisfaction were established and demonstrated in several studies. Pham (2011) argues that in order to fully investigate the indirect influence impact (via service quality) as well as total influence of service convenience on customer satisfaction. He found that there was a positive effect of service convenience on perceived service quality. That could explain 42% of the variance of service quality (Pham 2011). Pham findings corresponds with the findings of Berry et al., (2002) regarding of service convenience as an antecedent of both service quality and satisfaction as a distinct-but-related construct.

Study by Abdullah, Suhaimi et al., (2011) showed that all the constructs had a significant positive correlations with the overall service quality, satisfaction level and loyalty. Similarity, Carlson and O’Cass (2011) investigated whether elements of e-service quality should be viewed by dimensions, as antecedents to a global evaluation of e-service quality, or as a formative configuration to predict behavioral intentions. Their findings showed support for all three theoretical models, and slightly stronger support for the formative model. Customer satisfaction was also found to play a mediating role on behavioral intentions within these e-service quality models.

In the e-retailing field, For instance, Kim et al., (2006) and Madu (2002) pointed out that the growth of e-retailing has been an increasing emphasis on e-service quality. Kim (2011) stated
that considering the crucial role of e-service quality on successful e-retailing, it is important for e-retailers to understand important e-service attributes to better meet the needs of their target customers.

In an attempted to identify the generic service quality dimensions of technology-based banking and to examine the effect of these dimensions on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Four generic were identified as service quality dimensions in the technology-based banking services customer service, technology security and information quality, technology convenience, and technology usage easiness and reliability (Ganguli and Roy, 2011). It was further shown that technology convenience and customer satisfaction have significant and positive impact on customer loyalty.

Su et al., (2008) used 6 dimensions for analysis of degree of consumer satisfaction using e. services: quality of service provided, customer service, management of processes, ease of use, the quality of information and design of the website. Other researchers Cao et al., (2005) analyzed the quality based on the principle of information systems and identified four essential elements: information, services, system quality and attractiveness (Davidaviien and Tolvaïšas).

A study by Karunasena, Deng et al., (2011) revealed that the public value of e-government in Sri Lanka was unsatisfactory in all the dimensions of public value generation. The study also showed that the proposed framework is effective in facilitating the identification of public value of e-government in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the study revealed that the lack of e-services, the security threat to public information in public organizations, the low adoption of information and communication technologies in government, and the low uptake of available e-government initiatives were the key reasons for such a poor performance in e-government.

Hassan and Shehab et al., (2011) stated that In the public sector, organizations and agencies were swiftly setting up “e-government” systems to provide services to citizens. Others Rust and Kannan (2002) point out that in the academic community there was an increased interest among researchers in understanding how e-servicing influence customers; their satisfaction; their loyalty; their service quality expectations; and, how this knowledge leads to better frameworks for e-service provision.

Regarding Investigating the service quality of Macao’s World Heritage (WH) site as perceived by visitors involving both tourists and local residents. YimKing and Cheng (2011) found that the overall visitor satisfaction level on the service quality of Macao’s WH was high but dimensions on “empathy” and “consumables” needed improvements. Significant differences were also found between the tourists and local residents.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION
In today’s highly changeable business environment, the evaluation of customer satisfaction and service quality is the primary goal for service firms that would like to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace and provides long term benefits. Therefore, this paper has aimed to determine the major dimensions of e-service quality and examine how these dimensions affect customer satisfaction. The results in this conceptual study show that there are five key dimensions of e-service quality, including ease of use, reliability, system availability and responsiveness from the perspective of online companies, and trust from the perspective of customers. And found out that much of the studies in e-service quality take a combination of traditional service quality dimensions and web interface quality dimensions as the starting point. And the performance of customer relationships depends highly on the characteristics of the e-service.
REFERENCES


