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Title of the Thesis: *Effects and Implications of After Sales Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical study of IT Hardware industry in India.*

ABSTRACT

The present study is a detailed effort to explore the customer service requirements, among the IT user industries in business markets served by small and medium computer (IT) service firms. The single key challenge for these small service providers is sustainable market share, loyal customer's increased share of spending (customer's share-of-wallet) and profitability. It is possible when they try to innovate and perform better in service delivery in order to satisfy and retain customers from a long-term perspective.

The various customer service attribute levels affecting after-sales service quality were identified through analysis of the survey. The performance delivery by the service firms at each level influences the customer satisfaction whose measurement is based on expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm on post-purchase usage and experience. Four dimensions emerged from exploratory factor analysis: *after sales service performance* (equivalent to technical quality), *behavioural skills* (equivalent to functional quality), *service improvements* and *technical preparedness*, consisting of items/attributes that critically emphasize *interactions* and *technical training* aspects. All the four dimensions are positively related to customer satisfaction. The two new dimensions of *service improvements* and *technical preparedness* are in addition to the two dimensions of technical quality and functional quality as explained in the well-known perceived service quality model of Dr. Christian Gronroos (1984, 1986).

The customers also mark the relative importance of these attributes along with their perception on satisfaction. The satisfaction- importance matrix helps to explore the areas of improvement required from the service provider's end.

Since products and services in business organizations are used for a longer time period, the measurement of overall-cumulative (aggregate of transaction-specific at attribute level) satisfaction is more appropriate. Therefore, the quantitative survey helps to establish linkages between the different overall summary measure constructs, i.e. overall service quality, overall customer satisfaction, customer relationship strength, post-usage loyalty intentions like positive word-of-mouth and re-purchase intentions and above all, customer's share of business (share-of-wallet). It helps to segregate the pre-satisfaction elements and post-satisfaction elements of the survey questionnaire.

The study includes the service firm management's perception about their organizational capabilities for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of their own organizations. It enables to understand the management strategy and priorities about deploying their own capabilities for customer service attributes.

The study also established the relationship and linkages between the two broad categories of variables i.e. customer service requirements (voice of the customer- 'WHATS') and organizational capabilities (voice of the organization - 'HOWS') through Quality Function deployment method. This technique enables to understand the provider gap of difference between service firm management perception of customer's importance (expectations), and that of customer's own importance (expectations) for the same set of requirements.

The qualitative content analysis of interviews helps to form a service capabilities framework in the context of business markets. The emerging themes/categories validate the items and variables of the survey questionnaire. The two models are consistent, relevant and supportive of each other.

A sample of 130- business clients belonging to three small service firms participated in the main round of research questionnaire and in-depth interview. The responses of 117 respondents (IT in charge) were found useable.