

B2B services quality through the industrial services marketing: Insights from the container port industry in Morocco

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ABSTRACT: Many studies have been carried out to establish the factors that determine the competitiveness of a container port. From reviewing numerous marketing studies, discussions and literature over the last 50 years, it is clear that little has been written for the case of marketing in the seaport sector. The ultimate objective of this paper is to assess previous researches in industrial services marketing and apply them in the context of seaport sector. The four-dimensional model of the perceived quality of industrial services was the framework of this study. The data are based on in-depth interviews. In conclusion, we found that the four qualitative dimensions are correlated, it is sufficient that one of them is failing to ensure that all of the seaport quality system is challenged and / or that clients are dissatisfied. However, the customer's perception of the four quality dimensions can vary depending on the type of customer, expectations and the relationships established. Hence it is highly recommended to customize the four-dimensional model of service quality according to each market segment.

KEYWORDS - Corporate quality, Interactive quality, Network quality, Physical quality, Seaport, Services marketing,

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I. INTRODUCTION

The competitive position of a container port is determined by its competitive offer to the host of shippers and shipping lines for the trade routes, the geographic regions and other ports to which the container port is connected. However, in the wider dimension, the competitiveness of a container port is determined by the range of competitive advantages that are created by the port over time (Haezendonck and Notteboom, 2002). To this day, many studies have been carried out to establish and understand the factors and developments that influence and determine the competitiveness of a container port. Considering the literature has been discussed over the last 50 years in the field of marketing overall, little has been written for the case of marketing in the seaport sector.

The complexity of Seaport marketing is coming from the number of intersections of different disciplines that are involved. Fragmentation researches have been conducted on the spatial analysis of ports, their planning and development, terminal operations, supply chains, competitively, port policy. However, few of these research articles discuss in adequate detail the different aspects of the seaport and the interactions between them.

The purpose of this paper is to review previous works on industrial services marketing and apply them in the context of seaport sector. This paper will also serve a purpose to inspire future works by proposing new problematic which will give guidance to a more holistic approach to the subject of seaport marketing. This study was focused on Tangier Med port for many reasons. First, It is the most modern and specialised seaport in Morocco. Second, Its strategic position is crucial as it increases the competitiveness with the other seaports in the region to the highest level. Furthermore, because of the free commercial and industrial zones, Tangier Med is attracting more foreign investors who are expecting a high quality of service. In this study, we have chosen the qualitative method – semi structured interviews- with case study

In guise of conclusion, we found that the four discussed qualitative dimensions constitute one construct of quality. It is sufficient that one of them is failing to ensure that all of the provider's quality system is challenged and / or that clients are dissatisfied.

II. FOUR-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF QUALITY FOR INDUSTRIAL SERVICES

We will start discussing the three dimensional quality approach and based on this we will present the four dimensional model of quality in industrial services. The three-dimensional quality approach defines the service quality as formed by the qualitative extent of a service on the various dimensions of the service production process (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1991). Thus, the Quality of services is structured around three key dimensions:

physical quality, interactive quality and institutional quality. These quality dimensions are related to the fundamental dimensions of service and the organisation.

2.1 PHYSICAL QUALITY

Despite the intangibility of services, their implementation is often accompanied by physical or tangible items. The appearance of vehicles, buildings, interior decoration, tools and equipment, staff members, printed advertising materials, and other visible indications all present physical evidence of a firm's service quality. Laitamaki and Lehtinen (1984) distinguish between two types of physical components that measure the physical quality of the service: Physical products and physical support. The Figure 1 represents the physical elements in service production.

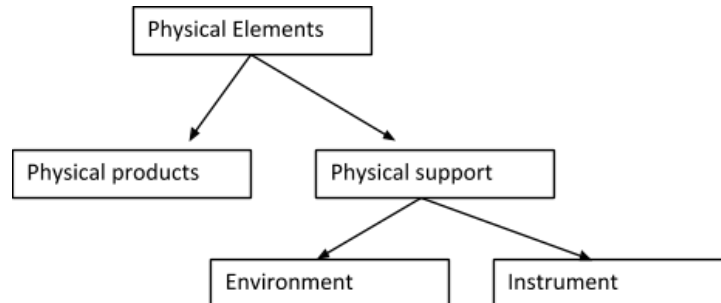


Figure 1: Physical Elements in Service Production (Lehtinen And Lehtinen, 1991)

Physical products are a good or goods consumed during the process of production of the service. Their importance varies from one service to another. In many cases the existence or the importance of physical product is very low or nil. For instance, insurance companies, dancing schools or consulting businesses... Sometimes the physical element in service production is very necessary and important. The media business is a very famous example for this importance, as it is the environment and equipment which allow or facilitate the realization of the service.

The physical quality is a determining factor in the quality of service, provided to ensure consistency with the interactive quality (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1991).

2.2 INTERACTIVE QUALITY

A service is a period of time during which customers interact directly with a service (Fisk et al., 2007). As it is widely discussed in the traditional literatures about services, services are distinguishable from products by several characteristics. The most extensive list of these characteristics is cited in Lovelock book (Lovelock 2007). One of the main characteristics is simultaneity. It refers to the fact that for most services, the production and consumption of service occur simultaneously" (Fisk et al., 2007). Simultaneity of services is the primary source of Interactivity of services. The interaction of the customer with the service is a must to the service to happen.

McLuhan (1964) stated that the process is the product. Services are not things. When we say "movie" we actually mean "entertainment services". When we say "shipping" we actually mean "maritime transportation" and so on. Names we give to services are stopping us from seeing clearly the real nature of the services. Services are not by their income only but as well by their processes. Services are not objects, they are processes. Because of the simultaneity characteristic of services, we can say that services are interactive processes.

To illustrate this aspect of interactivity in services we refer to Jan Carlzon (Carlzon, 1989), the former president and CEO of Scandinavia Airlines (SAS) in his book *The Moment of Truth*, in which he shows how to transform SAS from an operations driven business into a customer-driven airline. The following comments have been made by Carlzon about his airline: "Last year, each of our 10 million customers came into contact with approximately five SAS employees, and this contact lasted an average of 15 seconds each time. Thus, SAS is "created" 50 million times a year, 15 seconds at a time. These 50 million "moment of truth" are the moments that ultimately determine whether SAS will succeed or fail as a company. They are the moments when we must prove to our customers that SAS is their best alternative". This comment highlights the opportunities and risks associated with the interaction between the customer and service.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the elements involved in the interactivity of customer with service. We personally believe that the most simple and practical classification is the one made by Lehtinen (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1991). The Figure 2 shows the two elements resources from the company side involved in this interaction with customers:

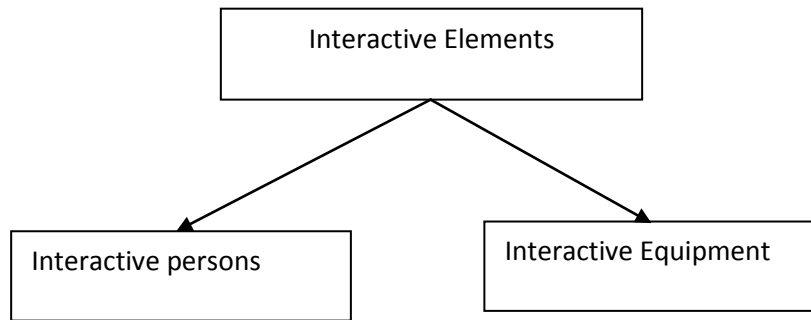


Figure 2: Interactive Elements In Service Production (Lehtinen And Lehtinen , 1991)

2.3 CORPORATE QUALITY

In this research we divided the corporate quality into two main components. The first one is not visible to the customer; it is the internal organization of the provider, as described by Eiglier and Langard (1987) in their servuction system. The two authors report that "the physical support and contact personnel are conditioned by the objectives pursued by the service company management". In other words, the physical quality and interactive quality are strongly related to the performance of the internal organization.

The second component is connected to the profile or image of the institution of the provider (Lehtinen and LAITAMAKI, 1984). It is actually the visible facet by the customer. It is synonymous with the corporate identity of the service. This is a piece of information that clients use in their buying decision process to reduce the risk of a faulty service.

Corporate image is considered to be a vital aspect in the overall assessment of any business (Bitner, 1991; Andreassen and Lanseng, 1997; Kandampully and Hu, 2007; Sarstedt et al., 2012). This is a result of the power that lies in the customers' perception when reading or hearing about the company (Bravo et al., 2009).

The concept of corporate quality is controversial in the field of services management. The same entitlement of « corporate quality » has been debated, beside « profitability » and « productivity », in the finance management field. However our research focuses on the service management definitions and delimitations. Several definitions are cited by different academic works and literature. Keller (1993) defined corporate image as perceptions of an organization reflected in the affiliations held in consumers' mind. On other hand, Nguyen and LeBlanc (1998) defined corporate image as what is called a « subjective knowledge ». This subjective knowledge could be believes, Ideology, company reputation, company brand... corporate image is considered as a holistic concept that is influenced by these elements. It is the general impression remains in the customers' memory, built on the accumulative ideas, feelings, and experiences with the company. The latter will lead to positive or negative image in the customers' memory and it is recalled when the name of the company is mentioned (Hatch et al., 2003; Bravo et al., 2009).

Indeed, corporate quality needs to be managed carefully by the service providers because the expectations of their customers and their actual perception of the service depend firstly on how the internal organization or management contributes to their satisfaction, and secondly to the coherence between the images conveyed by the company of the service and the reality of the service.

2.4 NETWORK QUALITY

Compared to the aforementioned research, Arnaud (1989) offers a new dimension of quality of services that takes into account the environment of Service Company. Indeed, during the service realization process, partners can be involved to realize the activities that are not part of the core business of the service company. For example and as we will see in the empirical part of this study, a Maritime company like Maersk Line has an influent environment that consists of a trucking company cargo, environment can consist of customs, transport companies, security services, terminal company (APMT) and so on.

ARNAUD stresses that the environment of the service company can have a significant importance in the service produced by influencing its quality. He insists on the fact that service companies should surround themselves with strong partners, manage and monitor their activities to ensure total quality to their customers.

This work of Arnaud is crucial in the industrial environment. It helped us to highlight a fourth qualitative dimension, that of the environmental performance of the business service. In fact, a business can provide a total

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quality service, only by choosing and developing a network of effective partners, highlighting the relational, organizational and contractual aspects.

In regards to the field of seaport and logistics, Crowd and Sammons (2008) have also noted that the shippers choose more than a port in itself, but are instead focused on the package of services offered by the logistics supply chain. However, the authors have argued that the influence shippers' on the decisions of choice of port could be in decline of freight from origin to final destination can be controlled by a single line of dispatch, a third party service provider, or an integrator of the supply chain by using various arrangements of transport and several alternative routes designed to minimize the total cost of logistics and maximize value to the customer and the supplier. It becomes imperative for the port to engage all relevant stakeholders in their efforts to remain.

2.5 THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF PERCEIVED QUALITY OF INDUSTRIAL SERVICES

The conceptualization of the model of the industrial service quality and its perception by customers, in a four-dimensional approach, particularly based on three main works in this area (MSSASSI Said, 1989):

- ✓ The three-dimensional aspect of the quality of services offered by both Finnish authors LETHINEN and LAITAMAKI (1984) ;
- ✓ The servuction system as described by Eiglier and LANGEARD (1987);
- ✓ The work of ARNAUD (1989) of inter-organizational services.

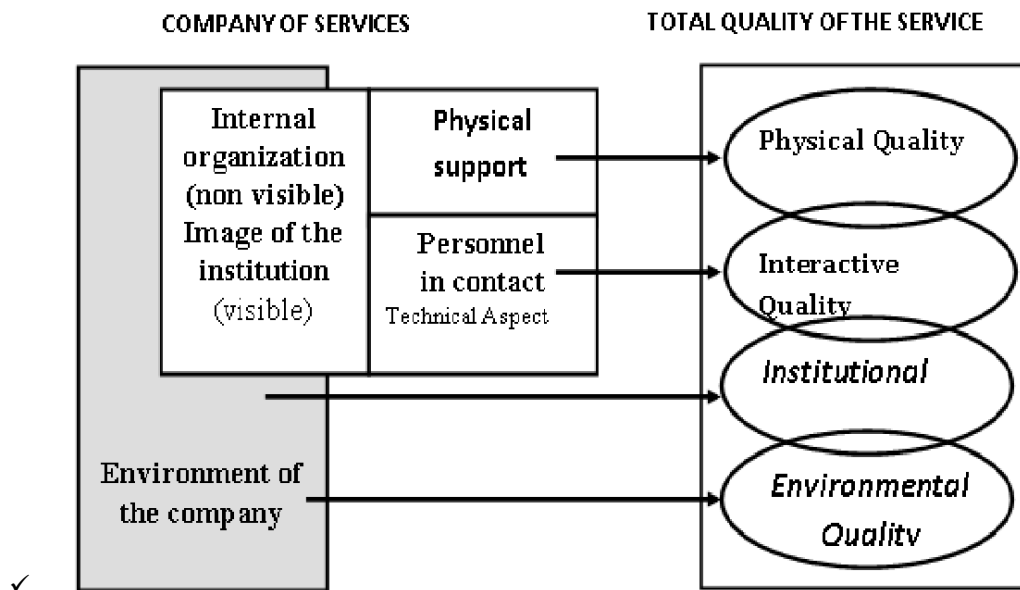


Figure 3: The four-dimensional model of the perception of the quality of services (Inspired by the work of LETHINEN and LAITAMAKI; EIGLIER & LANGEARD and ARNAUD)

According to this model, the four-dimensional approach of the quality of industrial services can be defined as a method adopted by the provider of services in order to balance the content of the interactions within the industrial servuction system. This latter, is basically done by managing and controlling the quality of the four major components of this system, namely the persons in contact, the physical support, internal organization and the environment or partners of the business service. The environment of the service and the actors are very important, especially in the context of seaport and logistics. This is what ARNAUD names network quality. Combining the four dimensional model of quality and the expanded marketing mix for services we could draw the following associations (Table 1).

Generic category in four dimensional model	Expanded Marketing mix
1- Physical quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place • Product • Physical evidence

2- Interactive quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People
3- Corporate quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Price • Promotion • Process
4- Network quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners

Table 1: comparison between the generic categories in four-dimensional model and the expanded marketing mix

III. METHODOLOGY: QUALITATIVE STUDY OF QUALITY IN TANGIER MED

Our research approach is aimed in fact to understand and explain the element involved in the quality perception of container services. We can say that our position is that of an “Interpreting observer “(Giordano, 2003). In this study, we have chosen the qualitative method – semi structured interviews- with case study because it allows us to understand the perception of quality in container terminals. It also offers us the opportunity to analyze patterns in selected contexts.

From the numerous purposeful sampling strategies available in the literature (i.e., maximal variation sampling, confirming/disconfirming sampling...) we adopted the critical sampling for many reasons. According to Schultze and Avital (2011), critical sampling involves selecting a clear case that enables a researcher to learn about a phenomenon. The basis for selecting participants should be their ability to provide accurate information about a particular phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). In our research we will focus on Port Tanger Med I with the two containers APM Terminals (Terminal 1-APMterminals) and Eurogate terminal (Terminal 2-Eurogate)

The following table shows the number interviews per type of companies.

Description	Number
Forwarding agency	4
Maritime company	2
Import-export company	6
Freezone companies	3
warehousing company	2
Container terminal operator	2
Total	19

Table 2: Number of interviews by type of companies

We have chosen the thematic analysis because it is of interest to the frequency of appearance of themes, as opposed to the lexical analysis that focuses on words (Giannelloni and Vernet, 2001). Our goal is therefore to go beyond the calculation of the occurrence of words in order to give meaning to the data collected by interviews. Indeed, in relation to our problematic, it is not enough to know the frequency of a word, but rather the perception of the quality of the port service.

Categories and a coding scheme have been derived from three sources: the data, previous related studies, and theories. Our Coding scheme has been developed abductively. In order to explain this approach, we synthesize in the following table the themes and the subthemes of our dictionary, illustrated by sentences resulting from our Interviews.

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Themes	Subthemes	Description	Example
Corporate quality	Internal organization of seaport	It is related to the objectives set by the managers of seaport	“APM TERMINALS and CMACGM, with their global expertise providing us trust in using Tangier Med seaport »
	Corporate Image of seaport	This is the identity of the seaport that influences the decision of purchasing its services	
Interactive quality	Interactive persons- technical aspect	It corresponds the know-how of the staff in contact involved in import or export process: forwarding agency, trucks drivers, technicians, RTG drivers, maritime company commercial...	“The well-trained RTG and cranes drivers reduced the risk of delays and damage”
	Interactive persons- emotional aspect	It is about behaviour of the staff in contact (helpfulness, availability, honesty, courtesy, sensibility to the constraints of the customers, etc.)	
Physical quality	Physical support	It is related to the performance of physical support belonging to the service provider and consumer.	“The transportation infrastructure linking seaport to cities has been developed, the thing that is facilitating and reducing cost for importers and exporters”
Network quality	Or Environmental quality	It is related to the quality of all parts of container chain	“the low level of integration customs-forwarding agencies, influence negatively the production of the seaport”

Table 3: Review of themes and subthemes dictionary

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this section is to synthesize the results of our case studies to clarify the answers to our research questions. Thus, the first paragraph presents the qualitative dimensions of container ports service in Morocco. The second paragraph answers the question how to measure the perception of the quality of the port service. The third paragraph is about the improvement of the quality of port service through the service marketing.

- **What are the qualitative dimensions of a container port service in Morocco?**

The identification of the dimension of the quality of a container port is very vital to our problematic. Without this identification the research would not reach answers for the key problematic. Different dimensions have been determined. We did categorize them in main four generic dimensions: corporate, interactive, physic and network. In this study the following Table 4 presents the key dimensions have been determined in both cases:

Dimension	Recapitulation	CNTerminal1	CNTerminal2
Corporate quality	Attractiveness of prices	YES	YES
	Corporate citizenship	YES	YES
	Safety of employees	YES	YES
Interactive quality	Professionalism of staff	YES	YES

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	The skills of gate in and out	YES	YES
	Behaviours of staff fronstage	YES	YES
Physical quality	Added value services	YES	YES
	Connexion port-city	YES	YES
	Connexion inland-cities	YES	YES
Network quality	The Information Sharing	YES	YES

Table 4: qualitative dimensions of a container port service in Morocco

The attractiveness of the price is a coherent result with the study of Stuchtey (1991) who explains that wherever the offer of seaports in a region is identical, the buyers will decide based on the pricing policy. This means that seaport should use promotional tools to get more trade.

The skills and behaviours of the front stage staff are conform to the results of (Lehtinen And Lehtinen, 1991). The skills and behaviours of staff are crucial to the perception of service quality in container port.

In terms of added value services, our results are coherent with the outcome stated by (Musso and Ghiara 2008; Brett and Roe 2010). Container port is no more considered ‘standalone transport nodes’ but an interdependent ‘port cluster element’.

The connexion-inland-city, is consistent with the perspective put forward Notteboom (2007) when he defined the port as “A land area with maritime and hinterland access that has developed into a logistics and industrial centre, playing an important role in global industrial and logistics networks”. Ports have to be an integrated logistics centres to ensure a high quality of delivered services to the final customer.

The following is about the elements that we have detected through our case studies and which are not evoked by the literature which has examined the elements affecting the perception of the quality of the port service:

- ✓ The first element is the corporate citizenship and how it affects the perception of the quality of container port. The both cases have mentioned the corporate citizenship as element of the quality construct.
- ✓ The second element is the safety of employees. Literature was focused on the study of the interactivity staff- customer and equipment-customer but ignored the safety of employees in the backstage and front stage. As it has been stated in our interviews, this element is crucial to quality of service in container port for the simple reason that any accident or incident might cause delay and dissatisfaction.
- ✓ The third element was the terminal information system. The terminal information system was always studied in researches related to performance and productivity. However, in this paper we found out that this element has a direct impact on the perception of quality of container port services. Furthermore, the element of information sharing within the port chain was only discussed as holistic approach. In this paper we found that container port management should be supporting and initiating information sharing with other actors in order to enhance the perception of the quality of container or terminal port.
- ✓ The other element was the labelling cost. This variable has been always indicated as with indirect influence. In this research we found that this variable has a straightforward and direct impact on the perception of quality of services of a container port especially for the companies in the commercial free zone. The explanation is that most companies in commercial free zones uses the local warehousing for bounding and consolidation. With low cost of labelling and warehousing in free zones, many companies would use Tanger med as consolidation and redistribution centre for their international import and export transactions.

- **How to measure the perception of the quality of the port service by the actors?**

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Since the container port has more than one type of customers, measuring the perception of the quality is a complicated process. In the case of Tanger Med, the direct customers of the container port are the import and export companies, forwarding agencies, Maritime companies. The quality of a port should be taking into consideration the dimensions expressed by the different levels of client. The measurement of the perception of the quality should not be fragmented. Questionnaires/ emails should be distributed regularly to collect data about how much are the clients of the port satisfied. This questionnaire or email should be covering the four dimensions of the quality as indentified in the previous paragraph.

- **How to improve the quality of port service through service marketing?**

Based on the qualitative dimensions that have been identified and questioned around, the marketers or managers of the container port should make an action plan. A deep analysis of the data collected by the questionnaires or emails is very crucial. The analysis should be carried within the marketing frame. Two key scenarios are possible:

The quality is lower than the expectation of the client: in this case, a reactive improvement plan should be decided about.

The quality is matching or exceeding the expectation of customers: in this case the management should ensure maintaining the same standards of each dimension. The quality of one dimension is never permanent is a constant work.

V. CONCLUSION

It was obvious at the beginning of this research that the key unit of study should be identified. Through the discussion of definitions of ports we came to the most known definition of ports that has been stated by Notteboom (2007). "The port is a land area with maritime and hinterland access that has developed into a logistics and industrial centre, playing an important role in global industrial and logistics networks". We adopted this definition because of its capability to integrate a wide range of strategies and because it focus on the It centres on the function of ports in logistics networks.

Extrapolating the particularity of the industrial service, we come to the finding that all services for organizations are considered industrial services by the content and nature of the interactions they generate between the client organization and the service enterprise.

Our results at theoretical level show that the effective service design for container port should consider the role of employees and level of empowerment because discretion is required within the system when dealing with customers. Other elements are the use of technology, the level of customer contact and customer involvement, and amount of service product customisation. The greater the contact with customers, the more heterogeneity is introduced and less opportunity to gain effectiveness from standardisation.

Our research has also highlighted most influential dimensions of quality in the port sector .In both case contexts, our results first show that the dimensions "interactive quality" and "quality physic" are those that have a great influence on the perception of quality in the container port. Secondly, even if the dimensions of "corporate quality" and "network quality" are not classified in the priority of the customers, the fact remains that the latter are of undoubted interest for our research, because they have directly linked to the main mission of a modern and integrated port.

Finally, our results allowed reaching the main goal of our research, to better understand, through two case studies, the main dimensions influencing the perception of the quality in the container port.

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