

Zone of Tolerance – How to Determine whether it is “Narrow” or “Broad”?

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Editorial

The increased significance of the services sector to the global economy has led to a heightened concern by practitioners, as well as consumers, regarding the quality of services being offered [1]. Specially, the delivery of service quality is increasingly being seen as central to service providers' efforts to position themselves effectively in the marketplace. As a result, the concept of quality and its relationship with the service industries has become a major preoccupation of many businesses within this sector [2]. Leading service organizations strive to maintain a superior quality of service in an effort to gain customer loyalty [3]. Thus, a service organization's long-term success in a market is essentially determined by its ability to expand and maintain a large and loyal customer base. In addition, leveraging service quality has been shown to contribute to both the retention and expansion of the existing customer base [4].

If service quality is to be improved, it must be reliably assessed and measured. There are different instruments that are developed to measure service quality in different service settings. Parasuraman [5] discussed the concept of zone of tolerance of service as the difference between desired service (what the customer hopes to receive) and adequate service (what the customer will accept as sufficient). This concept has direct relevance to various service sectors in terms of assisting the firm to manage service more efficiently. The service level that a customer believes the firm will actually deliver is referred to as the predicted service. However, customers do not have a single 'ideal' level of expectation, but rather a range of expectations. Parasuraman [5] refers to this range of expectations as the 'zone of tolerance', with 'desired service' at the top and 'adequate service' at the bottom of the scale. The desired service expectation is the level of service that customers hope to receive. This is a mixture of what customers believe the level of performance can be and should be [6]. They claim that this corresponds to customers' evaluation of service quality. The adequate service expectation is defined as the lowest level of performance that consumers will accept. The authors note that this level of expectation is comparable to minimum tolerable expectation. This is termed 'predictive expectation', and is associated with customer satisfaction. The area between desired service and adequate service is referred to as the zone of tolerance, and represents the range of service performance that customers will tolerate.

According to Parasuraman [5], if the service delivered falls within the zone, customers will be satisfied and if the service is better than their desired service level, customers will perceive the service as exceptionally good, and be delighted. However, if the service falls below the zone of tolerance, customers will not only be unsatisfied but will feel cheated and take their custom elsewhere. The zone of tolerance provides a range within which customers are willing to accept variations in service delivery. Also, the zone of tolerance proved to be a useful tool for incorporating service quality perceptions and different levels of expectations [7] and also in diagnosing changes in the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction [8].

Although the service quality analyzed in detail within the literature,

there are limited number of studies that analyze “zone of tolerance”. Furthermore, there is no specific way that defines how to determine whether the predicted zone of tolerance is either narrow or board. According to Zeithaml et al. [6] the narrow perspective proposes that customer expectation is a belief in future performance of a product while the broad perspective proposes that expectation is multidimensional and associated with different levels of performance.

The notion can be define as a narrow or broad perspective in zone of tolerance is related to its width. According to some recent studies [9,10] if the width of zone of tolerance is found to be less than 20% of the point-of-scale used, it should be considered 'a narrow zone of tolerance'. If the width is found greater than 60% of the point-of-scale used, it should be considered 'a broad zone of tolerance'. In the remaining case of the middle condition, the neutral zone of tolerance exists. These percentages are only suggestions and that other ranges and descriptions of wideness are possible.

As a conclusion, the measurement of service quality has become a significant marketing tool for businesses that wish to develop a competitive advantage by learning about their customers' consumption experiences. Especially, zone of tolerance is an innovative concept that has attracted considerable attention in the services marketing arena [11]. The zone of tolerance is central to customer evaluations of service quality and satisfaction [12], and it helps managers to analyze the effectiveness of service quality and to identify problem areas that need improvement [13].

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