Enhancing the Competitiveness of Organic Food Shops Using the SERVQUAL Scale*,**

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Abstract

Purpose - This study focused on consumer perceptions of service quality in organic food shops, the innovativeness of organic products, and which SERVQUAL sub-dimensions increase purchase intentions. Another purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between consumer perceptions of organic food shops, their direct interest in organic food, and their purchase intentions.

Research design, data, and methodology - We tested our hypothesized model within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework, utilizing path-analysis implementation. The AMOS 18.0 software was used, and we found that it fit very well with the observed data.

Results - The results of the full model (structural and measurement models) indicated the following fit indices: χ^2=39.492, degree of freedom=25, provability level=0.033, RMR=0.047, GFI=0.948, AGFI=0.906, NNFI=0.958, CFI=0.984, and RMSEA=0.060. The effects of service quality on purchase intention, service quality on innovativeness, and innovativeness on purchase intention we resignificant. We also examined the statistical significance of the mediation effects using the Sobeltest and found further evidence to support service quality and purchase intention through innovation.

Conclusions - These results suggest that, if organic food shops want to achieve a greater level of competitiveness, they must try to raise the quality of their service and actively promote the innovativeness of organic food.

Keywords : Organic Food, Organic Food Shop, SERVQUAL Scale, Innovativeness.

JEL Classifications: M10, M31, L10, N55, Q13.

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1. Introduction

The production and demand of organic food are gradually increasing alongside the pursuit of health and safety for farm product worldwide. Specifically, consumers' demand for organic products is increasing across the globe, with retail sales estimated at 33 billion US-Dollars (25.5 billion Euros) in 2005 (Sahota, 2008). Sahota (2008) reported that Asia is becoming an important region for organic food and the Asian market is reporting healthy growth because of increasing retail distribution and rising consumer awareness. Consumer awareness of organic foods is rising partly because of the high incidence of health scares in recent years. The scares, some involving food, are raising consumer awareness of health issues and stimulating consumer demand for organic products. Important health scares included Avian flu, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and those involving cola drinks (India, August 2006) and tofu (Indonesia, January 2006) (Sahota, 2008).

And according to USDA(United States Department of Agriculture)'s 2011 Report(USDA, 2011), the Korean organic food market grew at an astonishing rate of over 100 percent through 2000 and during the last five years has maintained an average growth rate of 50 percent. And the organic market is predicted to climb to $6 billion by 2020. Consumers in Korea are increasingly willing to purchase organic products as they become more aware of the importance of a healthy diet as pointed out by Sahota (2008). As organic food mow represents a 10 percent share of the total agricultural products market, which suggests that organic products have entered into the main stream consumer market. According to their report, specifically, the organic market is entering a new phase in Korea. The market share increased to $3.1 billion, based on market price, in 2009, up 17 percent from the previous year. Organic processed food production has also seen major growth and change in the past decade. Major food manufacturing companies are beginning th enter the packaged organic product market, because the organic processed foods market is increasing 25 percent each year. Out of the domestic processed food, however, it is important to note that 72 percent of the ingredients were imported, and of those, 89 percent was imported from the United States and th EU. Most fresh organic vegetables and fruits are produced and consumed domestically. Korea's organic production is also growing at a fast pace.

About the domestic situation, KREI (Korea Rural Economic Institute, 2010) reported that Korea is expected to have more than 15.5% of organic food among all pro-environmental agriculture product markets thanks to the increase of demand and growth of the

market. The background of this increasing organic food market could be explained by the global trend of increased income level of people, the value of a healthy life, and new open service market strategies of corporations. Specifically, increased income level allows people to value a healthy life through the media's introduction of the "well-being" lifestyle along with social environmental change such as a five-day workweek. And issues like Avian flu, SARS, Mad Cow Disease and release of radioactivity in Japan made people conscious about their health and the food they consume. It also allowed people to spend extra money on choosing healthier food.

In order to meet the social stream which demands higher safety of health and life, the Korean government started to run an organic certification system for domestic agriculture products through pro-environmental agricultural cultivation laws. This helped to confront cheap imported agriculture products as a pioneering strategy of the new service market focusing on quality (since 2001) and organic markets which only deal with pro-environmental products was newly introduced, cultivating healthy agriculture products to keep the health of customers (Lee, 2011).

Despite having high interest in organic food, only some researchers have reported the relationship between organic food itself and consumers' perception in Korea. For example, Choi and Kim (2011) reported the relationships of consumers' knowledge, risk perception and purchase intention of organic food, and Kim et al. (2011) reported the effects of food choice motive on attitude and intention of purchasing organic food. Suh (2010) also reported that the relationship of consumers' food choice behavior by comparison of past experience. However, this study was focused on consumers' perception of service quality. It was a very important factor for increasing organic food consumption. In this study, we confirmed, using SERVQUAL scale, that the level of service quality has an impact upon the consumers' purchasing intention. This study also focused on which sub dimension in SERVQUAL heightens consumers' purchasing intention. We expected these results to offer important clues for enhancing the competitiveness of organic food stores.

Another purpose of this study was to explore the relationship model among consumers' perception of organic food shop (e.g. level of service quality), their direct interest for organic food (e.g. innovativeness), and their purchasing intention. We expected the result to reveal the consumer's perspective on organic food and organic food stores.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Organic food and organic food shops

2.1.1. Organic food

Typically, organic foods are foods that are produced using methods that do not involve modern synthetic inputs such as synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers, do not contain genetically modified organisms, and are not processed using irradiation, industrial solvents, or chemical food additives.

Citation of the Allen & Albala (2007)'s definition is as follows:

Organic food refers to food produced without using the conventional inputs of modern, industrial agriculture; pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), irradiation, or food additives. It is marked as being healthy for both the body and the environment. It is also portrayed as being natural, implying a connection between the human body and Nature as inherently pure, complete, clean, and friendly. Organic production, in this vein, resists a human-made system of production that suffers from pollution as a result of attempts by human intervention to manage and manipulate Nature. Characteristically, organic food produces and advocates emphasize conservation of soil, water, and renewable resources to protect and enhance overall environmental quality. Animal-based organic food, such as meat, eggs, and dairy products, necessarily come from animals that are not given any antibiotics of hormones throughout their entire lives. Livestock must also have outdoor access and be fed by 100 percent organic feed.

However, in this study, we defined an organic agriculture product as a type of pro-environmental agricultural product which was raised in soil that has not used agricultural chemicals or chemical fertilizer for over 3 years. In addition, the agricultural product must have been certificated by a national agricultural product quality administrator or a private certification authority (Lee, 2011).

2.1.2. Organic food shops

According to the report of Lee (2011), organic food is usually produced and distributed various kinds and small amount system and generally organic food has high price because of labor expense during producing process, and small amount caused organic food has low quality externally.

In the case of the general retail market, most distributions are direct transaction rather than common transaction. After mid-2000s, a number of enterprises and stores increased their organic food distribution route to reach general distributions like organic food-related major companies, major distribution enterprises, and supermarkets. There was a diversity in items, distribution structure changes like pro-environmental specialty stores, online shopping malls, and business heading toward greater sophistication and larger store size.

The management system of organic food-selling supermarkets typically worries about high cost of products that are highly perishable. Producers and professional distribution stores provide higher commission or rebates to expose their organic products in the regular retail stores so that it has a high exposure to the customers.

Major marts, which have increasing numbers of stores, recently started opening "shop-in-shop" systems. In total agricultural product sales of 3 major distribution stores (i.e. Emart, Homeplus and Lotte mart), organic foods comprise 18% of entire agricultural product sales. Recently, major distribution enterprises such as discount stores have also realized that having pro-environmental agricultural products on shelves could be their differentiation strategy. The organic food trend is shifting from special purchase to direct purchase, promoting local producing areas, direct sales and private brands.

There are five types of organic food distribution (shops) in Korea. Summaries of the types of shops are as follows:

First is the association and civil group type, which means member

direct transaction (e.g. Hansallim, iCOOP, etc). Second is the "organic corner" of distribution enterprises, which started from organic, pro-environmental agricultural products in department stores/discount stores to larger stores and brands (e.g. Purum by Lotte and Wellbeing House by Shinsegae, etc). Third is the increase in the number of organic food brand selling areas such as Olga/Natual house by Pulmuwon. Fourth is the growth of organic restaurant enterprises like cafés, restaurants, and bakeries (e.g. Marketo).

Finally, there are distribution channels through organic internet shopping malls such as Mugonghae, Ansimnong and Addfarm.

Although the explosive growth of overall demand for organic food can readily be seen, in this study, we've focused on the organic food stores losing their competitive edge which should be the basis of supplying for organic food.

2.2. Service Quality

Parasuraman et al. (1985) suggested three underlying themes after reviewing the previous writing on service. First, service quality is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate than goods quality. Second, service quality is perceptions results from a comparison of consumer expectations with actual service performance. And quality evaluations are not made solely on the outcome of service; they also involve evaluations of the process of service delivery.

As Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined perceived service quality as "a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service. But some different views drew distinctions between different views on service quality just like Swartz and Brown (1989), Grönross (1983), and Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982). For example, Swartz and Brown (1989) concerning that "What" the service delivers is evaluated after performance. This dimension is called outcome quality by Parasuramn et al. (1989), technical quality by Grönross (1983), and physical quality by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982). "How" the service is delivered is evaluated during delivery (Swartz and Brown, 1989). This dimension is called process quality by Parasuraman et al. (1988), functional quality by Grönross (1983), and interactive quality by Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982)[1].

Service quality theory (Oliver, 1980) predicts that clients will judge that quality is low if performance does not meet their expectations and quality increases as performance exceeds expectations. Hence, customers' expectations serve as the foundation on which service quality will be evaluated by customers. In addition, as service quality increases, satisfaction with the service and intentions to reuse the service increase.

Like Patrick et al. (1996), in this paper, service quality can be defined as the difference between customers' expectations for service performance prior to the service encounter and their perceptions of the service received. Especially, the customers are more good expected organic food and organic food store, and then their perceptions of level of service quality will be expected very important factor.

The SERVQUAL sale was produced for developing valid and reliable measures of marketing constructs (Brown et al., 1993). The scale (Parasuraman et al., 1989) was developed by, first, writing a set of about 100 questions that asked consumers to rate a service in terms both of expectations and of performance on specific attributes that were thought to reflect each of the ten dimensions. And a revised scale was administered to a second sample, questions were tested and the results was a 22-questions (item) scale measuring five basic dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles both on expectations and performance. Specifically, the customer rating would indicate his or her extent of agreement or disagreement with each statement with 7 indicating "strongly agree" and 1 indicating "strongly disagree", with 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 for a rating between "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"(Patrick et al., 1996). In this study, to measure the degree of service quality, an appropriately modified for organic food and organic food stores, SERVQUAL scale was used.

2.3. Innovativeness

In the current highly competitive marketplace, firms are under increasing pressure to develop new products and services that are both timely and responsive to customer needs (Olson et al., 1995). Organic food stores are also under a lot of pressure to launch new organic foods and services to meet customer needs competitively. As we turn out this argument based on a resource dependency view of the product development process, and based on what has been used in the marketing literature to help explain interactions between organic food, organic food stores and customers perceived innovativeness, we expected that, if customers feel a variety of innovativeness about the efficacy of organic food, they will increase the purchase intention of organic food.

As a marketing concept, innovativeness can at the very least be defined as imprecise (Roehrich, 2004). Firm innovativeness, or "creation on newness," depicts a firm's ability to develop and launch new products at a fast rate (Hurley & Hult, 1998). Product innovativeness, or "possession of newness," is the degree of newness of a product (Daneels & Kleinsmith, 2001). Consumer innovativeness, or "consumption of newness," is the tendency to buy new products more often and more quickly than other people (Midgley & Dowling, 1978) (Roehrich, 2004). In this study, the word "innovativeness" will be used similarly with reference to consumer innovativeness including sub-dimension just like technical innovativeness (Park & Chae, 2011), fashion innovativeness (Jun & Rhee, 2009), and information innovativeness (Kim & Lee, 2007).

Innate innovativeness is a predisposition to buy new and different products and brands rather than remain with previous choices and consumer patterns (Steenkamp at al., 1999). We expected that perceived innovativeness will affect between the level of service quality and purchase intention.

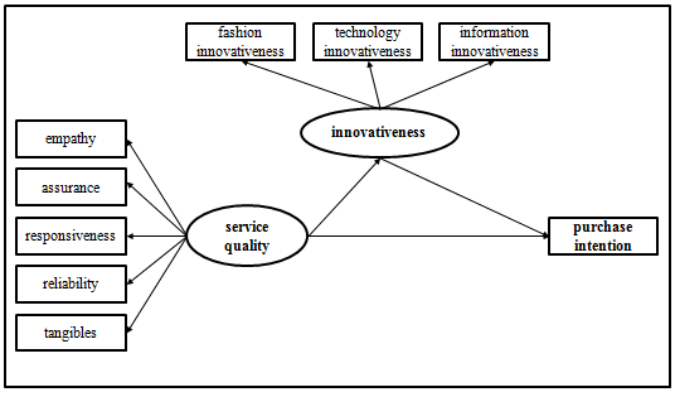
1) Re-quoted by Patrick et al. (1996).

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

3.1. Research Model

In this study, we verified that the level of service quality has an impact upon the consumers' purchasing intention. Also, this study focused on which sub dimension in SERVQUAL heightens consumers' purchasing intention. Another purpose of this study was to explore the relationship model among consumers' perception of organic food shops, direct interest for organic food, and purchasing intention.

The research model in this study is illustrated in Figure. 1.



<Figure 1> Research Model

3.2. Hypothesis

3.2.1. Relationship between service quality, innovativeness, and purchase intention

According to the SERVQUAL definition and concept of quality, it can aid the manager by providing general knowledge of how consumers are likely to judge the quality of the business (Patrick et al., 1996). And the innovativeness-quality-performance model proposed by Cho & Pucik (2005) reported that quality mediates the relationship between innovativeness and profitability, and both innovativeness and quality have mediation effects on market value. Previous studies have suggested that perceived service quality positively influences customer satisfaction and purchase intentions (Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Martensen et al., 2000). And many researchers, such as Rogers (2003) and Yang (2005), reported that a high level of innovativeness could positively affect customers' purchase intention.

Therefore, we hypothesize;

H1: Service quality will affect the purchase intention.

H2: Service quality will affect innovativeness.

H3: Innovativeness will affect the purchase intention.

3.2.2. Mediation effect of innovativeness between service quality and purchase intention.

A mediating effect of innovativeness between service quality and purchase intention could not be found, but a previous study, Park et al. (2002), expected innovativeness to mediate. Specifically, Park et al. (2002) showed that innovativeness will positively statistically affect the relationship between purchasing attitude and purchase intention. Another perspective, that of Hebb (1995) and Leuba (1955), seems to be the first to suggest that the individual seeks stimulation, and there is an individual optimal level of stimulation. After a thorough review of the different theories concerning this need, Venkatesn (1973) suggested that a relationship of direct dependency between the need for stimulation and innovative behavior should be considered. Building on Berlyne's (1960) approach, he shows how new products can help people maintain their inner stimulation at an optimum level in different situation (Roehrich, 2004).

Therefore, we hypothesis;

H4: Innovativeness will mediate between service quality and purchase intention.

4. Methods

4.1. Data and Sample

Participants from Ajou university MBA students were surveyed. A total of 163 participants (85 males; age M= 37.45 and 78 females; Age M = 36.21 took part in this study.

4.2. Self-Report Measures

SERVQUAL was measured 22 item 7-point likert scale developed by Parasuraman et al. (1989), innovativeness was measured 9 item 7-point likert scale developed by Kang & Jin(2007), Goldsmith & Hofacker (1991), Goldsmith et al (1995), purchase intention was measured 3 item 7-point likert scale developed by Agarwal & Karahnna (2000), Davis (1985).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Measurement model

The confirmatory factor analysis was completed with maximum likelihood estimation. In the study, each one item of tangibles, and reliability of SERVQUAL, and on item of information innovativeness was deleted because item estimate was lower than 0.5, respectively. The results of construct reliability and variances extracted are shown in Table 1.

On the basis of these results, this study summed the scores on the items of each construct. The mean, standard deviations, and correlation matrix are shown in Table 2.

<Table 1> Construct reliability and variance extracted

Constructs	Sub-factors	items	Construct Reliability	Variance Extracted
Service Quality	Tangibles	3	.963	.571
	Reliability	4		
	Responsiveness	4		
	Assurance	4		
	Empathy	5		
Innovativeness	Fashion innovativeness	3	.903	.539
	Technology innovativeness	3		
	Information innovativeness	2		
Purchase intention		3	.788	.554

<Table 2> Means (Standard Deviation) and Correlation Matrix

	Service Quality	Innovativeness	Purchase intention
Service Quality	(.571)		
Innovativeness	.24**	(.539)	
Purchase intention	.30**	.72**	(.554)
Mean	4.50	3.05	3.42
Std. Deviation	.836	1.08	1.33

** Correlation coefficients are significant at α= 0.01 level

5.2. Results

We tested our hypothesized model within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework utilizing path-analysis implementation using the AMOS 18.0 software and found that it fit very well with the observed data. As shown below, the results of the full model (structural and measurement models) indicated fit indices: χ^2=39.492, degree of freedom=25, provability level=0.033, RMR=0.047, GFI=0.948, AGFI=0.906, NNFI=0.958, CFI=0.984, RMSEA=0.060. The adequacy of the structural equation models was evaluated on the criteria of overall fit with the data.

Next, we evaluated the individual paths of the model. These results are summarized in Table 3 and shown in Figure 2.

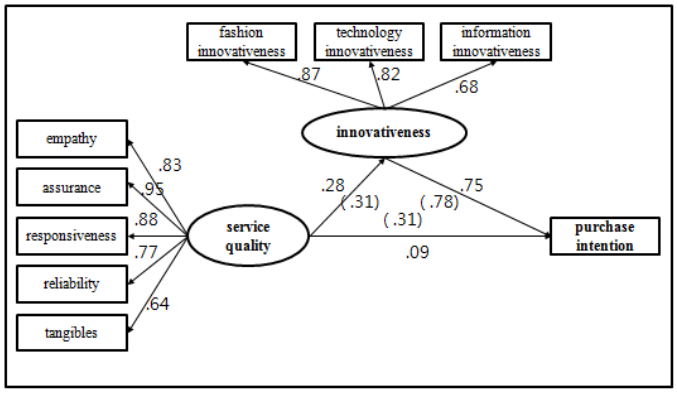
The effect of service quality on purchase intention was significant (γ=0.641, p<0.01). Therefore, H1 was supported by the data. The effect of service quality on innovativeness was significant (γ=0.307, p<0.01). Therefore, H2 was supported by the data. The effect of innovativeness on purchase intention was significant (γ=0.779, p<0.01). Therefore, H3 was supported by the data.

<Table 3> Path model results

Path	Estimate	t-value	p	Assessment
H1	0.641	3.728	0.000	supported
H2	0.307	3.550	0.000	supported
H3	0.779	9.350	0.000	supported

These results showed that the effect of organic food shops' service quality and the effect of perceived innovativeness for organic food were very important. Therefore, these results suggested that if they want to achieve competitiveness in the industry, they must strive to upgrade the quality of service as well as actively promoting innovativeness for organic food.

Specifically, the results as shown in Figure 2 showed that the most important sub-factor of service quality is assurance (γ=0.949, p<0.01), followed by responsiveness (γ=0.883, p<0.01), empathy (γ =0.828, p<0.01), reliability (γ=0.772, p<0.01), and tangibility (γ =0.644, p<0.01). And, the most important sub-factor of innovativeness is fashion innovativeness (γ=0.866, p<0.01), followed by technology innovativeness (γ=0.825, p<0.01), and information innovativeness (γ =0.751, p<0.01).



<Figure 2> Results of path model and mediation effect

We examined the statistical significance of the mediation effects using the Sobel test (see Mackinnon et al., 2002) and found further evidence to support hypothesis 4 (service quality → innovativeness → purchase intention ; z=1.971, p<. 05). And we found evidence using the AMOS 18.0 supporting a mediated relationship between service quality and purchase intention by fashion innovativeness (p=0.011), technology innovativeness (p=0.009), and information innovativeness (p=0.01), respectively.

5.3. Discussion

Eventually, this study showed that customer-perceived service quality in organic food shops influences purchase intention through the mediation of innovativeness regarding fashion, technology and information about organic foods. In other words, the current study suggests that organic food stores should improve the quality of service and provide a variety of innovativeness for organic products in order to increase their competitiveness. For example, USDA(2011)'s report suggested that labeling may be done depending on the organic agricultural ingredients in a food product.

To implement this, various types of strategies should be established. For example, the government should solve problems of organic food system and policy and supporting the organic industry with public service announcements. Especially, to promote convenience of purchase, the current dual system should be unified to increase consumer's trust in organic agricultural products and the organic processed product certification system should provide accurate information of organic food and this indication system should be promoted. Also, in the case of large enterprises, they should focus on selecting a distribution channel which is suitable for the target, sup-

porting available information such as innovativeness and improving the quality of service of organic food stores.

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