Effects of Perceived Service Quality of Cultural Centers in Discount Stores on Relationship Quality

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to explore whether investing in cultural centers enhances the image and performance of corporations, and seeks to identify the effects of the relationship quality of cultural centers on the relationship quality of discount stores.

Research design, data, and methodology - To accomplish the objective, a survey was conducted on the users of the cultural center of NH Hanaro Club's S Branch. Regarding the questionnaires, 155 copies were distributed and 139 were used as valid data responses, which were analyzed through a descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and a path analysis with structural equation modeling.

Results –Cultural centers are lifelong educational institutions revolving around females, and corporations can improve their image and performance through cultural centers in pursuit of profits. Moreover, the reliability and responsiveness of cultural centers positively influenced their relationship quality and that of discount stores.

Conclusion - Customer service should be provided promptly and sincerely to achieve maximum customer satisfaction. This will boost the relationship quality of cultural centers, and positive customer evaluation will lead to better relationship quality of the discount stores.

Keywords: Qultural Centers, Perceived Service Quality, Relationship Qualuty, Discount Stores, NH Hanaro Club.

JEL Classifications: I38, H75, L84, M31.

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1. Introduction

In 1984, the first lifelong educational institution of a corporation, Dongbang Plaza Cultural Center, was established. Since then, lots of corporations have operated Cultural Centers as they pursued profits. According to Bae(2005), the Cultural Centers of department stores are located inside the store, allowing housewives to do shopping for groceries or clothes before or after classes. It is highly beneficial as it can save their time. In addition, a playroom for young children is provided for free, allowing their mothers to take classes without worrying about child care. That's why Cultural Centers are perceived as a lifelong educational institution highly accessible to women. At the same time, Bae(2005) pointed out that the Cultural Centers of department stores are places where the properties of educational institutions and those of corporations pursuing profits clash, as an accessory facility of department stores. In fact, they operate Cultural Centers to turn members into loyal customers; it began as a marketing strategy to attract customers and boost the image of corporations. On the other hand, the members use the Cultural Centers to take classes of their interest, reflecting the basic desire to pursue education for self-improvement, as education-oriented animals (homo educatus) (Jo, 1997).

Discount stores also have Cultural Centers under the purpose of providing open lifelong education to boost the quality of lives of people with the following roles: offering constructive leisure activities; enhancing the living culture of local residents; re-educating adults; sharing corporate profits with the society(Gong, 2014). However, their ultimate purpose is to increase the sales of their stores, just like department stores. Although the classes of Cultural Centers are seemingly unrelated to consumption, the cultural activities are another form of products sold in the name of self-improvement(Gong, 2014). Thus, Cultural Centers are expected to enhance the image and sales of discount stores. Also, they could increase customer satisfaction by offering customer-friendly services with lifelong education and cultural activities for self-improvement. Therefore, the Cultural Centers of discount stores have two different purposes: the basic purpose of sharing corporate profits with society, enhancing living cultures, and expanding the cultural population through cultural activities;

the commercial purpose of increasing sales by enhancing the overall image of corporations(Kim et al., 2014). According to the research, identifying whether the Cultural Centers contribute to the profitability of corporations is critical beyond meeting the social desires. The reason is as follows. Because the purpose of corporations is to earn profits, their Cultural Centers that do not improve the image or sales of the discount stores do not deserve active investment from the corporations. Thus, they might withdraw or decrease their investment in the Cultural Centers if they do not produce any direct or indirect benefits, although they are serving as a lifelong education institution(Kim et al., 2014).

This is a continued study intended to identify how the perceived factors among Cultural Center users influence the performance of the affiliated discount stores. Specifically, the objective is to identify the correlation between Cultural Center usage and sales of discount stores by examining the following in an empirical manner: direct effects of service quality factors of Cultural Centers perceived by users on their relationship quality; effects of relationship quality of Cultural Centers on the relationship quality of discount stores.

The findings of this study will provide the following benefits. First, it will provide useful tips on efficient utilization of Cultural Centers of discount stores. Second, it will confirm whether the continued investment in Cultural Centers is really worth it by verifying their impact on the sales of discount stores, their ultimate purpose; it has never been explored by any other study. At the same time, the meaning of Cultural Centers as a lifelong educational institution will be explored in connection with the operation by discount stores.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Service Quality

Enhancing service quality is a typical strategy of corporations aimed at generating more profits and differentiating themselves from other corporations. In fact, service quality affects the performance of any organizations as a key factor in boosting the organizational competitiveness. Thus, its importance has been stressed at an increasing level(Lewis & Bernard, 1983; Rudie & Wansley 1985; Thompson et al., 1985). According to Grönroos(1984), service quality is the perception of consumers towards a certain service, and he divided it into technical quality and functional quality. Specifically, technical quality is what the customer gets at the end, and functional quality is the process where the technical quality is delivered to consumers in a functional manner. If such factors including the process of delivering a service do not provide joy to consumers, customer satisfaction is not likely to be achieved. In other words, service quality is just as important as the attraction of a service or product(Grönroos, 1984). Specifically, service quality is the result of evaluating the expected and perceived services on the part of customers. Therefore, service quality is determined by such variables as customer expectations, functional characteristics, and image of a service or product(Kim, 2014). Such perspective of Grönroos can be interpreted through the expectancy-disconfirmation model presented by Oliver(1980). According to the model, customer satisfaction/ dissatisfaction are determined by the following three factors. First, the degree of confirmation/ disconfirmation, a difference between expectations and perceived performance. Second, perceived performance. Third, expectations(Oliver, 1980). According to a research (Grönroos, 1984; Oliver, 1980), service quality is intangible, unlike tangible products. Thus, there are almost no tangible cues that can measure the quality (The tangible cues of service quality are limited to the physical abilities or human factors of the service provider). As a result, it is defined as service quality perceived by customers based on their subjective standards, rather than objective ones. Similarly, Parasuraman et al.(1988) said that service quality(SERVQUAL) refers to the difference between an expected level of service and a perceived level of service on the part of customers. He stressed that assessment of service quality is evaluating the difference between the personal expectations of customers involving their desires, needs, hopes and ideals and the actual services experienced by customers. Therefore, optimal service quality can be generated when the preference and expectations of customers perfectly match, according to a study(Haywood-Farmer, 1988).

In this study, service quality was divided into the five dimensions introduced by Parasuraman et al.(1988). First, tangibility is an external cue for assessing the service quality, which refers to the following: physical facilities; equipment; appearance of employees; tools and materials; physical representation of services. Second, reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised service accurately, which includes accurate billing, accurate records, and punctuality. Third, responsiveness is defined as the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service, which includes punctual service, quick replies, and immediate actions. Fourth, assurance is defined with the following elements: competence, the level of skills and knowledge required for a service; trustworthy and confident customer encounter; courtesy that includes the friendliness, respect, politeness, and considerate attitude of employees; credibility that includes the sincerity and honesty of a service provider; security that enables customers to feel free from danger, risk or doubt. Assurance includes the following: knowledge and skills of a service provider; research capabilities of an organization; consideration for the property and time of customers; respectful attitude of employees; company reputation; employee integrity; ensuring physical and financial security and confidentiality. Finally, empathy is defined with the following elements: communication, listening to customers and explaining to them in a language they are able to understand; access, approachability and ease of contact; understanding, making an effort to understand the customer's individual needs. Empathy includes the following: explaining a service, its cost, and their relationship; assuring customers that their problems can be solved and are effectively managed; approachability by phone; short waiting time; convenient business hours and location; understanding the particular needs of cus-

tomers and providing individualized attention; recognizing VIP customers.

2.2. Relationship Quality

The key concept of studies on relationship marketing is 'relationship quality.' The concept has been defined by many scholars from multiple perspectives(Chun & Park, 2010; Crosby et al., 1990; Gummesson, 1998; Henning-Thurau et al.2000). It was organized by Kim(2014) as follows. According to Gummesson(1998), relationship quality is one of 4 types of quality that customers encounter. He defined it as quality of interactions with customers. Thus, a positive relationship enhances the quality perceived by customers and even leads to a long-term relationship with them. Crosby et al.(1990) presented a two-dimensional model of relationship quality consisting of trust in employees and satisfaction in their performance. If the level of relationship quality is high, it allows customers to rely on the integrity of employees in proportion to the level of their satisfaction. Also, it develops customer confidence in the future performance. In addition, it was proven that the elements of relationship quality perceived by customers can be controlled by sellers (Kim, 2014). Meanwhile, Chun & Park(2010) defined relationship quality as the overall evaluation of customers on their repeated use or transactions from a perspective similar to post-purchase behavior; it is reflecting on the process and results of consumption after a product purchase(Lee & Yang, 2012). Relationship quality can also be defined as the degree of appropriateness of relationship for meeting customer needs(Hennig-Thurau et al. 2000). Thus, positive interactions with employees lead to customer confidence and a long-term relationship(Nam, 2010). Another definition of relationship quality is that it is a customer perception as to how well a relationship satisfies their expectations, prediction, goals, and needs(Jarvelin & Lehtinen, 1996).

Lots of studies established the main elements of relationship quality as the following: trust, satisfaction, and commitment related to service performance(Baker, 1999; Crosby et al., 1990; Dorsch et al. 1998; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Henning-Thurau, 2002; Oderkerken-Schröder et al., 2003; Roberts et al., 2003). That's why consumers never purchase a product again if they are dissatisfied with the results. Similarly, dissatisfied Cultural Center users never come back once their session expires. Also, the dissatisfaction has a negative impact on the relationship quality of discount stores that operate Cultural Centers.

3. Research Model and Hypotheses

The preceding studies on service quality as to consumer behavior have mainly used the concept of 'perceived service quality.' According to them, perceived service quality is correlated with transaction satisfaction. Thus, higher service quality leads to higher satisfaction and increases consumer's behavioral intention(Kim, 2014).

This study explored the impact of customers who perceive the sub-factors of Cultural Centers on their relationship quality. In addition, its effects on the relationship quality of discount stores were examined to establish a research model; it was created to verify whether the Cultural Centers of discount stores can increase the profits of corporations, their ultimate purpose. The model is presented in <Figure 1>.
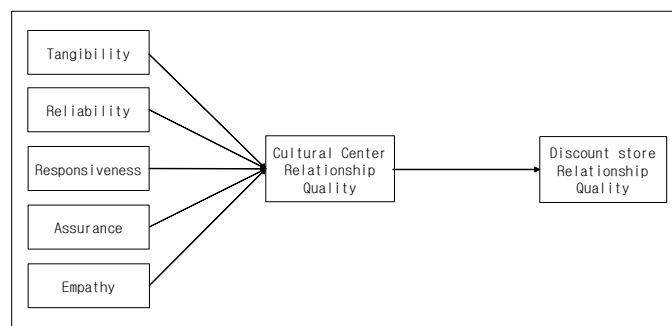
<Figure 1> Research Model

The correlation between service quality and relationship quality is as follows according to Kim(2014) who analyzed the preceding studies. Yi(2000) proved that higher service quality increases customer satisfaction, leading to repurchase intention and word-of-mouth intention. As a result, it enhances corporate performance. According to Yi & La(2003), Generally, higher perceived service quality leads to higher transaction satisfaction and greater behavioral intention. Rust & Oliver(1994) stated that the overall satisfaction in a particular company is created by customer satisfaction in the product or service, elements of the satisfaction. Hong(2004) argued that all elements of service quality, except for reliability, have a significant effect on customer satisfaction on his study on hotels.

Thus, the following is highly likely, similar to the findings of preceding studies: Each element of service quality of Cultural Centers perceived among users has a positive effect on the relationship quality. Also, the perceived service quality has a positive effect on the relationship quality of discount stores. Based on the prediction, the following hypotheses were established.

<Hypothesis 1> Perceived tangibility will have a positive effect on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers.
<Hypothesis 2> Perceived reliability will have a positive effect on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers.
<Hypothesis 3> Perceived responsiveness will have a positive effect on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers.
<Hypothesis 4> Perceived assurance will have a positive effect on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers.
<Hypothesis 5> Perceived empathy will have a positive effect on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers.
<Hypothesis 6> Positive relationship quality of Cultural

Centers will have a positive effect on the relationship quality of discount stores.

4. Research Method

4.1. Data Collection and Demographic Characteristics

The research and data collection were done as follows. First, a survey was conducted on the users of NH Hanaro Club's S Branch Cultural Center, which was utilized on a study by Kim et al.(2014). As for questionnaires, 155 copies were distributed and 139 were used as valid data after excluding 16 with insincere responses. In terms of their demographics [1], there were 122 Female(90.4%) and 13 Male(9.6%), which indicates that the majority of Cultural Center users are women. As for age, there were 7 people aged less than 50(5.1%), There were 22 people aged 50-55 (16.2%), 29 people aged 56-60(21.3%), 33 people aged 61-6 (24.3%), 21 people aged 66-70(15.4%), and 24 people aged 70 and above(17.6%). In terms of income, 11 people earned less than a million won(8.1%), 15 earned 1 million-2 million won(11%), 34 earned 2 million-3 million won(25.0%), 30 earned 3 million-4 million won(22.1%), and 46 earned 4 million or more(33.8%). The results reflect the overall characteristics of the Cultural Center users in the discount store.

As for the number of times they used the Cultural Center, 79 people(56.8%) used it less than 4 times, the highest proportion, followed by 47(33.8%) who used it 4-8 times, indicating that they used it twice or less a week. In terms of purpose of using the Cultural Center, 68 people(48.9%) used it to take classes, the highest proportion, followed by 43(30.9%) seeking leisure activities and 28(20.1%) who just dropped by the Center after shopping. Thus, the main purpose is to take a class or enjoy a leisure activity. As for the biggest reason they chose the Cultural Center, 51 people(36.7%) responded it allowed them to enjoy cultural activities with easy access to a discount store. 32 people(23.0%) cited the comfortable atmosphere, 19 (13.7%) cited the convenient transportation, and 17(12.2%) cited the low tuition. 13 people(9.4%) cited outstanding instructors and 7 people(5.0%) cited diverse classes.

4.2. Questionnaires

The service quality was measured as follows. Based on a study by Parasuraman et al. (1988), 4 questions on tangibility, responsiveness, and assurance, and 5 questions on reliability and empathy were assessed respectively through 7-point Likert scale. The relationship quality of Cultural Centers and discount stores was measured as follows. Based on a study by Oliver(1993), 4 questions on Cultural Centers and discount stores were assessed through 5-point Likert scale. To solve the gap in the scales of variables, they were converted into z-score

for analysis.

5. Empirical Analysis

5.1. Reliability and Validity

To identify whether the measured items have internal consistency, their reliability was measured through Cronbach α (Nunally, 1978), Two questions on tangibility were excluded as their standardized regression coefficients were less than 0.5, based on a confirmatory factor analysis that verified the validity of the variables. However, the construct validity of other variables was secured as their standardized regression coefficients were 0.5 or above. Meanwhile, the convergent and discriminant validity of tangibility was not secured as its construct reliability was less than 0.7. Thus, it was excluded from the analysis. As for variance extracted index values of the variables, they were all 0.5 or above, except for reliability whose values were less than 0.5. Thus, the convergent validity was secured. As for reliability, its convergent validity was verified in comparison with the coefficient of determination, a square value of the correlation coefficient, through correlation analysis.

<Table 1> Reliability and Validity

Variables	Sub-Factor	Final items	Cronbach's α	Construct Reliability	AVE
Relationship Quality	Tangibility	2	0.814	0.607	0.436
	Reliability	5	0.916	0.803	0.455
	Responsiveness	4	0.936	0.836	0.562
	Assurance	4	0.954	0.881	0.649
	Empathy	5	0.965	0.903	0.652
Relationship Quality of C.C		4	0.971	0.969	0.888
Relationship Quality of D.C		4	0.934	0.941	0.802

Note) C.C ; Cultural Center D.C: Discount Store

5.2. Correlation Analysis

<Table 2> indicates the results of the following: a confirmatory factor analysis to identify the tendency and correlation among the variables; a correlation analysis to see whether reliability, whose AVE value is less than 0.5, has convergent validity.

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1) 4 people in each gender and 3 people in the category of age and income were missing

<Table 2> Correlation Analysis (Pearson Correlation Coefficient) (n=139)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Reliability	(0.455)					
2.Responsiveness	0.841**	(0.562)				
3.Innovation	0.796**	0.906**	(0.649)			
4.Empathy	0.742**	0.828**	0.897**	(0.652)		
5.R. Q of C.C.	0.634**	0.668**	0.606**	0.553**	(0.888)	
6.R. Q of D.C.	0.491**	0.545**	0.576**	0.509**	0.471**	(0.802)
Mean	5.04	4.87	4.95	4.78	3.94	3.73
Standard Deviation	1.44	1.56	1.57	1.52	0.99	0.84

Note) * p<.05, ** p<.01, (   ) indicates AVE

Based on the results, a very high correlation among variables should be examined carefully. Jung & Choi(2001) pointed out the following: When the correlation of two independent variables is higher than a high correlation between an independent variable and a dependent variable with similar features, the estimated coefficients have no statistical meanings due to multicollinearity. If a AVE value is higher than the coefficient of determination, a square value of the correlation coefficient, perhaps there are no problems caused by multicollinearity. However, the high correlation among the elements of service quality in this study suggests it is necessary to verify there is no issue with autocorrelation through verification of the independence of tolerance limit or residuals. Therefore, a regression analysis was conducted to identify the correlation between the 4 elements of service quality and the relationship quality of Cultural Centers for multicollinearity and auto-correlation verification through tolerance limit and Durbin-Watson test. The results are as follows. The tolerance limit values were mostly low and VIF value was also high at above 3.5. Thus, the impact of service quality elements on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers should be examined carefully in this study.
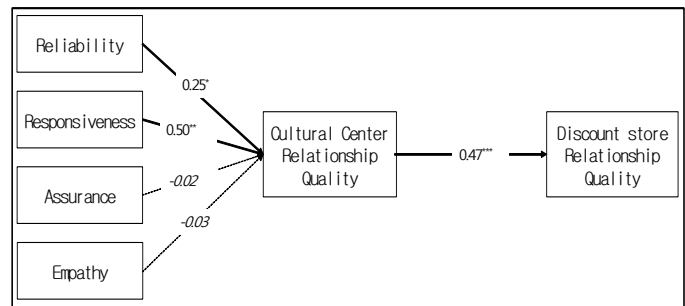
5.3. Correlation Analysis

<Figure 2> shows the results on hypothesis testing through a path analysis with structural equation, excluding the relationship path between tangibility and Cultural Center relationship quality due to insufficient validity.

The results are as follows. Only reliability (γ=-0.13, p<.01) and responsiveness had a positive impact on the relationship quality of the Cultural Center. Meanwhile, assurance (γ=-0.13, p<.01) and empathy (γ=-0.13, p<.01) were not statistically significant. Therefore, <Hypothesis 2>, <Hypothesis 3>, and <Hypothesis 6> were accepted, among the hypotheses established in the beginning. However, <Hypothesis 1>, <Hypothesis 4> and <Hypothesis 5> were rejected.

The value of each path is presented in <Table 3>. The goodness of fit of the model that connected the covariance of the error term reflecting multicollinearity and auto-correlation is as follows: χ^2=25.988; d.f=4; p=.000; GFI=.0946; NFI=.967;

CFI=.971; RMR=.105.

Note) *** p<.001

<Figure 2> Hypothesis Testing Results

<Table 3> Path Analysis Results

Path	Standardized Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p
Reliability → Relationship quality of C.C	.254	.117	2.180	.029
Responsiveness → Relationship quality of C.C	.498	.167	2.990	.003
Assurance → Relationship quality of C.C	-.021	.187	-.113	.910
Empathy → Relationship quality of C.C	-.029	.142	-.206	.837
Relationship quality of C.C → D.C	.471	.075	6.276	.000

6. Conclusion

This is a continued study intended to identify how the factors perceived by Cultural Center users influence the performance of the affiliated discount stores. Specifically, the objective is to identify the correlation between Cultural Center usage and sales of discount stores by examining the following in an empirical manner: direct effects of service quality factors of Cultural Centers perceived by users on their relationship quality; effects of relationship quality of Cultural Centers on the relationship quality of discount stores.

Based on the findings, the conclusion and implications are as follows:

First, in terms of demographic features, many of the users were aged 56 and above and the majority were women. It suggests that NH Hanaro Club's S Branch Cultural Center was also serving as a lifelong educational institution revolving around females. In particular, the use of Cultural Center was linked to the discount store usage, beyond taking classes and enjoying leisure activities. It reveals that Cultural Centers can help corporations improve their image and performance linked to profits, as well as serving as a lifelong educational institution.

Second, the large discount stores that operate Cultural Centers should be developed, which in turn develops the Centers. In particular, it requires good atmosphere of the Centers and convenient transportation. The findings suggest the following. First, if the corporations that operate Cultural Centers enhance their image and themselves, it helps to develop their Cultural Centers. The success of Cultural Centers is affected by the following: attractive environment; sincere customer service through employee education; convenient transportation.

Third, although the correlation analysis showed the issue with multicollinearity and auto-correlation, it also showed there was a positive correlation between the relationship quality of Cultural Centers and their discount stores. It was proven by each element of service quality, except tangibility whose validity was not secured. Thus, each element (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) should be pursued in order to boost the relationship quality. It is especially important to enhance the overall service quality.

Fourth, the path analysis showed that reliability and responsiveness had a positive impact on the relationship quality of Cultural Centers. Also, positive relationship quality of Cultural Centers had a positive effect on the relationship quality of discount stores. Therefore, Cultural Centers should accurately carry out their promised service, such as providing classes on time and accurate customer support. They should step up their efforts to offer appropriate, prompt services and quick replies to maximize customer satisfaction. Then it will improve the relationship quality of Cultural Centers. Positive reaction and evaluation from customers will improve the relationship quality of their discount stores as well.

Despite such findings, this study has several limitations that should be improved in future studies. First, it failed to solve the issue with multicollinearity and auto-correlation due to the strong correlation among the service quality elements in a correlation analysis. It is partially because the Cultural Center users didn't actively give responses as they were relatively old. In fact, many of the respondents aged 65 or older didn't understand the survey questions or asked for help as they felt tired. When they received help, they probably gave a better evaluation than they had intended. Thus, future studies need to develop new measurement scales and methods that allow older customers to reply more easily. Second, the findings of this study may not be generalized as the sample was limited to the NH Hanaro Club's S Branch Cultural Center customers. Therefore, future studies need to target more variety of regions and Cultural Centers to obtain more accurate findings. Finally, since the survey was done through a Self Reporting Questionnaire (SEQ), it may have issues such as hindsight bias. Also, the findings may have other issues, since they were obtained through a cross-sectional study. As mentioned previously, such issues should be solved by developing better, more objective scales. Also, it is necessary to conduct a longitudinal study to solve the limitations of a cross-sectional study.

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