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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes service research published in marketing journals from 1993 to 2003. Through a content analysis, we study the relationships between service marketing subfields. A MCA allows us to map keywords and authors, and track this literature over the past eleven years. A discussion of the future of service research is also provided.

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, Fisk, Brown, and Bitner and Berry and Parasuraman published two seminal articles on the early developments of a new academic field: service marketing. In these papers, the authors described how service marketing emerged and developed to become an autonomous academic field, independent from general marketing. Eleven years after the publication of these articles, the service marketing field has developed and matured (Grove, Fisk, and John 2003). More recently, Fisk, Grove, and John (2000; Grove, Fisk, and John 2003) have looked at the past, present, and future of service marketing research through the eyes of experts. The purpose of this paper is to study this evolution over the past eleven years of research published in 10 of the top academic journals from 1993 to 2003 to better understand the structure of the field and the direction it could take in the future.

The service marketing literature having now reached its maturity stage, it is important to identify the breadth and diversity of its content as well as the main directions and magnitude of progress in order to identify desirable directions for future research. The objective of this paper is therefore: first to map the structure of the service marketing field to identify the interconnections its subfields; second, to examine the research current trends in order to better understand and foresee their impact on the development of the field; and third, based on the analysis of past research, to provide some clues about the future of this literature.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present a brief overview of the development of service marketing before 1993 based on the papers by Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993) and Swartz, Bowen, and Brown (1992). This is followed by the description of the method used in the study. We then present the results of the analysis of the content of the service marketing literature published between 1993 and 2003 and its evolution over time. We also examine the most published authors and their position in the service marketing field. We conclude the paper with a discussion of some concerns about the future of the service marketing field.

DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICE MARKETING: AN OVERVIEW


During the Crawling Out stage (1953–1979), scholars in the service marketing field first fought to assert the discipline’s right to exist (Fisk, Brown, and Bitner 1993; Swartz, Bowen, and Brown 1992). This stage began in 1953 with the first service marketing scholars struggling to publish their work and culminated with the debate of how and why services were different from goods (e.g., Shostack 1977). From this early work came the identification of some of the distinctive characteristics of services, such as intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability (Shostack 1977).

The Scurrying About stage (1980–1985) was a bridging period where the services vs. goods debate began to wane (Fisk, Brown, and Bitner 1993). Attention then shifted from “Are services different from goods?” to “What are the implications of these differences?” (Swartz, Bowen, and Brown 1992). Christopher Lovelock tried to answer this question in a seminal article by classifying services (Lovelock 1983). This stage also saw the first papers in new areas of investigation, such as service design and mapping (Shostack 1984) and service encounter (Czepiel, Solomon, and Surprenant 1985), which flourished in the next period.

The Walking Erect stage (1986–1993), scholars achieved a respected stance as service marketing became an established field within the marketing discipline (Fisk, Brown, and Bitner 1993). The publications on many of the primary topics matured considerably. These topics
include managing quality given the heterogeneity of the service experience, designing and controlling intangible processes, managing supply and demand in capacity-constrained services, and organizational issues resulting from the overlap in marketing and operations functions (Fisk, Brown, and Bitner 1993; Swartz, Bowen, and Brown 1992).

Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993), documented the founding, emergence, and legitimization of the service marketing literature. They also asked: “What will the literature of the future be like?” and tried to answer this question based on documentation of the past and their positions as active researchers and participants in the field. In their speculations about the future of service marketing research, they predicted a broadening, deepening, and sharpening of the field and identified key research topics for the future. These topics were: service design and delivery, service encounters and service experience, service quality and customer satisfaction, as well as service recovery, reverse marketing, internal marketing, and support services, modeling and measurement, and technology infusion. More recently, Fisk, Brown, and John (2000; Brown, Fisk, and John 2003) asked ten service experts: “What directions would you like to see the services marketing field take in the future?” Their observations could be organized under three broad headings: the nature of services, the scope of services, and services and value creation.

Based on the content analysis of the papers published between 1993 and 2003 in key journals, we want to evaluate Fisk, Brown, and Bitner’s (1993) predictions and we also want to estimate the likelihood of the service marketing field going in the direction wished by the expert interviewed by Brown, Fisk, and John (2003).

METHOD

To examine the content of the service marketing literature, trace its evolution, and identify main streams of research, we first performed a content analysis of the papers published in the top journals for service marketing research over the period 1993–2003. A content analysis provides a means for the objective, systematic, and quantitative consideration of published articles.

Journals and Papers Selection

Over the past eleven years, the number of articles on service marketing topics has exploded. Consequently, it was impossible for us to include all the papers published since 1993 in this study, we, therefore, decided to limit our investigation to the papers published in top service journals and the top general marketing journals. Three top service-oriented journals were selected: the Journal of Services Marketing (JSM), the Journal of Service Research (JSR), and the International Journal of Service Industry Management (IJSIM). Using Hult and Neese’s (1997) ranking to identify the leading general marketing journals, we selected: the Journal of Marketing (JM), the Journal of Marketing Research (JMR), the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR), the Journal of Retailing (JR), the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS), and Marketing Science (MS). To this list, we added the International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJIRM) because of its international perspective.

The next step was to select the articles to be analyzed. For our analysis, we selected all research articles published in the service-oriented journals (JSM, JSR, and IJSIM). For the general marketing journals, we only retain articles on service marketing topics. Using the search engine of the ABI/Informs database, we preselected the articles including the keywords “service” or “services” in their titles, abstracts, or keywords. From this preselection, we excluded the articles, which content was not specifically on service marketing. We also chose to focus on those articles that were primarily involved with research issues. Therefore, the next step was to ensure that all the articles preselected had a research focus. This resulted in the elimination of articles written by editors and introductions to special issues. This process resulted in the selection of a total of 805 articles.

Keywords Selection

In order to code and analyze the content of the selected articles, we built a list of major themes or categories of keywords. The creation of such a list was made necessary by the large number of keywords issued by authors and found in the ABI/Informs database. To identify these major themes, we started with the list of key research topics developed by Swartz, Bowen, and Brown (1992) and Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993). We first allocated the keywords issued by authors and the ABI/Informs database into these major categories. Every time a keyword could not be allocated into one of these initial categories, a new one was created. This resulted in a list of more than 30 major themes. This list was then reviewed by independent service experts. After several rounds of discussion with these independent service experts, a final list of 27 major themes was obtained.

These 27 major themes are: (1) after-sale/customer service, (2) business-to-business services, (3) consumer behaviors, (4) service encounters, (5) e-service/technology, (6) typology of services, (7) innovation, new service development, (8) internationalization and export, (9) methodology and measurement, (10) operations and service design, (11) performance, (12) pricing and yield management, (13) service quality, (14) service failure and recovery, (15) relationship marketing and customer retention, (16) customer satisfaction, (17) strategy, (18)
servicescape and tangible cues, (19) communication/promotion/advertising, (20) service offering, (21) ethics, (22) internal marketing and service employee management, (23) competition, (24) non-profit and public services, (25) service distribution/delivery, (26) service usage/purchase, (27) environmental context.

Coding Procedure

Previous studies of journal content have generally classified articles in only one primary category (e.g., Inkpen and Beamish 1994). But, as noted by Inkpen and Beamish (1994) using only one category fails to acknowledge the cross-functional and interdisciplinary nature of an academic field such as service marketing; consequently, following the methodology used by Furrer, Schendel, and Thomas (2002), we decided to allocate articles across one or more keywords.

Each article was examined by two judges who reviewed all the 805 articles. To assure that each article was properly allocated, a two-step procedure was followed. First, the articles were allocated independently by both judges into the keywords based on a detailed examination of the abstracts. Second, the two judges solved their disagreements through discussion. If disagreement persisted between the judges, a detailed examination of the full-text of the article was made. The reliability of the coding procedure was assessed using Perreault and Leigh's (1989) index. We obtained an index of .91, which is very satisfactory. For each of the 27 keywords, we coded a dichotomous variable: 1 if the paper was allocated into the keyword and 0 otherwise.

Among the 805 articles, 93 (11.5%) were allocated into only 1 keyword, 274 (34.0%) into two, 281 (34.9%) into three, 113 (14.0%) into four, 35 (4.4%) into five, 7 (0.9%) into six, and 2 (0.1%) into seven. The overall mean is 2.7 keywords per article.

Service quality is the most frequent keyword with 231 papers. It is not surprising as service quality was already identified by Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993) as the single most researched area in service marketing in the previous period. Most of the work on service quality is still based on the pioneering articles by A. Parasuraman, Leonard Berry, and Valarie Zeithaml published in the 1980s. Service quality is followed by consumer behaviors (203) and customer satisfaction (195). These two themes are both closely related to service quality. The structural relationships between these three concepts have been the focus of several important papers during the 1990s. The next most important themes are performance (152) and strategy (123). These two related themes have emerged as important topics in the mid 1990. Research on service performance and profitability has strongly been influenced by the work of Roland Rust on return on quality (e.g., Rust, Zahorik, and Keiningham 1995). The next important keywords are Relationship marketing and customer retention (109) and Employees (102). These themes were already identified as important by Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993), but only take off after 1995.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

To analyze the content of the articles, we first computed a cluster analysis to identify the keywords which “hang together,” and conversely, to determine where the gaps and clear break points were. Second, we computed a multiple correspondence analysis to complement the cluster analysis and obtain a richer representation of the relationships between keywords. Third, we studied the evolution over time of the relationships between keywords. This analysis gives us the idea of future directions in service marketing research. Finally, we studied the authors who have the most published during our period of study.

Connections Among Keywords

To study the connections among keywords, we ran a cluster analysis of the matrix of proximities between keywords. We focus our analysis on six clusters that are interpretable and substantively coherent and two isolated keywords. The first cluster consists of keywords concerned with service quality and customer satisfaction. It contains the following keywords: service quality, customer satisfaction, service employees, after-sales and customer services, consumer behaviors and behavioral intentions, service failure and recovery, service encounter, distribution, methodology. This cluster regroups topics studied from the customer perspective at the encounter level. Keywords in the second cluster are concerned with the strategic aspects of service marketing – strategy, competition, performance, international, innovation, operations. The third cluster consists of keywords concerned with relationship marketing and customer retention. It contains the following keywords: relationship marketing, B2B, and environment. Research in this cluster focuses on the long-term relationships and interactions between customers and their service providers. Keywords in the fourth cluster are concerned with technology and value – technology/e-service, usage/purchase, price/value. This cluster regroups research on the impact of technology in service marketing. The role of the Internet and the emergence of e-services are important topics within the cluster. The fifth cluster includes keywords that focus on communication and advertising – communication/promotion, tangible. This cluster regroups the relatively few studies on advertising and communication in service industries. The sixth cluster is concerned with the service offering and contains such keywords as: service offering and service typology. Research in this cluster focuses on the characteristics of services. Two keywords are isolated:
ethics and non-profit services. Even if these two themes have recently emerged as important research topics, they only regroup few studies and have not yet found their positions within the service marketing literature.

A richer representation of the relationships between keywords may be obtained using a multiple correspondence analysis. Multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) provides a more detailed and systematic representation of the distances among keywords than a simple cluster analysis. The results of the MCA are graphically presented in Figure 1. The size of the point for each of the keywords is proportional to its weight (i.e., the number of articles regrouped within the keyword). Proximity between keywords corresponds to shared substance.

The first, horizontal, dimension of the map represented in Figure 1 separates keywords emphasizing the management-side of service marketing (on the right hand-side) from those concerned with the customer-side of service marketing (on the left hand-side). The second, vertical dimension separates keywords, which are at a higher, more strategic level (at the top) from those focusing on a lower, more operational level (at the bottom). In short, the dimensions of the map reflect characteristic “poles” of topical orientation within the service marketing literature.

Evolution Over Time

To obtain a dynamic view of the evolution of the service marketing literature and to be able to speculate about its future developments, we divided the eleven years of the publication into two equal periods. The first period runs from 1993 to 1998 and the second one from 1999 to 2003. Based on a simple count of the number of papers published per period and per keyword, we can identify trends in service marketing research. The results show that the number of papers published on consumer behaviors, e-service/technology, internationalization and export, service failure and recovery, relationships marketing and customer retention, customer satisfaction, ethics, service usage/purchase, and environmental context is increasing, when the number papers published on operations and service design, service quality, internal marketing and service employee management, competition, and service distribution/delivery is decreasing. These trends show an increased interest for a customer-focused approach to service marketing opposed to a managerial approach.

For each of the two periods, the position of each keyword in the perceptual map was computed. The results permitted to evaluate the direction of the evolution of the interrelationships among the keywords. This evolution is presented in Figure 2, in which arrows represent the direction of evolution. Diamonds correspond to the position of the keyword during the first period (1993–1998) and the squares correspond to their position during the second period (1999–2003).

Figure 2 shows that most keywords evolve toward the upper left corner of the map, which is toward more strategic customer-side research. This evolution denotes a
movement of the service marketing literature departing from an encounter level of analysis toward a more strategic perspective and from a management-side toward a more customer-side approach. This movement is consistent with the changes in the number of papers published for each keyword. Few keywords are moving in a different direction. For example, customer service, operations, and tangible are moving toward the management-side of the map, and innovation is moving up toward a more strategic approach.

Contributing Authors

In their study of the evolution of the service marketing literature from 1953 to 1993, Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993) identified the 56 most prolific service marketing authors. It is interesting to compare this list with the list of the most prolific authors from 1993 to 2003. A representation of the positions of these authors on a perceptual map may also be compared to the position of the keywords presented in Figure 1. This analysis gives us some clues to interpret the contribution of the most frequently published authors to the different subfields of service marketing.

The 805 articles published in the selected journals have been written by 1048 different authors. Among these authors 1 (0.1%) published 15 articles, 1 (0.1%) published 11 articles, 2 (0.2%) published 10 articles, 4 (0.4%) published 9 articles, 3 (0.3%) published 8, 5 (0.5%) published 7, 8 (0.8%) published 6, 11 (1.0%) published 5, 26 (2.5%) published 4, 48 (4.6%) published 3, 181 (17.3%) published 2, and 758 (75.1%) published only one article.

Authors can be ranked on the total number of appearances or on adjusted appearances. We based our ranking on the adjusted appearances rather than the total appearances used by Fisk, Brown, and Bitner (1993), because it is the most frequently used (e.g., Furrer, Schendel, and Thomas 2002). The adjustment method is similar to the one used by Morrison and Inkpen (1991), Inkpen and Beamish (1994), and Furrer, Schendel, and Thomas (2002). The number of adjusted appearances reflects multiple authored articles. If an article was published by two authors, each received one-half of a credit; in the case of three authors, one third of a credit; and so on. one hundred ninety-four (24.1%) papers are single authored, 353 (43.9%) have 2 authors, 214 (26.6%) have 3 authors, 33 (4.1%) have 4 authors, 9 (1.1%) have 5 authors, 1 (0.1%) has 6 authors, and 1 (0.1%) has 7 authors.

The most prolific authors were Anna Mattila, with 7.83 adjusted appearances and 10 total appearances, Peter Danaher, with 5.67 adjusted appearances and 9 total appearances, Jochen Wirtz, with 5.50 adjusted appearances and 11 total appearances, Ko de Ruyter, with 5.20 adjusted appearances and 15 total appearances, Robert Johnston, with 5.20 adjusted appearances and 7 total appearances, and Leonard Berry, with 5.16 adjusted appearances and 10 total appearances.

Among the 56 most prolific authors during the 1953 to 1993 period, eleven are still in the top list during the next period of 1993–2003, they are: Leonard Berry, Valerie Zeithaml, Mary Jo Bitner, Stephen Brown, Christian Grönnroos, A. Parasuraman, Evert Gummesson,
Raymond Fisk, Benjamin Schneider, Stephen Grove, and David Bowen. This denotes a certain stability of the field. In the last decade, the growing authors are Anna Mattila, Peter Danaher, Jochen Wirtz, Ko de Ruyter, Paul Patterson, Roland Rust, and Martin Wetzels.

These most prolific authors were also represented on a map. An author’s position of is represented as the average position of its published articles. Figure 3 represents this map. The comparison of the map of Figure 3 with the map of Figure 1 shows the topics that are the center of interest of the authors.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the past eleven years of research in service marketing adopted a past-present orientation. To the extent that these papers reflect the evolution of the service marketing field as a whole, the trends we have observed raise an important question about future of the service marketing fields: “Is the field likely to further concentrate toward a dominant paradigm or to fragment itself into a myriad of subfields?” The results of our analysis show that most of the keywords are moving in the same direction, which is not the center of the map. This move is therefore neither supporting the fragmentation hypothesis, nor the concentration hypothesis. This trend in one dominant direction may mean that the service marketing literature has not yet reach its maturity and is still evolving. Further research is however needed to support this interpretation of our results.

One of the limitations of our study is the necessary limit in the number of selected journals. We only selected 10 of the top journals for service marketing research, but many other outlets also publish service marketing research papers. Conferences proceedings, books, and dissertations are also important sources of service marketing research. The actual profusion of service marketing make virtually impossible to include all publications in the type of analysis we used. We are, however, confident that our selection of the top journals makes our results valid and reliable. Due to space constraint, we also limited the number analyses we ran. The positioning of the different journals as well as the most influential papers in the map issued from the MCA could provide some interesting and insightful results. We should reserve these analyses for a full-length paper.
REFERENCES


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