

Sustainable Innovation and Service Quality: An Integrated Overview

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Abstract: Sustainability is today a main concern of society. One way of addressing the problem and the need for sustainability is through innovation in products and services that are geared towards the satisfaction of specific needs of organizations, institutions or costumers related to a demand for products, services or product-services that are friendlier to the environment. Sustainable innovation is thus seen as a way of meeting the expectations of consumers and organizations regarding the delivery of green products or services. Stated in this way, there are two concepts that emerge as fundamental to the study of sustainability: the concept of sustainable innovation and the concept of service quality. The research questions that motivate this research are: what is the relationship between sustainable innovation and service quality? Are the expectations of consumers or organizations being met by the supply of green products and services? What are the implications in terms of changes that organizations or consumers must make? Having in mind these questions, the aim of this document is to explore the relationship between sustainable innovation and service quality in the scientific literature, identifying the factors and interactions that are suggested by it. The research methodology used to achieve that objective was based on a literature review, made with a qualitative approach. A four-point scale was developed to assess, in each article, the level of relation between the two concepts. The scale ranges from high to null relation between the two concepts. Most of the articles propose a positive relation between the two concepts, whereby 58% of the articles reviewed have the category of "high relation", and 31% were categorized as having a "medium relation". The implications for organizations may be the incorporation within their organizational culture of a strategy of integration of sustainable innovation and service quality through a mechanism called social and environmental responsibility.

Keywords: Sustainability, sustainable innovation, service quality, review

1. Introduction

Service quality and sustainable innovation are becoming key variables influencing decision-making by customers. On the one hand, innovation represents a mechanism which tries to create alternative ways to, simultaneously, provide sustainable goods and services, satisfy market needs and generate wealth (Kubičková, Benešová and Breveníková, 2016). On the other hand, service quality evaluates the satisfaction of consumers through the analysis of the gap between expectations and perceptions (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985). Organizations weight the importance of each dimension and adopt mechanisms to improve their competitive advantage (Kivisaari *et al.*, 2013; Mishra, 2017; De Luca *et al.*, 2018) and to satisfy all the stakeholders that have requirements that change due to different factors, many of them related to service and to sustainability (Swann, 2009).

During the last two decades some countries have defined policies and incorporated strategies to care for the environment, growth and economic and social development of nations. However, the incorporation of innovation strategies depends on some factors that are interrelated. Innovation of goods and services will depend on the type of consumers (Linåker *et al.*, 2018). For example according to Sousa-Zomer and Cauchick Miguel (2018) the solution for a sustainable product-service system may be a new sustainable technology, a new model or a new form of governance. Enterprises have also followed strategies that involve sustainable innovation because of the value that is perceived by costumers and which is motivated by social and ecological returns that such innovations generate (Dyck and Silvestre, 2018). Organizations are confronted with social and environmental responsibility, which depend on the policy structure of each country. There are several policy and economic pressures to introduce new ways to produce goods and services and to force the implementation of new paradigms of production. For instance, the European Union is actively seeking to implement practices of the so-called circular economy, as expressed in the following sentence: "[...]the proposed actions will contribute to "closing the loop" of product lifecycles through greater recycling and re-use, and bring benefits for both the environment and the economy with the application of the circular economy strategy in the European Union" (European Commision-EU, 2018). It represents an important concept and an opportunity from which organizations, and consumers, can benefit (Cordón Lagares, García Ordaz and del Hoyo, 2018; de Jesus and Mendonça, 2018) .