Customer complaints encountered in the online food retail during the COVID-19 intermittent curfew period

COVİD-19 aralıklı sokağa çıkma yasağı döneminde çevrimiçi gıda perakende sektöründe karşılaşılan müşteri şikayetleri

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Abstract

Almost everything has changed fundamentally with the coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic. The pandemic has adversely affected the retail industry and the global economy. After detecting COVID-19, customers' shopping preferences have moved to popular platforms like online shopping websites. Meanwhile, due to inadequate distribution structures and decentralized supply chain networks of businesses, customers have experienced many failures in service encounters. This study employed a document review method to analyse customer complaints covering common logistic service failures in the food sector during the three months (March, April and May 2020) intermittent curfew period. In addition, using content analysis, "şikayetvar.com" complaints were classified according to the service quality gap model. Since disruptions in the food industry are critical with their stimulating effects on supply chains, this industry has been analysed in detail. In terms of practical contribution, the study introduces an insight to enhance the customer service capabilities of private shopping sites. Furthermore, the theoretical background of the study reveals the service quality dimensions prioritized by customers in the pandemic environment and their critical role in service quality gaps.

Keywords: Service Quality, E-Retailing, Complaints, COVID-19

Jel Codes: R40, L81, D10

Öz

Koronavirüs salgınıyla birlikte neredeyse her şey kökten değişmiştir. COVİD-19 pandemisi küresel ekonominin yanı sıra perakende sektörünü de olumsuz etkilemiştir. COVİD-19 tespit edildikten sonra müşterilerin alışveriş tercihleri popüler bir platform haline gelen online alışveriş sitelerine kaymıştır. Bu süreçte, firmaların yetersiz dağıtım yapısı ve tedarik zinciri ağı nedeniyle, müşteriler hizmet alımlarında birçok hizmet hatası deneyimlemiştir. Bu çalışmada, Mart, Nisan ve Mayıs (2020) aylarını kapsayan üç aylık aralıklı sokağa çıkma yasağı döneminde çevrimiçi gıda sektöründe yaygın olarak görülen ve lojistik hizmet hatalarını kapsayan müşteri şikayetleri, döküman inceleme yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca içerik analizi kullanılarak "şikayetvar.com" şikayetleri hizmet kalitesi boşluk modeli kategorilerine ayrılmıştır. Gıda endüstrisindeki aksaklıklar, tedarik zinciri üzerindeki hayati etkileri ile kritik öneme sahip olduğundan, bu sektör yakından incelenmiştir. Yönetsel katkı açısından çalışma, özel alışveriş sitelerinin müşteri hizmetleri yeteneklerini geliştirmeye yönelik bir bakış açısı geliştirmektedir. Çalışmanın teorik arka planı, müşterilerin önceliklendirdiği hizmet kalitesi boyutlarına ve bunların pandemi ortamında hizmet kalitesi boşluklarındaki kritik rolüne açıklık getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hizmet Kalitesi, E-Perakendecilik, Şikayetler, COVİD-19

JEL Kodları: R40, L81, D10

Introduction

Advances in technology and the spread of the Internet have made change inevitable in the retail sector and many others. Compared to brick-and-mortar, the internet has emerged as an alternative and safe shopping experience and environment for store owners to continue their business during the coronavirus pandemic. Through the effective use of the internet, retail companies have had the opportunity to maintain retail activities by providing interaction, information density, diversity, and global influence (Levy, Weitz, Grewal & Madore, 2004). Rather than competing with traditional retailers, electronic retailing (e-retailing) has taken advantage of efficient technologies by using brand new applications which offer a range of different experiences to retailers (Kalakota and Whinston, 1997). Apart from affecting and changing all aspects of the marketing mix (Webb, 2002), e-retailing has enabled businesses to gain momentum with the speed performance and the ability to respond to the changing demands and needs of their customers in a short time by offering different product promotions, new sales channels, direct savings, decreased cycle time and enhanced customer service (Gunasekaran, Marri, McGaughey & Nebhwani, 2002).

Their needs, activities, and behaviours have changed significantly during the pandemic from consumer dynamics. Consumers have switched to online shopping in this period due to the increased length of staying at home, limited shopping hours, and restrictions on some products. Regarding their buying decisions, consumers began to prefer companies or brands that located their marketing activities in a different digital environment than traditional marketing tasks (Ahmed, Streimikiene, Berchtold, Vveinhardt, Channar & Soomro, 2019). Furthermore, research shows that customers' purchasing behaviour has shifted from fashion-oriented purchases to purchases based on daily needs in this critical period (Nielsen, 2020).

Looking at Turkey in particular, it is seen that the number of orders in e-commerce increased by 68 per cent compared to 2019, from 1 billion 366 million to 2 billion 297 million, and the number of businesses dealing with e-commerce reached 256 thousand 861 in 2020; this number was around 68 thousand in 2019 (eticaret.gov.tr). The sectoral change, market, and health products necessary for living were the product groups that showed the highest increase in e-commerce during the pandemic process (Muradoğlu, 2020). Cosmetics and books/stationery appeared as other product groups that consumers preferred to shop online during the epidemic period. In this process, various companies in Turkey with the concept of "private shopping" started to sell different types of food by promoting the "market" category on private shopping sites, and they have experienced a boom of orders, especially for essential products. However, although these companies have improved their e-customer service capabilities, there has been an explosion of complaints during this period. Most of them have encountered serious ordering, inventory, return and communication problems, which can also be seen in other e-commerce practices (Eken and Gezmen, 2020).

The purpose of the study is to explore the problems faced by companies operating in online food retail, as this industry meets the most basic daily needs of customers during the epidemic. Within this framework, we attempted to investigate the service quality dimensions of online food service, which played a crucial role in influencing customer service evaluation in the COVID-19 process. Additionally, we aimed at examining which of these service quality dimensions are emphasized more in the service quality gap model to make recommendations for marketing managers. By spotlighting the gaps related to knowledge, standards, delivery, communication, and perception (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011), we better understand leading gap dimensions in service quality towards shopping over private shopping sites. For the research, the data are drawn through the document review method from the "şikayetvar.com" website, which functions as a complaint forum and includes the comments of customers regarding the services of significant privates shopping sites like hepsiburada.com, gittigidiyor.com, morhipo.com, trendyol.com etc. This complaint site was selected because it has a relatively long history of complaints and has a well-structured organization to address our focus. The consumer complaints from selected private shopping sites were analyzed through a qualitative content analysis method based on the methodology suggested by Corbin and Strauss (1998). As a result, 600 complaints from three major private shopping sites were analyzed and evaluated in this context.

The study starts with a brief overview of e-retailing, e-service quality dimensions, gap model of service quality and the concept of customer satisfaction literature to shed light on our research topic and continues with the methodology section. In the sequel, empirical results are presented supported by the theoretical framework with a discussion at the end.

Literature review

E-retailing

The curfew in many countries has caused the COVID-19 outbreak to change consumer behaviour significantly and reshape the retail industry. Although the stores operating in the physical environment have been affected negatively by the pandemic because of the severe measures implemented and the preferences of the customers, retailers operating online continue to gain customers by increasing their sales.

In such an internet age, online selling websites have found their techniques and traditional marketing, and they have been progressing in this direction. Some of these techniques are sending e-newsletter to the customer e-mail addresses and following customers activities through social media analytics, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc. Besides, as these sites offer branded products in different categories with high discount rates (up to 90%) and provide easy returns, they are highly favoured by customers (Baruönu, 2014).

The studies have focused on the changes in e-commerce and consumers' consumption habits, preferences, and motivations during the COVID-19 process. In this regard, as Nielsen Research Company (2020) points out, keeping consumers at home during the pandemic has dramatically reduced their social networks and activities, leading them to follow daily routines that only meet their basic needs. Health-related issues (seeing doctors, buying medicine etc.), purchasing food or banking activities are the primary motives for consumers to go out from home. In this process, sports/physical activities or meeting friends/relatives are at the minimum level, as stated by Stanciu, Radu, Sapira, Bratoveanu & Florea (2020). It has also been observed some differences in consumers' purchasing preferences after the COVID-19 compared to before. In this process, their spending is concentrated more on medical supplies like hand sanitiser, soap, medical masks, sterile gloves etc. (Günyol, 2020). Besides, new consumer behaviour trends have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, making the situation more critical for companies to anticipate responding to customers' needs in specific segments (EY Future Consumer Index, 2020).

Retailers who want to keep up with the behavioural changes of customers and serve them more effectively than before have worked intensively to optimize their logistics services. As a result, a raft of logistical activities associated with value-creation practices have been accepted as contributors to e-retail strategies in such a digital business environment. In that respect, it is thought that the logistics value reflects the unspoken socio-cultural aspect of the e-retail services (Suhartanto, Helmi Ali, Tan, Sjahroeddin & Kusdibyo, 2019).

In the scope of private online shopping websites, the research attempts to reveal the dimensions of logistics service quality concerned most by the customers while buying food online during the COVID-19 process. The study also identifies the critical service gaps faced by companies operating in the food industry.

E-service quality dimensions

As Cox and Dale (2001) pointed out, the standard dimensions of service quality, such as competence, accessibility, courtesy, cleanliness, comfort, and friendliness, are not sufficient to define e-retailing service quality. In this regard, Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Malhotra (2000) introduced efficiency, assurance/trust, site aesthetics, flexibility, responsiveness, and price knowledge dimensions to this concept. After that, Yang and Jun (2002) added security dimensions, personalization, and ease of use to the previous ones. Furthermore, drawing upon e-service quality developed by Madu and Madu (2002), other factors like web store policies, system integrity, product/service differentiation, empathy, storage capacity, and serviceability play a crucial role in evaluating service quality.

Considering the services offered by the private shopping sites, the distribution of food products is one of the most challenging areas as it has an expiration date and deteriorates rapidly. Therefore, some

logistics services are becoming more critical day by day and must be perfectly managed to provide a good quality of service (Li, Hallsworth & Coca-Stefaniak, 2020). For example, the processing of meat, fish or dairy products requires clear service standards regarding storage, packaging and transportation processes. Herein, quality and hygiene standards must be provided continuously from manufacturers to end consumers for reliable service (Edith and Ochubiojo, 2012; Brandtner, Darbanian, Falatouri & Udokwu, 2021; Yang, Kim, Min & Hernandez-Calderon, 2021). Moreover, all processes must be followed regularly to ensure food safety and improve customer satisfaction (Meixner and Katt, 2020). Similarly, an extensive service network is of great importance in providing customers with convenient access and responsive services (Hobbs, 2020; Yang et al., 2021).

The credibility of timely delivery is another dimension of quality and is vital for suppliers to achieve (Thirumalai and Sinha 2005; Better, 2020; Yang et al., 2021). Moreover, considering the current pandemic situation, where transportation times reach at least three weeks, and it is challenging to keep time-based promises, it appears as a determinant of competitive advantage for competitors just a click away by influencing shopping practices, retailer loyalty, consumption, channel trust, and repeat purchases (De Kervenoael, Schwob & Chandra, 2020).

Additionally, the quality of websites, including ease of navigation, aesthetics design and processing speed, is crucial for the retailers offering online food delivery services to promote their products and services. Herein, maintaining the quality of the website is essential to retain customers, persuade them to revisit the web, and ultimately ensure their loyalty (Jeon and Jeong, 2017; Unnikrishnan and Figliozzi, 2021). Shopping websites are expected to comprise four dimensions: system availability, efficiency, privacy, and fulfilment (Suhartanto et al., 2019).

Along with consumers' needs and consumption habits, the consumer experiences and assessments regarding logistics services change rapidly depending on the situation during the epidemic. Therefore, in line with the empathy and understanding of the customer, updating the level of customer services following the customer voice and complaints take place as the other quality factors (Chua, Othman, Boo, Abkarim, & Ramachandran, 2010; Yang et al., 2021).

Service quality gap model

From a managerial perspective, identifying gaps in customers' evaluations and devising strategies to close those gaps are always beneficial starting points for the companies. This study employed the gap model classifying service quality gaps of private shopping sites. In this gap model, negative assessments of customers are accepted as worrying indications for organizations as they might mean that these customers will leave if the necessary actions are not taken. In this sense, improving customers' retention by providing optimal service quality is essential for service organizations desiring to gain an edge over their competitors.

As the importance of service quality increased, it has brought about the conceptualization of structures and their determinants. In this context, among different models introduced by Sasser, Olsen & Wyckoff (1978), Grönroos (1982), Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982); and Lewis and Booms (1983), Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Lovelock and Wirtz (2011); we applied "Parasuramans' model" which focuses on service delivery process and addresses differences that arise both within the company and between the company and the customer.

The service quality gap model proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) has been tested and criticized by many other authors. For example, Carman (1990) noted that further iteration and testing of SERVQUAL dimensions are needed before accepting it as a valid measure for service quality in retail or service context. Herein, some measurements were found as nongeneric The major shortcoming of the SERVQUAL procedure was the handling of expectations, which is a crucial factor for any service marketer. Later, this study received additional support from Babakus and Boller (1992), stating that SERVQUAL has several methodological problems associated with the wording of the items and defining a construct based on difference scores. In addition, the study aimed at conceptualizing and measuring service quality proposed by Cronin Jr and Taylor (1992) investigated the relationships between service quality, consumer satisfaction, and purchase intentions. They revealed that service quality measurement was based on a flawed paradigm, and scale items in one industry may differ. Also, Teas (1993, 1994) asserted alternative models to Parasuraman et al. (1985) for perceived service quality

and stated that the evaluated performance model could cause some problems for consumer gaps in service quality. Finally, Asubonteng, McCleary & Swan (1996) made a critical review of Parasuraman's model by uncovering the dimensions' reliability, validity, and interrelationships.

Based on the service quality model of Parasuraman et al. (1985), four main gap categories could lead to the fifth and most important gap. The four main categories include the expectation of customer and perception of management (Gap 1), perception of control and specification of service quality (Gap 2), specification of service quality and delivery of service (Gap 3), delivery of service and external communications (Gap 4). Finally, the fifth and most serious gap is between the expected and perceived usefulness (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

The knowledge gap (Gap 1) occurs due to the lack of competence of management to understand their customers. This is considered the first and foremost gap, and it is very helpful in improving logistics service operations if implemented effectively (Huang, Tseng & Hsu, 2016).

The gaps (Gap 2) occur when customer service standards are not adequately enforced and when the right services processes are not established to pursue quality in logistics services.

The delivery gap (Gap 3) represents the differences between promised and the actual performance of the service delivery, and it happens when supply and demand are not aligned with the customer requirements.

The communication gap (Gap 4) highlights the differences between the service guaranteed to customers by advertisements and the service received. The most well-known reasons for this gap are excessive promises given by the websites or miscommunication between companies' departments.

The customer gap (Gap 5) emphasizes the difference between what is delivered to the customer and what the customers perceive. This gap is strongly influenced by the series of gaps mentioned above occurring on the retailers'' side.

The concept of customer satisfaction

The confirmation/disconfirmation theory

As Expectation Disconfirmation Theory denotes, individuals expect a specific level of service when engaged in a purchase transaction (Oliver, 1977). After they benefit from the actual service, they develop perceptions of service performance. Here, when pre-purchase and post-purchase expectations are compared, the degree of positive or negative disapproval improves, significantly affecting overall satisfaction. Positive disconfirmation eventuates when service performance outperforms initial expectations (higher satisfaction) within this context. On the other hand, negative disconfirmation occurs when service performance is behind what was initially expected (lower satisfaction). As Oliver (1977) stated, complaint behaviour expresses dissatisfaction caused by negative disconfirming purchase expectations.

In this study, as we attempt to create a deeper understanding of customer complaint behaviour, we ground on negative disconfirmation of customers' expectations by applying the Service Quality Gap Model.

Exit, voice and loyalty theory

Customers having unfavourable service experiences can become highly active in their complaining behaviour. Hirschman's (1970) theory of exit, voice and loyalty is one of the first to conceptualize customer complaint responses by stating that if the individual terminates their relationship with the system, there will be an exit. If they express dissatisfaction with any authority, there will be a voice. Loyalty is defined as the expectation that someone will improve issues and maintain a commitment to any organization (Haenlein and Kaplan, 2012). The individual's exit and voice response are affected by their loyalty to the system.

In this paper, we assumed that if the customers experience any gap in the service quality, they respond with the reactions of "voice". The primary purposes of such communication with the company are to adjust to service delivery, attract attention, or receive an apology or some form of compensation (Tronvoll, 2007). At this point, the communication may take the form of informal feedback or a more formal complaint, as in our research.

Methodology

This study aimed to examine and interpret the complaints on "sikayetvar.com" during the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic. We specifically chose the first three months of the pandemic as this was a period when intermittent curfew and stringent measures were applied in Turkey. Since shopping can only be done at certain hours in this process, shopping venues became crowded. Those who do not want to go to the market due to the danger of the virus preferred major online platforms with "supermarket" options for their basic needs. As these online platforms remain open and function uninterrupted, we examined the structure of customer complaints on these platforms from "sikayetvar.com" during this period. This leading word of mouth marketing website, founded in 2001, currently has 5.801.002 individuals and 2400 corporate members following these customer complaints in Turkey (sikayetvar.com, 2020). The website is Turkey's most popular online consumer complaint platform (Gürce and Tosun, 2017), allowing consumers to post complaints publicly. Therefore, it is preferred in research because of its relatively easy access to data (Yilmaz, Varnali & Kasnakoglu, 2016). Here, individuals can express their complaints without being under pressure, thus enabling more reliable results in research. Furthermore, one week after the complaint is posted on the website, the person who wrote the complaint is asked to rate the firm's effort to resolve the complaint and score their intention to repurchase from the same brand in the future (Kasnakoglu, Yilmaz & Varnali, 2016). In this respect, this complaint site is a reference source for potential customers.

The study is designed qualitatively, and the document review method was used as a data collection method. Document review is defined as the collection, analysis and synthesis of written and visual material containing information about the facts and cases to be researched (Bowen, 2009). Documents can be obtained electronically via computer and internet, such as web pages, newsgroups, e-mail, blogs, and personal comments. In this research, the data were collected using 600 user complaints on the şikayetvar.com website within three months- intermittent curfew period (March, April, and May 2020). The research selected complaints from three leading private shopping sites with supermarket categories inside like Trendyol, Hepsiburada and Morhipo. These platforms have carried out activities to gain a share from the online market or increase their existing shares through different collaborations and innovative applications. For instance, Trendyol, one of the largest online retailers in Turkey, has started to sell food and fast-moving consumer goods online with the Trendyol market. In addition, it activated the 'Fast Market' feature to enable its customers to do grocery shopping. During this period, Morhipo also started to provide online food shopping services with Morhipo Market in cooperation with Istegelsin.

Similarly, Hepsiburada has implemented the Hepsiexpress service in collaboration with CarrefourSa to accelerate the market category. Serving only in Istanbul initially, the service has been put into service in seventeen cities quickly. Moreover, it delivers on the same day or by appointment four days later.

The content analysis method is used to conceptualize and organize the data obtained in qualitative research and to determine the themes explaining the data (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). In this direction, as one of the in-depth analysis techniques, the content analysis method was used to analyze data by three coding techniques: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1998).

The credibility of the results is one of the most critical criteria of scientific research, which is ensured by validity and reliability criteria. In qualitative research, validity is provided by consistency. In this context, character means that the data under the themes form a meaningful whole and that all these themes can explain the data obtained in the research in a meaningful way (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). Accordingly, this research shows consistency since there is no data other than the themes determined in the study and the data obtained are represented effectively. Within the scope of reliability, the operations carried out during the research process were gradually recorded in the excel file with details. The raw data, coding and analysis of the results obtained during the process were preserved. Within this context, code cross-checking is used to provide reliable investigation as humans tend to make errors in judgment (Franklin and Jordan, 1997). During the data analysis phase, the researchers obtained the findings regarding themes and coded them independently from each other. Then the created themes and categories were compared with each other.

Customers' expectations for quality have risen recently, and they have become more critical of the quality of the services they experience. For this reason, it is essential to understand the service quality

dimensions of customers and their impact on increasing/reducing service quality gaps. Parasuraman et al. (1985) stated that service quality gaps could be detected by looking at differences (gaps) between customer expectations and performances along service quality dimensions. Based on this theoretical model, we will touch on the service quality dimensions that have increased in importance with the COVID-19 pandemic and the service gaps caused by these dimensions in the service delivery process. Within this context, the study's outcomes will detect service quality gaps that can direct private shopping sites to improve their logistics service capabilities. Besides, it will guide us on which service quality dimensions to focus on to create a customer-centred business strategy. Within this scope, some of the created categories for service quality gaps and related service quality dimensions are shown in the table below to serve as an example of how the codes are generated (Table 1).

Table 1: Some examples from the Coding Process of the Findings

Private Shopping Site	Generation of Service Quality Gaps			Service Quality Dimensions
	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding	
Trendyol (Trendyol market)	*"What I see in the advertisement of the product is not the same as what I get. The actual operations and advertisements of the firm are not the same."*	Overpromising during the sales process	Communication Gap	Reliability
Trendyol (Trendyol market)	*"I would not expect this move from such a famous and corporate company. However, while expecting a much higher service quality, I came across a standard service. I will talk about this situation to all my acquaintances."*	Overestimating the quality of the services	Customer Gap	Credibility
Morhipo (Istegelsin)	*"I have not seen such a disgrace; the cargo company does not know where the product is. Although I have been calling customer service every month, they could not find the cargo. On top of that, they don't accept their mistakes and offer a refund option."*	Lack of quick action towards improving the accuracy of service performance	Delivery Gap	Responsiveness
Hepsiburada (Hepsi express)	*"I talked to this private shopping site, and they couldn't find any solution other than returning the product. It is okay if we are normal, but I am pregnant and cannot go to the cargo branch where everyone goes. The cargo company does not come to the house and pick up the product. I request them to come up with a different solution."*	Lack of customer relationship management	Knowledge Gap	Empathy
Hepsiburada (Hepsi express)	*"The coconut oil I ordered from this private shopping site appears to be "being prepared" in the system for two weeks. I will go out of town, but my product has not reached me yet, and it is not even cancelled. I am being victimized for no reason; please let this situation be resolved immediately."*	Nonfunctional website design	Standards Gap	Website design

Results

In this study, associated with our research questions, some excerpts from the research findings are presented considering the online service quality dimensions and Service Quality Gap Model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Lovelock and Wirtz (2011).

Knowledge gap: Within the context of the knowledge gap where management is not aware of customer expectations, especially during the intermittent curfew process, customers expected high priority shipments of "essential food" products, but that is not how the companies' business models worked in reality. Likewise, customers were guided to courier companies by private shopping sites, despite their unwillingness to handle the return process at such a critical time. In addition, these websites are accused of failing to consider essential customer information, such as those with heart disease, pregnant women,

newborns, and healthcare professionals. One of the customers, who made a complaint from şikayetvar.com, expressed the problem they experienced during the service delivery process as follows:

"They have postponed the delivery date of the baby food I ordered to 15 days later! Baby food cannot wait 15 days. Although it is said that it will be delivered within two days during the ordering process, customer service reports that it will be delivered within 15 days."

Another problem is that some essential foods were not single packaged and sold, so customers have to spend more money to purchase multiple packages to meet their basic needs despite the economic downturn.

"… in this process, they have displayed such a clever tactic that there is almost no single-item production on sale. That's why I bought 20 noodles from brand x, and the total price was 49.99. This is a product that normally costs 1.5 liras each."

Another problem was related to the inability of the actions taken to meet the real expectations of the customer. For example, customers want the company to expedite the delivery of (critical) products instead of providing gift certificates.

"Despite all my phone calls, they say that they are interested and that they will return as soon as possible, and they offer a gift voucher of 10 ₺ for customer satisfaction. However, it has been 38 days since I ordered the product. I want my product to arrive on time, not a gift card."

Associated with the e-service quality dimensions, the main reason for most of these knowledge gap-related problems is the limited understanding of private shopping service providers about online customers' usage behaviour. In this regard, paying attention to the customer's voice and showing empathy are the first steps in planning efforts to improve service quality. In addition, this is about learning customers' specific requirements and providing individualized attention for increasing performance evaluation of online service providers.

Standards gap: According to the standards gaps, it has been determined that companies prioritized acting on the requests from customers with complaints on popular complaint forums like "şikayetvar.com". A customer who has difficulty in getting a response to her complaint expresses the situation as follows:

"Unfortunately, they were not interested until I posted this complaint website. Half an hour later, they processed the refund when I wrote it here. On the phone, they tell me that complaints here take priority!"

Customers also found that negative reviews were not posted on these private shopping sites. Additionally, while these private shopping website companies continue to respond to customer complaints automatically and identically on this popular "şikayetvar.com" word of mouth forum, they have not responded to negative evaluations posted on their websites:

"..to inform the buyers of this product, I commented on "I still have not received the order I placed on 12 April." but the fact that they didn't post my comment makes me suspicious of their transparency. I guess you can't make a negative comment on Trendyol."

Also, the delivery time set by these websites for the orders is too long, and these delivery times are automatically extended in the system without notifying the customer. Similarly, the charges, which were guaranteed to be delivered to the customer's address, were requested to be received later from another cargo company which was different from what was written in the remote sale contract. Systematic errors in the ordering process are considered another critical issue in this period. Even if the product has not been delivered, it still shows as "delivered" in the system, or although it is sometimes returned, it does not show as "delivered" in the system. Other systemic problems are related to order cancellations and unexpected changes in the order content during the checkout stage.

"The tea I bought is not delivered even though the deadline has passed, and it has been seen as 'your order has been received for 11 days. They do not cancel when I want to cancel, saying that it does not come out of our warehouse. We can't even go shopping out of fear, and we are victimized in such a difficult time."

Additionally, unsupervised vendors are a significant problem due to invoice-free sales, counterfeit products, ratings, or unavailability of vendor information. Finally, within this period, the issues of courier companies have become more prominent. Removing the shipping company from the customer's

address without the "controlled delivery" process and the "long damage assessment" of the goods are examples of these standards-related problems.

"... the courier says there is no damage to the outer box of the product, but Trendyol wants a report. I want to return the product. This site is unfairly victimizing me."

"…I didn't get a chance to check the cargo at the door because it was just left at the door when I arrived."

In addition, during the return process, the customer encountered the problem that the product was not returned due to the gift certificate received before or due to the scheduled daily return quota.

About the reliability dimension of service quality, these websites cannot perform the promised service dependably and accurately in such a difficult time, when consumers are increasingly dependent on the internet for recommendations and reviews. In this context, offering transparent customer service and building a speedy and accurate order fulfilment by assisting at the correct delivery point at the promised time appeared as critical elements for achieving high-quality customer service. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the website's design caused great difficulties for customers in terms of functionality and system reliability. At this point, as convenience is one of the customers' primary motives for trading through the Internet, customers require websites to be accessible and workable all the time. Additionally, as these service providers work with unsupervised suppliers and offer uncontrolled service delivery, credibility, and reputation dimensions, including trustworthiness, believability, and honesty, could not be built as intended.

Delivery gap: Considering delivery gaps, address errors; deformed products with a broken cold chain; late deliveries; lost cargos; poor packaging; lacked product deliveries in terms of quantity or weight; delivery of unlocked products, sending products without guard bands; delivery of products that are close to the expiration date, delivery of similar or cheaper products to the customer in the case of out of stock out situations without paying price differences created significant problems for the customers in this period. A customer who has been sent the wrong product expresses his concern as follows:

"I bought vitamins on this private shopping site for my family. But, unfortunately, they sent a completely different product. I will never forget the victimization of 60-year-old people in this period. "Send the product back", a private shopping site says. Yes, I will send people of this age to the cargo company when there is a spreading epidemic. What a creative solution! I'm so angry."

Another customer with a similar complaint says:

"I bought three hot sauces from a supplier in Hepsiburada. The product was given to someone else, I found the person, I looked at the box, there is wetness, and it is obvious that the bottles inside are broken. I immediately went to the cargo company and opened the package in front of their eyes. Look at the shame they've done."

As these private shopping sites do not offer reliable service in terms of their promises to their customers, the first gap stems from the reliability dimension. As the orders reach the customer so that they can no longer be used, this situation negatively affects the future recommendations of the customers. In a similar vein, insufficient level of communication and lack of willingness to communicate are other problems seen in service quality evaluations of the customers. In this context, and as a part of the responsiveness aspect of the service quality, keeping the customer informed and making necessary adjustments by prompt warning and notification system are among the basic moves that can prevent the delivery-related service quality gaps.

Communication gap: Associated with the communication gaps, customers had complaints due to seeing irrelevant assessments of products in the system; sending products with close expiration dates within the scope of marketing campaigns; defining invalid or fake discount coupons; different price definitions than those demonstrated in the product images; shipping with another packaging than the product images; no free shipping due to shopping memberships and cancelling and dividing orders without notifying the customer in case of stockout situations. A customer expresses her complaint about this issue as follows:

"I bought the product, which I saw as a 25 TL discount voucher on a private shopping site, but when I tried the code, it did not work. Even when I reached them about this issue, they displayed individual irresponsibility. So, unfortunately, I will not rely on these types of coupons again."

"I bought unsalted olives from Morhipo for my mother, who has severe heart disease. Although it is persistently written in every statement and shown in the image that it is salt-free, they sent a very salty saddle olive. If I create a return request, my parents can't deal with it. We are disappointed as a family!"

About service quality's reliability and communication dimension, private shopping sites promised customers more than they can consistently deliver via the media. As these promises did not match actual service delivery, the consequent communication gap disappointed customers. In service, consistency means achieving sameness, uniformity, and fairness in delivering all the service attributes, regardless of time, place, occasion, and service provider. In order to treat customers fairly and ensure that they will get the experience they want, these sites must provide consistent customer service.

Customer gap: Since customers' perceptions about private shopping sites revolve around corporates, reputation, reliability, and brand image, deficiencies in logistics services are not expected and are misinterpreted by customers when such situations occur. For companies, these gaps stem from a lack of detailed information on products and collaborative business partners, the inability to apply fair and reliable pricing policies, and the use of opaque business models.

The problem experienced by a customer who is not satisfied with customer service is expressed as follows:

"…When I contacted customer service, they did not help me. I waited for a possible improvement, but I got a negative result. I could find this product at a more affordable price anywhere. The only reason I trust was their customer care."

"I bought the formula for my baby, it's been one week, and the product has been seen in the cargo branch for three days. I finally had to buy the product from the pharmacy, and if you work with irresponsible companies, you will lose Trendyol. We buy products with your assurance, but it's like it comes from outer space."

Service organizations, including private shopping sites, must meet what the customer expects. In this case, customers overestimated the quality of the services of personal shopping sites. Herein, customer orientation can be an essential factor in creating the customer gap's size. From this point, the most significant customer gap exists from the "assurance" dimension of service quality. This stems from the inability of the private shopping sites to inspire trust and confidence in their customers. In this respect, extensive efforts should be provided to eliminate this gap on the customers' side.

In line with our research questions, the results suggest that customers are concerned with six key factors related to service quality: reliability, empathy, website design, credibility, communication, and responsiveness. In this regard, while the "empathy" dimension of service quality comes to the fore for the knowledge gap, "reliability", "website design", and "credibility" dimensions are accentuated for the knowledge gap. Similarly, while the delivery gap revolves around the "communication", "reliability", and "responsiveness" dimensions, communication gaps are pertinent to the "communication", "reliability", and "consistency" dimensions. Lastly, "assurance" has become prominent for the service gap (Table 2). It should be kept in mind that the differences in expectations and perceptions regarding service quality do not consist only of those discussed in this study. Other differences may arise due to many different reasons.

The content analysis of the customers' complaints enables us to explore the diverse aspects of online service quality dimensions. The results thus embrace almost all key online service quality factors proposed by previous studies (Zeithaml et al., 2000; Madu and Madu, 2002; Yang and Jun, 2020). However, unknown factors demonstrate that service quality dimensions tend to be context- and industry-bounded (Mehta, Lalwani & Han, 2000). Therefore, this study presents a more comprehensive survey by associating the service quality dimensions mentioned in these studies with the service quality gaps. In this way, while investigating the dimensions of online food service quality, which play a vital role in influencing the service quality assessment of customers in the COVID-19 process, we showed which of these dimensions played a more significant role in the service quality gap model.

Table 2: Service Quality Dimensions and Their Role in the Service Quality Gap Model

The Domain of Service Quality Gaps	Number of complaints	Dimension of Service Quality Gaps	Service Quality Dimensions
Undefined priorities for products	25	Knowledge Gap	Empathy
Difficult return process	15		
Ignoring critical customer profiles	10		
Unaligned actions with customer expectations	18		
Forcing customers to buy the bundled packages	7		
Lack of transparency in business	35	Standards Gap	Reliability
Discrimination of complaints	25		
Uninterested service representation	20		Website design
Lack of warning mechanisms	19		
Systematic errors in the ordering process	17		
Reflecting the deficiencies in the sales contracts to the customer	15		Credibility
Stockout and cancellation issues	10		
Working with unsupervised business partners	9		Reputation
Problems with courier companies	7		
Complex procedures in the return process	3		
Nonfunctional website design	2		
Late deliveries	35	Delivery Gap	Reliability
Incomplete deliveries	32		
Wrong addresses/products	20		
Delivery of damaged products	12		Communication
Lost cargoes	10		
Bad packaging	9		
Unlocked deliveries	6		Responsiveness
Lack of reactive service delivery	2		
Unrelated comments on websites	38	Communication Gap	
Invalid discount coupons	25		Reliability
Offering fake discounts	20		
Failed marketing campaigns	20		Communication
Unsuccessful membership practices	17		
Overpromising during the sales process	12		Consistency
Overrated corporate image	58	Customer Gap	
Overestimating the quality of the services	44		Assurance

Conclusion, discussion and suggestions

The fundamental responsibility of every business is to ensure customer satisfaction and provide quality products and services that meet customer needs. However, in some cases, even the best companies that work with this discipline face complaints about their products and services. In this respect, in addition to providing quality products and services, it is of great importance to listening to customers who have problems and complaints about their products and services. Technology provides channels for both the business and the customers to get along. This research detected 600 customer complaints within the three-month-intermittent curfew period (March, April, and May 2020) on the "şikayetvar.com" complaint channel. These complaints covering everyday logistics service failures in the food sector were analyzed by associating service quality dimensions with the service quality gap model.

In line with the disconfirmation and exit, loyalty and voice theory, the study demonstrates that if customers perceive any gap in the service delivery process, they express their reactions through "voicing" their complaints by seeking redress directly from the e-retailer or the manufacturer. In this regard, associated with disconfirmation theory, service quality gaps (knowledge, delivery, standards, communication, customer) experienced by companies during the pandemic prevented delivering high-quality service to customers. As customer satisfaction is strongly related to the customer's service quality perceptions, this created negative disconfirmation on the customers' side. Associated with the exit, loyalty and voice theory, customers highlighted their top priority dimensions of service quality (empathy, reliability, credibility, reputation, communication, responsiveness, consistency, assurance,

and website design) to receive an apology or some form of compensation through voicing their unfavourable experience to others.

Looking at the service quality gaps in detail, prioritising some products and customer groups, facilitating the purchase and return process, and adopting compensation approaches in line with customer expectations are essential issues within the scope of the knowledge gap. As a part of the standards gap, lack of transparency in business, disinterested customer service, systematic errors and dysfunctional website design in the ordering process, problems with business partners and complex procedures in the return process were the critical problems for the companies. Within the delivery gap, late, incomplete, damaged, and unlocked deliveries, wrong addresses and products, lost cargos, inadequate packaging, and lack of reactive service delivery posed significant difficulties for the last mile delivery of the orders. For the communication gap, comments on websites unrelated to the product, identifying invalid or fake discount coupons, failed marketing campaigns or over-promises about the service performance, and failed membership applications were the challenging burdens encountered by these companies. Lastly, overrating corporate image and the quality of the services by the customers created a customer gap towards companies. As findings indicate, service quality gaps are primarily associated with the basic logistics activities, including return management, customer services, order processing, transportation, marketing, and procurement in this intermittent curfew period.

Companies need to learn their service quality gaps and make various activities and consumer-oriented arrangements to satisfy them. In this regard, cognitive/emotional discomfort caused by insufficient return on resources expended by the consumer at any stage of the purchasing/consumption process should be prevented by serving above the expected level of performance. Besides, it is also crucial for decision-makers and managers to focus primarily on consumer trust and satisfaction and pay attention to open and accessible complaint channels in case of dissatisfaction. In this respect, customer complaints should be monitored ongoing and considered invaluable information to resolve service failures. These customer "voices" should be used as an early detection mechanism to take precautionary steps before the customer "exits", which causes more destructive results for the companies. For service businesses to close the knowledge gap, they need to show the necessary attention to marketing research and increase the interaction between management and customers. For the standards gap, companies should believe in the importance of providing quality service, set concrete targets for this aim, and standardize the work and duties to ensure that the required quality level is achieved.

Regarding the delivery gap, behavioural control systems should be used in the performance measurement and output control systems, and personnel should be trained on safe delivery. Furthermore, to reduce the communication gap, it is necessary to ensure that the advertising and promotion tools used by the service business accurately represent the service offered and the way of service delivery. Lastly, the suggestions mentioned above to reduce the four gaps in the Service Quality Model will naturally contribute significantly to reducing the service gap in the model. This increases the possibility of providing service by customer expectations.

Considering the previous studies, Dhingra, Gupta & Bhatt (2020) identified the dimensions of e-service quality based on the literature review, which are website design, reliability, responsiveness, trust, and personalization. Additionally, as Çelik (2021) stated, system availability, fulfilment, responsiveness, and compensation as e-service quality dimensions had a significant and positive effect on the customers' e-satisfaction. Along similar lines, reliability, security, responsiveness, and ease of use are essential dimensions for e-service quality for satisfactory service in the study of Jalil, Kaur & Jogia (2021). Although these and other previous studies address the service quality dimensions of increasing importance, it is unclear which service quality dimensions affect which service quality gaps of the businesses. Theoretically, our study is specific to the food sector, mapping each of the nine increasingly important e-service quality dimensions to service quality gaps. In this respect, the study offers a new conceptual framework. Managerially, by demonstrating the role of prioritized service quality dimensions in service quality gaps, the study's findings enable practitioners to allocate resources to various e-service quality attributes needed to ensure efficient customer satisfaction management.

The research covers the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic episode in Turkey. The study's main limitation relates to a small sample; only the complaints of online grocery shoppers in pandemic settings were focused on. With the excellent result of vaccination, the census might be defined as all

online shoppers more inclusively, and interviews could be conducted with online shoppers in future studies. Furthermore, since the survey was born in the e-grocery sector, replicating the study to other industries like e-banking or e-healthcare can be suggested. Additionally, there is no doubt that differences in expectations and perceptions of service quality are not limited to those discussed in this study.

It should be noted that other differences may occur due to many other reasons. In this context, in addition to the service quality gap model, many service quality models developed by different researchers but not included in this study can also be examined, and these models can be compared and analyzed. Also, by adopting a qualitative methodology, additional insights can be gathered from customers regarding other aspects of e-service quality that are yet to be examined.

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