A STUDY ON EVALUATION OF AFTER SALES SERVICES IN THE FURNITURE SECTOR (SAMPLE, CITY OF ZONGULDAK, TURKEY)

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ABSTRACT

In order to survive in face of ever-increasing competition, the companies have become aware of the importance of the customer satisfaction and hold it as their target to establish loyal customers to remain competitive. The companies that consider the customers a very outstanding asset and adopt it as a principle to offer customer-oriented service desire to stand by them after sales. In this sense, and as a requirement of Total Quality as well, the concept of after sales service is all operations providing services after sale such as transportation, delivery, installation of the product purchased, communication with the consumer for use of the product, maintenance-repair and spare parts and operations to deal with the customer complaints as a whole. In face of the competition, the furniture sector, like all sectors, turns towards the after sales services.

In this study, we introduce opinions and evaluations on the part of the consumers concerning after sales services provided in the furniture sector. As study material, we have selected consumers in six districts, including central district of the city of Zonguldak. Vis-à-vis survey has been selected as method and applied to 383 consumers in the study area.

Key words: Total quality management, after sales service, furniture

1. INTRODUCTION

Observations are that "Total Quality" (TQ) applications have provided great contributions in the efforts of the companies for achievement of customer satisfaction. Integrative nature of TQ process along a route starting from the raw material stage of the product to the sale and after sales services has been the most significant factor in achieving customer satisfaction (URL-1, 2009). After sales service, a stage of the total quality process, is efforts of the organizations, strictly following the principles of finished product and service quality, to ensure correct use of the products by the customer to the intended purpose and achieve customer satisfaction by providing service and spare part services correctly, quickly and at favorable price in case of failure or complaint (Onder,. 1993). Satisfaction felt by the customer is maintained by such follow-up and provision of necessary services. To affect the customer in a positive way is also important for future actions and new sales. Warranty to the effect that after sales services such as transportation, setup, installation, warranty, maintenance, repair, etc. will be provided reinforce satisfaction felt by the customer. However, after sales services covering operations such as sale of spare parts, maintenance, repair, consultancy and technical support constitute a highly profitable area. Because of all these reasons, the important of after sales customer services is increasing every day (Bengul, 2006). Appropriate after sales service strategies and quality will cause the customers to have an overall satisfactory feeling for the product, gaining positive experience and information about it. And accumulation of such experience and information will lead to customer satisfaction and make it possible for the organizations to maintain sales (Korkmaz, 2001).

In the furniture sector, like all sectors, the after sales service will be much important as production in the total quality. The current studies show that the factor making a product attractive for the customer and promoting sales is widespread after sales services. Customers expect the company from which they purchase product to stand by them by means of after sales services and quick and effective handling of their complaints and problems concerning the product (Turedi, 2010).

In this study, through a survey conducted on the furniture sector in the city of Zonguldak, the customers were asked about their opinion of the after sales services provided to them with the resulting findings evaluated and results presented.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Study area has been established as the central district as well as Alapli, Caycuma, Devrek, Gokcebey and Eregli districts in Zonguldak. Number of survey to be applied to the consumers in the study area, e.g. city of Zonguldak and central districts, has been established as follows.

As main population, total number of houses in the city of Zonguldak is accepted and sample size, e.g. number of surveys to be conducted, was determined. However, as there was no information available in the Municipality of Zonguldak about number of houses, the estimated number of houses was found on the assumption that five individuals live per house, basing on the population determined as per (URL-2, 2009). Accordingly, total number of houses selected as main population is 123,830. The study was performed at a confidence level of 95%. Determination of total number of surveys to be conducted, that is the sample size, has been according to Table 1.

Table 1. Sample sizes corresponding to different population sizes for sampling errors of 5% and 10% at a confidence level of 95%

Target Group size (N)	Sample sizes for α=0.05			
	Sampling error 5% (d)		Sampling error 10% (d)	
	p=0.05, q=0.05	p=0.8, q=0.2	p=0.05, q=0.05	p=0.8, q=0.02
1.000	278	198	88	58
2.000	322	219	92	60
3.000	341	227	93	60
4.000	351	232	94	61
5.000	357	234	94	61
10.000	370	240	95	61
20.000	377	243	96	61
50.000	381	245	96	61
100.000	383	245	96	61
500.000	384	246	96	61

123.830 houses selected as main group correspond, according to Table 1, to 384 sample size at a significance level of 5%. Accordingly, number of survey to be conducted in each district is determined by the following formula (Cabuk, 2000).

$$S = \frac{X}{N} n$$

According to our study, the variables in this formula are:
S: Number of surveys required to be conducted,
x: Number of houses in the districts;
N: Number of house in the main group; and
n: Sample size.

Thus number of surveys to be conducted is 29 in the district of Alapli, 60 in Caycuma, 39 in Devrek, 105 in Eregli, 15 in Gokcebey and 133 in the central district. Questionnaire form is consisted of 37 questions. The questionnaire form drawn out was put into implementation under the specified plan and visits have been made to these districts to seek answers to questions by vis-à-vis interviews with the consumers.

For assessment of the date, Independent-Samples T-Test (T-Test with two independent samples) was used out of three different T-Test alternatives in SPSS 15.0 software.

3. FINDINGS

Table 2. Advantages provided by the firms and significance of the after sale services that have played role in decision-taking for purchase.

	Most significant		Less significant		Least significant	
	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
Warranties	274	72	50	13	23	6
Transportation	49	13	90	23	83	22
Installation	40	10	150	39	70	18
Free Customer Hotline	20	5	93	24	207	54
Total	383	100	383	100	383	100

According to Table 2, the warranty provided by the firm has the highest rate, e.g. 72%, which is the most effective with respect to consumers in taking decision on furniture purchase. It is followed by transportation, 13%.

Status of use of the after sale services that play role in the decision-taking on purchase was studied by educational levels of the consumers. Values indicating these rates are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Rates of use of after sale services by educational levels of the consumer.

	Primary		Secondary		High School		University		Illiterate		Total	
	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
Warranties	30	48	30	58	136	44	139	41	0	0	335	27
Transportation	13	2	12	2	77	10	92	12	0	0	194	25
Free Customer Hotline	6	1	4	1	17	2	14	2	0	0	41	5
Installation	13	2	6	1	80	10	97	13	0	0	196	26
Total	62	53	52	61	310	67	342	67	0	0	766	83

According to Table 3, the warranty service has been used most with a rate of 27%. It is followed by installation (26%) and transportation service (25%). After sale service least used is free customer hotline provided by the firm with a rate of 5%.

Table 4 shows that the customers living in the districts take delivery of the products in 3 days and less by the following rates: 4.7% in Alapli, 8.4% in Caycuma, 4.4% in Devrek, 17.8% in Eregli, 2.9% in Gokcebey and 17.2% in Zonguldak.

Values indicating delivery time after purchase of furniture are shown in Table 4 by districts:

Table 4. Values indicating delivery time after purchase of furniture by districts

	Alapli		Caycuma		Devrek		Eregli		Gokcebey		Zonguldak		Total Survey	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.		Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
3 days or less	18	4.7	32	8.4	17	4.4	68	17.8	11	2.9	66	17.2	212	55.4
One week	8	2.1	26	6.8	13	3.4	22	5.7	4	1.0	50	13.1	123	32.1
10 days or more	3	0.8	2	0.5	8	2.1	18	4.7	0	0.0	17	4.4	48	12.5
Total	29	7.6	60	15.7	38	9.9	108	28.2	15	3.9	133	34.7	383	100.0

Table 5. Determination of the thought about whether an extra fee will be claimed or not for repairs and fixes under warranty terms.

	Yes		No		Total	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Low Income	82	21	79	21	161	42
Medium and High Income	149	39	73	19	222	58
Total	231	60	152	40	383	100

It is surveyed whether there is any difference of opinion among the consumers by their income status with respect to idea that no extra fee will be claimed after sale for any repairs under the warranty. Accordingly, hypothesis is formed as follows:

H_0: There is no difference of opinion among the consumers by their income status with respect to the idea that no extra price will be claimed for any repairs and to be performed under warranty. H_A: There is difference of opinion among the consumers by their income status with respect to the opinion that no extra price will be claimed for any repairs to be performed under warranty (Table 6).

Table 6. Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Upper	Lower	
Equal variances assumed	21,09	,000	3,231	381	,001	,162	,050	,063	,260	
Equal variances not assumed			3,199	331,8	,002	,162	,051	,062	,261	

According to the results of the analysis mean for 161 low-income respondents is 1.49 and mean for 222 medium- and high-income respondents is 1.33. In the survey, the following indications are made: 1= low income; 2= medium and high income. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated according to the analysis is 0.02<0.05, H_A has been accepted. According to the hypothesis H_A, there is difference of opinion with respect to the opinion among the

consumers by income status with respect to the opinion that no extra price will be claimed for any repairs to be performed under warranty after purchase.

In the survey, the consumers were asked whether they expect the company will somehow provide convenience even if the product has expired its warranty term, and it was studied from the responses given whether there is any difference among the consumers by their education status. Accordingly, hypothesis is formed as follows:

H_0: There is no difference of opinion among the consumers by their education status with respect to the opinion that the firm will somehow provide convenience even if the product expired its warranty term. H_A: There is difference of opinion among the consumers by their education status with respect to the opinion that the firm will somehow provide convenience even if the product expired its warranty term.

Table 7. Determination of the opinion to the effect that the firm will somehow provide convenience even if the product expired its warranty term.

	Yes		No		Total	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Primary and High School	75	20	137	36	212	55
University	69	18	102	27	171	45
Total	144	38	239	62	383	100

According to the results of the analyses, mean of 212 primary school and high school respondents is 1.84 and mean of 171 respondents of university degree is 1.6. In the survey, the following indications are given: 1=primary school and high school; 2= university. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated as per the analysis is 0.000<0.05, H_A is accepted. According to the hypothesis H_A, there is difference of opinion among the consumers by their education status with respect to the opinion that the firm will somehow provide convenience even if the product expired its warranty term (Table 8).

Table 8.Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	116,76	,000	5,665	381	,000	,248	,044	,162	,334
Equal variances not assumed			5,489	304,9	,000	,248	,045	,159	,337

The consumers were asked whether their homes are left as cleaned after the furniture articles are placed. In line with the responses given, it is studies whether there is any relation between the female and male consumers. For this purpose, T-test was applied and hypothesis was formed as follows.

H_0: There is no difference of opinion among the consumers by their sex with respect to the opinion that the home is left clean after the furniture articles are placed/set up. H_A: There is difference of opinion among the consumers by their sex with respect to the opinion that the home is left clean after the furniture articles are placed/set up (Table 9).

Table 9. Determining whether the home is left clean after the furniture articles are placed.

	Yes		No		Total	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Female	97	25	91	24	188	49
Male	106	28	89	23	195	51
Total	203	53	180	47	383	100

Table 10. Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	,950	,330	,540	381	,589	,028	,051	-,073	,128
Equal variances not assumed			,540	380,3	,589	,028	,051	-,073	,128

According to the results of analysis, mean of 195 male respondents is 1.46 and mean of female 188 respondents is 1.48. No significant difference is seen between the averages of the groups. In other words, the female and male respondents are of opinion that the home is left clean after the furniture articles are placed/set up. In the survey, the following indications are given: 1=female; 2=male. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated according to the analysis is 0.589>0.05, H_0 is accepted. According to the hypothesis H_0, there is no difference among the consumers by their sex with respect to the opinion whether the home is left clean or not after the furniture articles are placed.

In the survey, the respondents were asked whether they could come into contact with the sales representative of the firm from which they purchased the product in case of any complaint in connection with the furniture, and it was surveyed whether there is any difference among the consumers by their income status on basis of responses they gave. Accordingly, the following hypothesis has been formed.

H_0: There is no difference among the consumers by their income status with respect to having access to the sales representative of the firm from which they purchased the product in case of any complaint concerning the furniture. H_A: There is difference among the consumers by their income status with respect to having access to the sales representative of the firm from which they purchased the product in case of any complaint concerning the furniture.

Table 11. Access to the sales representative of the firm from which the product is purchased in case of any complaint concerning furniture

	Yes		No		Total	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Low Income	106	28	55	14	161	42

Medium and High Income	151	39	71	19	222	58
Total	257	67	126	33	383	100

According to the results of analysis, mean of 161 low-income respondents is 1.34 and mean of 222 medium- and high-income respondents is 1.32. It is seen there is no significant difference between the means of the groups. In other words, in opinion of low- and high-income consumers, they can have easily access to the sales representative of the firm from which they purchase the product in case of any complaint about the furniture. In the survey, the following indications are used: 1= low-income; 2= medium- and high-income. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated as per the analyses is $0.655 > 0,05$ meaning H_0 has been accepted. According to the hypothesis H_0, there is no difference among the consumers by their income-status in having access to the sales representative of the firm from which they purchase the furniture in case of any complaint about the furniture.

Table 12.Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	,782	,377	,447	381	,655	,022	,049	-,074	,118
Equal variances not assumed			,446	341,3	,656	,022	,049	-,074	,118

The consumers were asked whether they receive any response to their complaints about the furniture to survey whether there is any difference of opinion by age group among the consumers. Accordingly, the hypothesis is formed as follows:

H_0: There is no difference by age group with respect to their receiving response in a short time in case of complaints made by the consumers about the furniture.

H_A: There is difference by age group with respect to their receiving response in short time in case of complaints made by the consumers about the furniture.

Table 13. Determination of receiving response in short time in case of complaints made by the consumers concerning the furniture.

	Yes		No		Total	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Middle age and below	114	30	126	33	240	63
Above middle age	82	21	61	16	143	37
Total	196	51	187	49	383	100

Table 14. Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	3,432	,065	1,868	381	,063	,098	,053	-,005	,202
Equal variances not assumed			1,871	300,59	,062	,098	,053	-,005	,202

According to the results of analysis, mean of 240 respondents, middle-age and below, is 1.53 and mean of 143 respondents, middle-age and above, is 1.43. In the survey, the following values are given: 1= middle age and below; 2= middle age and above. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated is 0.063> is 0.05, H_0 has been accepted. According to the hypothesis H_0, there is no difference by age group with respect to receiving response in short time to the complaints made by the consumers concerning furniture. Accordingly, it is understood that after sale service consultants provide consultancy service in a manner understandable by consumers of all ages.

In the survey, the consumers were asked whether they contact with the customer representation for settlement of the problem again when same problem occurs upon provision of after sale service. The aim is, on basis of responses received, to determine whether there is any relation among the consumers by education status. For this purpose, T-test was applied and the following hypothesis has been formed.

H_0: There is no difference among the consumers by their education status with respect to their application again to the customer representative for settlement of same problem encountered upon provision of after sale service.

H_A: There is difference among the consumers by their education status with respect to their application again to the customer representative for settlement of same problem encountered upon provision of after sale service.

Table 15. Assessment of the application by the consumers to the customer representative for settlement of the same problem again.

| | Yes | | No | | Total | |
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Primary and High School	70	18	142	37	212	55
University	43	11	128	33	171	45
Total	113	30	270	70	383	100

Table 16. Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	11,71	,001	-1,681	381	,094	-,079	,047	-,171	,013
Equal variances not assumed			-1,696	374,1	,091	-,079	,046	-,170	,013

According to the results of analysis, the mean of 212 graduates from primary school and high school is 1.67 and mean of 171 respondents from university is 1.75. It is seen that there is no important difference between the means of the groups. In the survey, the following values are given: 1= primary school and high school; 2= university. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated as per the analysis is 0.094>0.05, H_0 has been accepted. According to the hypothesis H_0, there is no difference among the consumers by their education status with respect to their application again to the customer representative for settlement of same problem they encounter again upon after sale service has been provided for the product.

In the survey, the consumers were asked whether the problem has been removed in short time after they have applied to the customer representative second time and it was surveyed whether there is any difference between the female and male consumers on basis of responses they gave. Ant accordingly, the following hypothesis has been formed.

H_0: There is no effect of sex on settlement of the problem in a short time when the customer representative was applied second time.

H_A: There is effect of sex on settlement of the problem in short time when the customer representative was applied second time.

According to the results of analysis, the mean of 61 male respondents is 1.54 and mean of 52 female respondents is 1.54. No significant difference seems between the means of the groups. In the survey, the following values are given: 1= female; 2= male. As Sig (2 tailed) calculated according to the analysis is 0.979> 0,05, according to the hypothesis H_0 has been accepted. According to the hypothesis H_0, there is no effect of sex on settlement of the problem in short time when the customer representative has been applied second time.

Table 17. Assessment of settlement of the problem in short time after the customer representative has been applied second time.

	Yes		No		Total	
	Quant.	%	Quant.	%	Quant.	%
Female	24	21	28	25	52	46
Male	28	25	33	29	61	54
Total	52	46	61	54	113	100

Table 18. Results of Independent-Samples T-Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Upper	Lower
Equal variances assumed	,003	,958	-,027	111	,979	-,003	,095	-,191	,186
Equal variances not assumed			-,027	108,1	,979	-,003	,095	-,191	,186

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Below are the results obtained from, assessments and suggestions with respect to the survey of 383 consumers in order to get knowledge of their opinion about after sale services in the furniture sector in the city of Zonguldak and districts thereof.

It is understood that the consumers give highest (72%) importance to the warranties provided by the firm with respect to advantages and after sales services provided by the firms that play role in taking decision on purchase. In case the product incurs damage caused both by defects of material and workmanship and improper installation, the consumers give more importance to the warranty that covers repair of the product without claiming any extra payment such as workmanship cost, price of replacement part or whatever. For the customers, other after sale services such as transportation, installation and free customer services hotline are at the second, third and fourth place. The reason that the consumers do not consider the installation at the first place is that they purchase some products as already installed and, furthermore, that the installation diagrams of the disassembled products come with the products. Again, it is understood that the warranty service, among the after sale services, is the one that consumers give importance most (27%), irrespective of the education status. It is seen that the consumers, particularly graduates of primary and secondary schools, do not use free customer hotlines much. It is understood that the consumers gives importance to the product warranty most, but taking advantage of after sale services such as transportation and installation at about same rates as well. According to another question that verifies their use of transportation services at a high rate as well as their satisfaction, when we look at the delivery terms after purchase of the furniture by districts, we see that they are generally delivered to the districts in a period of 3 days or less (55%). Accordingly, it is seen that the firms show sensitivity for delivery term of the product. We may say that the furniture firms have improved themselves by following quick production and quick shipment policy or cooperating with prestigious transportation firms.

It is surveyed whether there is any difference of opinion among the consumers by their income status with respect to the point that no extra fee will be claimed for any repairs to be performed after purchase under warranty, and the survey showed that there is difference of opinion between the low-income families and medium- and high-income families. While low-income consumers suppose that an extra fee would be claimed for any repairs to be performed under warranty upon purchase, the medium- and high-income consumers are of the opinion that no extra fee would be claimed. Accordingly, we may conclude that medium- and high-income consumers are more conscious about things under the product warranty.

It is understood from the survey that there is difference of opinion among the consumers, graduates of university, on the one hand, and primary school and high school, on the other hand, on the matter that whether the firms provide convenience to the customers even if the product warranty has expired. Accordingly, consumers that are university graduates think the firms they prefer will surely support their customers in such problem. As it is, we

may say that in line with the increased level of the education status, the consumers understand the customer services better, evaluating their objectives more consciously.

It is understood that there is no difference of opinion among female and male consumers on whether the home is left clean after placement/set-up of the furniture. Irrespective of sex, all consumers thinks that their home is left clean. As it is, we may say that the firms show due sensitivity and respect during installation of the product. For satisfaction of the consumers in this respect, we may say that cooperation of the manufacturing firms with some special companies for installation purpose has been effective.

Consumers stated that in case of any complaint about furniture, they could have access to the sales representative of the firm easily (67%). It is also seen as to the consumers of different income groups that in case of any complaint about the product, there is no difference of opinion on having access to the sales representative of the firm from which the product is purchased. The customers of different age groups that state they could have easily access to the sales representative have pointed out that their complaints were removed in short time. As it is, we may say that the after sale service consultants provide consultancy service in a way clearly understandable by consumers of any age. As the firms have improved their after sales service units, the consumers can come into contact with an authorized officer of the firm when they encounter a product-related problem and thus their problems are removed in short time. As it is, we see that the firms give all assistance to the consumers about the product after the product is sold. Additionally, while the consumers stated that could have easily access to the sales representation about any matter and their complaints are settled, they think in a different way when they encounter same problem for the product in question. It is understood that the consumers encountering same problems do not apply the customer representatives second time (70%) and there is no difference of opinion in this respect among the consumers of different education status. However, 54% of the consumers encountering same problem second time has stated that their problems were removed soon and it is understood that there is no difference of opinion among female and male consumers in this respect. This situation shows that the consumers do not take advantage of customer services completely due to their habits, bad experience and their prejudice to the effect that their problems will not be dealt with and removed second time. For this reason, the firms should know behavior patterns of the consumers to be more successful. If requests and requirements of the consumers, ways of consumption, attitudes after consumption, etc. are known, after sale operations of the firms will reach to their intended point both on part of producers and consumers.

Finally, the firms should maintain after sale of the product the energy they consume until they purchase the product by supporting after sale services they provide to the consumers. The firms should stand behind the product they sell, and thus removing in short time any problems encountered by the consumer and should improve after sale services more to maximize customer satisfaction. And this will both increase confidence of the consumers in the firm and support sales of the firm through the increased customer satisfaction.

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