

FACTORS INFLUENCING CLIENT SATISFACTION IN LAW FIRMS: A CASE STUDY OF ZHONGTONG LAW FIRM IN BEIJING

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the economy, the demand for high-quality legal services in emerging fields is increasing. The single-form traditional legal services can no longer satisfy the diversified needs of clients. The high density of law firms and the intense competition in the legal services market require continuous improvement in law firms' service satisfaction to maintain a competitive edge.

The purpose of this study is to: 1) To analyze the key factors influencing client satisfaction in law firms, and 2) To verify the positive impact of service quality, brand image, and lawyer competence on client satisfaction in law firms. This study selected Zhongtong Law Firm in Beijing as a case study and adopted a quantitative research method. User data were collected through a survey with a sample size of 200 respondents.

The results of the study indicate that: 1) client satisfaction in law firms is influenced by the firm's brand image, service quality, and lawyer competence. 2) These three factors have a significant positive impact on client satisfaction in law firms.

Studying client satisfaction in law firms will help enrich and enhance the satisfaction with legal services provided by law firms, offering more competitive legal services to clients seeking legal assistance.

Keywords: Law Firm, Client Satisfaction, Influencing Factors

Introduction

With the advancement of China's "Belt and Road" policy, there has been a push towards the internationalization of legal services, opening the doors for legal services across various countries (Liu, 2016). This presents a rare opportunity for law firms, but it also comes with greater challenges. As the economy rapidly develops and new fields continue to emerge, the traditional single-form legal services can no longer meet the increasingly diversified needs of clients. As a fundamental component of the legal system, both lawyers and law firms are facing significant challenges amid industry transformation (Wang & Zhao, 2018).

The number of large corporate law firms is steadily increasing, particularly in first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. Enhancing service quality and increasing brand recognition are crucial for law firms to maintain a competitive edge in the complex legal services market (Yan, 2019).

This paper takes Zhongtong Law Firm in Beijing as a case study, analyzing the issues present in the provision of legal services. It focuses on exploring how to effectively optimize satisfaction with legal services provided by law firms in the new era. The study examines how to provide clients with more advantageous legal services while transforming "personal service" into "brand advantage." Discussing and researching these issues will help enrich and enhance the satisfaction with legal services provided by law firms, offering clients seeking legal assistance more competitive and high-quality legal services (Tu & Fu, 2017).

Research Objectives

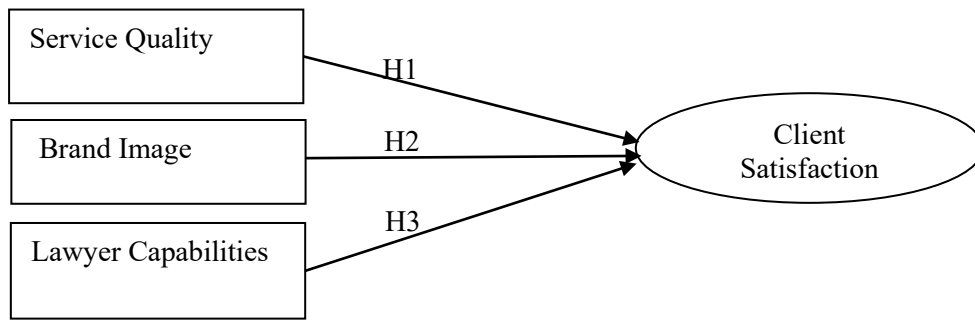
This paper is based on an analysis of client satisfaction at Zhongtong Law Firm in Beijing. It aims to identify issues affecting client satisfaction during the provision of legal services and to develop client management strategies that can enhance the firm's competitiveness. By addressing the diverse needs of clients, the study seeks to improve client satisfaction, thereby boosting the profitability of Zhongtong Law Firm and ensuring its long-term development in the legal services industry. The specific research objectives are summarized as follows:

1. To analyze the key factors influencing client satisfaction in law firms.
2. To verify the positive impact of service quality, brand image, and lawyer competence on client satisfaction at law firms.

Hypotheses

To analyze the factors influencing client satisfaction, this study constructs a theoretical framework with the law firm's service quality, brand image, and lawyer capabilities as independent variables and proposes hypotheses. Client satisfaction, as the result of client evaluations, serves as the dependent variable.

As Beijing Zhongtong Law Firm's business grows, it sometimes neglects to provide excellent client follow-up and more effective, satisfying services. In a competitive environment, facing pressures and threats from various sources may lead to some client attrition. Therefore, analyzing its deficiencies in service marketing can help the law firm provide better services to clients in the future. The proposed hypotheses are shown in Picture 1.



Picture 1: Hypotheses

H1: The service quality of the law firm has a positive impact on client satisfaction.

H2: The brand image of the law firm has a positive impact on client satisfaction.

H3: The capabilities of the lawyers in the law firm have a positive impact on client satisfaction.

Literature Review

This study is based on the theory of service marketing 7Ps and customer satisfaction theory to analyze the factors influencing client satisfaction in law firms. The study adopts a literature review method to clarify the factors influencing user satisfaction. By reviewing and analyzing the literature, it aims to understand the relationship between this study and existing literature, grasp the research background, and lay the theoretical foundation for future research.

The factors influencing client satisfaction in law firms involve various theoretical foundations, including marketing and organizational behavior. Here are some key concepts and theories:

Service Quality

Customer-perceived service quality can be compared based on customers' expectations of service compared to their actual perceptions of service outcomes. Customer perceptions and expectations are primarily reflected in five aspects: tangibles, reliability, assurance, empathy, and responsiveness. Tangibles include physical facilities, equipment, and the appearance of service personnel. Reliability refers to the ability to perform services reliably and accurately as promised. Responsiveness refers to the willingness to help customers and improve service levels promptly. Assurance involves the knowledge, courtesy, and ability of staff to convey confidence and credibility. Empathy refers to caring for customers and providing personalized service (Song & Su, 2018).

The study emphasizes the important role of personnel in the service process, expanding the original service interaction model by viewing customers as co-producers and focusing on how interactions between customers affect service quality (Fan, 1999). Starting from empirical research in hospitals, there is a greater emphasis on the practical utility of service quality research for business managers (Lu, 2012). Research on service quality in China still largely involves digesting and

absorbing foreign research, with a focus on empirical studies in specific industries.

Integrating quality, functional quality, and output quality (Xu, 2017) validates the universality of basic service quality theories and helps improve measurement scales for service quality, providing better guidance for service-oriented enterprises.

Brand Image

Brand image refers to the overall perception, feelings, and evaluations that the public holds about a brand. It represents the brand's image and reputation in the market. For law firms, brand image embodies their competitiveness and attractiveness in the legal services market. The elements that constitute brand image mainly include brand positioning, brand communication, consumer demands, and industry competition (Shi, 2023).

Firstly, brand positioning forms the foundation of brand image shaping. Law firms need to clearly define their market position and target customer groups to establish a unique brand image in the market. Secondly, brand communication is crucial for enhancing brand image. Law firms need to choose suitable communication channels and methods to convey their brand image to target customer groups, thereby enhancing customer awareness and trust in the brand.

Additionally, consumer demands and industry competition are important factors influencing brand image. Law firms need to pay attention to changes in consumer demands, adjust and optimize their brand image in a timely manner to adapt to market changes (Zhang, 2015).

Lawyer Competence

Lawyer competence forms the foundation for law firms to provide high-quality legal services and is a key factor in shaping their brand image. Lawyer competence primarily includes professional knowledge, practical experience, communication skills, and ethical standards.

Firstly, professional knowledge and practical experience are the core of lawyer competence. Lawyers need to possess solid legal knowledge and extensive practical experience to deliver professional and efficient legal services to clients. These abilities and qualities not only affect the operational level of law firms but also directly influence their brand image and reputation.

Secondly, communication skills and ethical standards are also crucial aspects of lawyer competence. Lawyers need to have excellent communication skills and ethical integrity to build good relationships with clients, earning their trust and respect. These abilities and qualities are equally important for enhancing the brand image and reputation of law firms. In conclusion, service quality, brand image, and lawyer competence all play crucial roles in the development of law firms. Law firms need to focus on shaping their brand image and enhancing lawyer competence to improve their competitiveness and market position. Moreover, law firms should actively monitor market trends and changes in client demands, continuously adjusting and optimizing their service quality, brand image, and lawyer team structure to adapt to market changes and meet client needs.

Theory of Service Marketing 7Ps

With the continuous development of the service industry and increasing competition, traditional marketing theories have become inadequate to fully meet the demands of modern service sectors. In response to this, Booms and Bitner in 1981 expanded the traditional 4Ps marketing mix model by adding three new elements, thus creating the extended theory of 7Ps of service marketing (Zhang et al., 2019). The modern interpretation of the 7Ps theory includes Product, Service, Price, Place, Promotion, People, and Physical Evidence, as shown in Table 1. With the introduction and widespread acceptance of the 7Ps framework, research in service marketing theory has expanded into areas such as internal marketing, service culture, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and loyalty, total quality management, and core competencies of service enterprises (Hu & Li, 2019). Research in these areas represents new trends in the development of service marketing theory since the 1990s, reflecting the evolving dynamics of the service market.

Table 1: Meaning of the 7Ps of Services Marketing

Element	Content
Product	Product range, quality, performance, design, service
Price	Discounts, payment terms, perceived customer value, quality-price ratio, differentiation
Path	Location, distribution channels, scope of distribution
Promotion	Advertising, publicity, public relations, personnel promotion, image promotion
People	Attitude, Behaviour, Reliability, Communication, Customer Involvement, Negative Value
Physical Evidence	Environmental design, equipment and facilities
Process	Activity flow, customer engagement

Theory of Customer Satisfaction

Chen Hui conducted an in-depth analysis of customer satisfaction and client management at Yingke Law Firm (Foshan), focusing on various dimensions of legal service quality: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, customer care, and customer loyalty, through a customer satisfaction survey (Chen, 2019). The study focuses on the satisfaction with service quality at LY Law Firm in Heze, Shandong. It establishes customer satisfaction survey indicators based on five dimensions of service quality assessment. The research categorizes clients into three groups: loyalists, swing clients, and defectors. Finally, targeted recommendations are proposed to enhance customer satisfaction at the firm (Jiang, 2014). The customer satisfaction evaluation system in the telecommunications industry is divided into two parts: standard satisfaction and business processes (Zhang, 2014). The business processes include five major indicators: product, service, pricing, channel, and sales. An expert consulting agency has established a quality control evaluation system for health check-up institutions in Shanghai, which includes three primary indicators, ten secondary

indicators, and multiple tertiary indicators (Guo & Li, 2019). They analyzed insurance company customer satisfaction, constructing evaluation indicators and models validated by factor analysis to systematically assess customer satisfaction at an insurance company in Changsha (Guo & Chen, 2015).

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research method. Based on existing theoretical foundations and previous studies, the content of the questionnaire was confirmed, and the questionnaire was distributed and analyzed. Feedback from the data was used to adjust the questionnaire content, forming the final version of the questionnaire. SPSS was used to conduct reliability and validity analyses on the questionnaire data.

Table 2: Factors Influencing Client Satisfaction at the Law Firm

Variable	Measurement items	NO
Service Quality	1. Are you satisfied with the Law Society's approach to maximizing benefits?	Q1
	2. Are you satisfied with the protection of personal information privacy by the firm's lawyers?	Q2
	3. Are you satisfied that the firm keeps the evidence, case files, etc. intact?	Q3
	4. Can the attorney differentiate his or her services according to your actual situation?	Q4
	5. Can an attorney perform services at a time that is convenient for you?	Q5
	6. Were you satisfied with the length of time it took for your attorney to get the legal materials to you when you needed help?	Q6
	7. How satisfied are you with the lawyer's ability to put himself/herself in his/her shoes and solve problems?	Q7
Brand Image	1. How satisfied are you with the level of sophistication of the firm's legal services program for you?	Q8
	2. are you satisfied that administrators and attorneys value decorum?	Q9
	3. Are you satisfied with the firm's online legal content improvement?	Q10
	4. Are you satisfied with the clean and tidy environment of the law firm?	Q11
	5. Are you satisfied that the law firm has modern office equipment?	Q12
	6. Are you satisfied that the facilities in the law firm are compatible with the services provided?	Q13
Lawyer Capabilities	1. Are you satisfied with the professional competence of the law firm's lawyers?	Q14
	2. are you satisfied with the personalized attention the attorney can give?	Q15
	3. Are you satisfied with the lawyer's ability to understand needs?	Q16
	4. Are you satisfied with the quality of the individual lawyers of the firm?	Q17
	5. Are you satisfied with the efficient handling of the lawyer's differentiated services?	Q18
	6. Are you satisfied with the level of education and experience of lawyers?	Q19
	7. Are you satisfied with the attorney's problem solving and winning arguments?	Q20

This survey primarily targeted clients who had received services from Zhongtong Law Firm in Beijing within the past year. Combining the actual situation of the law firm with the five

dimensions of the model, 20 questions were designed to evaluate satisfaction, as shown in Table 2.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part covered the basic information of the clients, including the type of cases they selected, their social attributes, age, and personal income. The second part contained specific satisfaction-related questions, including service quality and brand image surveys of the law firm. The questions used a Likert scale to measure satisfaction levels: "1, 2, 3, 4, 5," corresponding to "very dissatisfied," "dissatisfied," "neutral," "satisfied," and "very satisfied."

Data Collection

The survey targeted clients who had previously cooperated with YY Law Firm. Given the characteristics of legal services, the questionnaire was distributed through three channels: email, WeChat, and face-to-face interactions. The distribution process spanned two and a half months.

Data collection is crucial in research. In this study, a total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, and 192 were returned. After reviewing the responses and excluding invalid questionnaires, the final number of valid questionnaires was 188, resulting in an effective response rate of 94%. The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS.

Data Analysis

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measurement with the variable it aims to measure. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1. A value of 0.6 is considered acceptable, values greater than 0.7 indicate good reliability, and values greater than 0.9 are regarded as very high internal consistency of the scale. As shown in Table 3, all values are greater than 0.7, and the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.846, indicating good reliability in this study.

Table 3: Variable Reliability Tests

Variable	Cronbach Alpha	N of Items
Service Quality	0.899	7
Brand Image	0.863	6
Lawyer Capabilities	0.775	7

Validity analysis examines the relationship between actual scores and expected scores, essentially determining whether the actual scores measure the intended construct. The KMO value for the factor analysis is 0.872, and Bartlett's test of sphericity is statistically significant ($P < 0.001$), indicating that the data is suitable for factor analysis, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: KMO and Bartlett's test

Kaiser -Meyer -Olkin Sampling Adequacy Measures		0.872
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. CARTES	1345.78
	df	276
	organizations	0.000

Through factor analysis of all items, three effective factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were identified: service quality, brand image, and lawyer capabilities. The item classification and the preset scale are consistent, indicating good structural validity of the scale and meeting expectations. The explanation degrees of the three factors for the scale's covered information are 15.266%, 10.589%, and 10.413%, respectively, with a cumulative explanation degree of 56.653%, which is greater than 50%. This indicates that these three factors can effectively explain the content of the scale. as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Validation Factor Analysis (CFA)

unit	Total Variance Explained							
	Initial eigenvalue		The extraction of square loads			Rotation of the square load		
	variance %	Accrue %	total	Percentage of variance	Accrue %	total	Percentage of variance	accrue%
1	21.623	21.623	4.656	22.523	22.523	3.732	15.266	22.334
2	12.017	33.640	3.104	12.017	34.640	2.721	10.589	88.615
3	9.753	42.393	2.188	9.753	43.393	2.833	10.413	56.653

Results

Correlation analysis using Pearson correlation coefficient assesses linear relationships. A positive value indicates a positive correlation, while a negative value indicates a negative correlation. The range is between -1 and 1, with larger absolute values indicating stronger correlation: values exceeding 0.4 signify a relatively strong positive correlation, and values exceeding 0.6 indicate a strong positive correlation. The specific analysis results are detailed in Table 6. From these results, it is evident that client satisfaction with the service quality, brand image, and lawyer capabilities of the law firm all show statistically significant correlations.

Table 6: Correlation between variables (Pearson correlation matrix)

Variable	Service Quality	Brand Image	Lawyer Capabilities	Client Satisfaction
Service Quality	1			
Brand Image	.591**	1		
Lawyer Capabilities	.551**	.665**	1	
Client Satisfaction	.572**	.692**	.675**	1

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

Therefore, based on the data analysis results, when studying the factors influencing client satisfaction with law firms, the service quality of law firms has a significant positive impact on client satisfaction, supporting hypothesis H1. Brand image has a significant positive impact on client satisfaction, supporting hypothesis H2. Lawyer competence has a significant positive impact on client satisfaction, supporting hypothesis H3.

Discussion

The Beijing Zhongtong Law Firm focuses on analyzing from three aspects: service quality, brand image, and lawyer competence. Based on the satisfaction survey results, it proposes improvement measures addressing the root causes of key influencing factors. These measures include visualizing case handling processes, upgrading hardware facilities and promotional methods, standardizing case handling procedures, and developing client management plans. These actions aim to improve client satisfaction amidst the current downturn in satisfaction levels at Beijing Zhongtong Law Firm. It is advisable to align these strategies with the actual operational status of the law firm to effectively address and resolve issues contributing to low client satisfaction levels.

Conclusions

1). The service quality of a law firm has a positive impact on client satisfaction.

As a technical knowledge service industry with strong social attributes, lawyers trade legal knowledge as their commodity through their expression. It's crucial for a lawyer's overall competence to ensure that every client with a dream of winning feels satisfied upon their initial contact with the law firm. Beyond professional needs, understanding clients' "business goals" and "value demands," and demonstrating empathy by providing personalized services are key.

2). The brand image of a law firm positively influences client satisfaction.

Corporate Identity System (CIS) involves systematic transformation of a firm's self-awareness, service orientation, work systems, and supervisory mechanisms to create a distinctive corporate image. It encompasses concept identification, behavior, and visual identity systems. Firstly, a law firm designs aesthetically pleasing names and logos that highlight "harmony among people." Secondly, it establishes consistent branding across various elements like interior decor, briefcases, and lawyer business cards. Thirdly, it rewrites legal texts using uniform terminology to achieve both aesthetic appeal and practicality. Finally, the firm establishes a web presence through websites, public accounts, and video channels to enhance visibility and attract more potential clients.

3). The competence of lawyers at a law firm positively affects client satisfaction.

With the increasing legal awareness and civic legal literacy in society today, the demands placed on lawyers are rising. Specialization within legal professions continues to evolve, with roles such as negotiation lawyers, litigation lawyers, and documentation lawyers becoming more specialized. This necessitates continuous improvement in lawyers' professional qualifications and ongoing learning to meet the demands of the profession. The competitiveness of lawyers is derived from their ability to continually learn and adapt.

In conclusion, this study aims to enhance client service satisfaction at the law firm, stabilize market share, strengthen competitive advantages, and promote long-term, stable, and healthy

development of the firm. Additionally, it seeks to serve as a reference and guide for other law firms aiming to improve client service satisfaction.

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