

A STUDY OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN GREEK POSTAL SERVICES

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Abstract

Postal services face many challenges, issues including competition, privatization, deregulation, liberalization, technology and substitution from electronic and digital services. In particular deregulation and the economic crisis in Greece make it important for postal service providers to take steps to maintain revenues and market presence. Customer satisfaction becomes critical in that respect. This paper investigates customer buying behavior, priorities and preferences with regard to postal services available in the Greek market. In particular, it investigates the extent to which customers are aware of different types of postal services available in the Greek market and identifies the type of services which are more appealing to them. It also measures the extent to which customers are satisfied by the postal services they use, as well as, post-buying attitudes and complaints. A semi-structured questionnaire will be employed to collect the data, which will be analyzed statistically to achieve highly significant conclusions where possible. Section one reviews the relevant literature and develops the hypotheses. Section two sets out the methodology. Section three analyses the data collected. Section four presents concluding remarks, implications for management and suggestions for further research.

Keywords: Services, Postal Services, Customer Satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of services over the past decade has been remarkable. Services are increasingly attracting attention from many authors. Nowadays in competitive service environment people who have the role of marketer in businesses are seeking customer satisfaction in order to create and improve relationships between businesses and new or existing customers (Webster and Sundaram, 2009, p.105). Customers are seen as the basis of a company's profitability (Pishgar, Dezhkam, Ghanbarpoor, Shabani & Ashoori, 2013, p. 135).

Little research has been carried out on customer satisfaction in Greek postal services up to now. The objective of this paper is to seek and measure the level of customer satisfaction and services which rendered in the postal industry in Greece. Some researchers have paid attention to service quality in Greek postal services. Research on the quality of postal services is conducted every year by the Hellenic Telecommunications and Posts commission (EETT), (ELTA) and the European commission (Wik-consult, 2013 p.p. 46-49), generally addressed to internal market and services and also to some non academic journals. Past studies relate the quality of postal services, as perceived by customers, with their satisfaction from specific features of these services.

During the summer of 2007, financial crisis initiated from the United States of America. In Greece, during 2014, the country is still experiencing a financial status that has an impact in Greek postal market. Under circumstances of deregulation and liberalization of the Greek postal market, arises the need to reexplore or to rethink the position of postal company in relation to its customers.

The major points of difference compared to previous studies are, firstly Liberalization of the Greek postal market from 2013 and secondary new innovations and services which are introduced by postal services, in relation to economic conditions. This study indicates the level of customer satisfaction from the offered postal services and additionally, which are the most important criteria that influence their satisfaction, and how

important were in customers decisions.

At this point, it was examined the correlation between demographic characteristics of the sample (occupation, age, sex, education level) and their preferences for specific postal services. Moreover, as the research was conducted it was investigated if customers used or not the Greek postal services. In the positive case, furthermore, it was investigated thoroughly to what extent they used the postal services, and the criteria in their purchasing behavior. Also, the consumers' priorities and preferences about postal services transactions were examined. Thereafter, it was scrutinized their post-purchasing behavior (future use and recommendation to others) and on the other hand, postal market problems were investigated and how the postal services managed customer complaints (comparing customers' perceptions of service elements as: accessibility, tangibles, reliability, assurance, empathy and complaint handling). Finally, correlations between the variables and the reliability of the sample were analyzed.

2. Literature review

2.1. Services

Services are part of our life from a long time. Services are increasingly attracting from academicians as well as practitioners (Rajeswari, Sunmista, 2011, p.2). During the past three decades, literature on services has grown. There are many different definitions of services in literature. Definitions of services focused on the difference between products and services but the purpose of both are same, to satisfy human needs and wants (Raza, Siddiquei, Awan & Bukhari, 2012, p. 789). Businesses offer products for sale to customers but selling a combination of products and services. Sometimes services constitute a big percent of total value of the product. For instance, service is an activity or series of activities, take place in interactions between the customer and the service employees or physical resources or goods or systems of the service provider, which are provider as solutions to customer problems (Gronroos, 1990, p.27). (American Marketing Association 1960, p.21) defines marketing as activities, benefits of satisfaction which are offered for sale or provided in connection with sale. A service may be defined as a change in the condition of a person, or of a good belonging to some economic unit, which is brought about as the result of the activity of some other economic unit, with the prior agreement of the former person or economic unit (Hill, 1977, p. 318). Moreover (Edvardsson, 1997 p.33) views a service as part of the wider concept of the product.

2.2. Postal services

Generally postal services are related to delivery of parcels, letters, documents and packages. Also postal transportation process consists following activities, (collection, input sorting, transportation, output sorting & distribution). (Noordin, Hasnan & Osman, 2012, p.205). Postal industry used of physical communication in the past or transportation process. Postal services face many challenges in the past decade, specifically: Threat from electronic communication, the competition from express and parcel carriers with the use of electronic communication seem to be a major challenge for the postal services (Mohan, Maheswara Reddy, 2012, p.122), the rapid growing of the e-commerce, the growth of e- services, the introduction of the digital services, the change in post offices operations hours, the economy crisis during the 2010's. New postal service has substituted traditional post. The conceptual framework of postal services from literature review led to the following definition.

Services related to letters	Services consisting of pick-up, transport and delivery services of letters, newspapers, journals, periodicals, brochures, leaflets and similar printed matters, whether for domestic or foreign destinations, as rendered by the national postal administration.
Services related to parcels	Services consisting of pick-up, transport and delivery services of parcels and packages, whether for domestic or foreign destinations, as rendered by the national postal administration.
Counter services (in post office)	Services rendered at post office counters, e.g. sales of postage stamps, handling of certified or registered letters and packets, and other post office counter services.
Other services	Poste restante services, E- services, digital services, mailbox rental services & postal services not elsewhere classified.

(WTO, 2010 p.4)

Availability of postal services is different in countries. In Greece, postal sector during the past years, presents dynamic growth and intense competition, fact that lead to more flexible & attractive services for consumers (e.g. Hybrid mail, GIS services, camera phone postcards, Quick response code), (EETT, 2012). The postal service comes under the Ministry of infrastructure, transport and networks.

2.3. Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is the fundamental to the marketing concept (Kurniawan, 2010, p. 83). Customer satisfaction is a business term, which identify that the product or service which supplied to customers how much satisfying them (Naveed, Akhtar, Rehman Cheema, 2012, p.64). Different authors use different criteria, elements, characteristics when discussing about customer satisfaction. For example authors examine factors that people consider when they buy something. Generally, customer satisfaction, by a definition is a positive feeling experienced by an individual after using a good or a service (Delafrooz, Taleghani, Taghineghad, Nademi, 2013, p.115). Moreover customer satisfaction is an important factor in future tendency to make a purchase, also sometimes satisfied customers talks probably enthusiastically about their positive experience, or their buying, or use of a particular service with other people, this will lead to positive advertising (Delafrooz, Taleghani, Taghineghad, Nademi, 2013, p.115), (Mistry, 2013, p. 133). Customer satisfaction provides a link between purchase and post-purchase phenomena in terms of attitude change and repeat purchase (Lau, Cheung, Lam, Chu, 2013, p. 268). On the other hand businesses if they want to protect or gain market shares, they will need to overcome competitors by offering high quality product or service to ensure customer satisfaction, furthermore customer's feelings and beliefs affect their satisfaction level. Finally if customers are satisfied by services, the result is that, they will be loyal on business and it could also mean higher profits and higher market share for business (Al Karim, Chowdhury, 2014, p. 3, 4).

2.4. Relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction

Service quality is the function of customer's expectations and perception about the service and associated with customer levels of satisfaction and intention to repatronize the service (Rajeswari, Sunmista, 2011, p.2). Quality and customer satisfaction have long been recognized as playing a crucial role for success and survival in today's competitive market (Al Karim, Chowdhury, 2014, p. 4). Many researchers and a big number of studies have identified dimensions of service quality on customer satisfaction (Dehghan, 2006, p.38), (Munusamy, Chelliah & Wai Mun, 2010, p.400), (Kurniawan, 2010, p. 47) (Lau, Cheung, Lam, Chu, 2013, p. 268), (Mistry, 2013, p. 136), (Al Karim, Al Karim, Chowdhury, 2014 p.5), (Taleghani, Taghineghad, Nademi, 2013, p.116). Relatively few studies have investigated customer satisfaction from service quality in postal sector (Gupta & Gupta, 2012, p. 232-236) and European commission studies. Also in Greece only Hellenic communication & post commission has studies about customer satisfaction in Greece.

This research has seven generally dimensions which are stated as follows:

Variables	Measurement items
Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Assurance	Including security and knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
Empathy	Communication, understanding the customer and caring and individualized attention that the firm provides to its customers
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Complaint handling	Problems solve by the best way, Time response
Access	Number of post offices, Location is easy to reach, Parking

Based on the above studies the research framework is following: (Hypotheses Development)

- H1: Tangible has positive relationship with customer satisfaction
- H2: Reliability has positive relationship with customer satisfaction
- H3: Assurance has positive relationship with customer satisfaction
- H4: Empathy has positive relationship with customer satisfaction

- H5: Responsiveness has positive relationship with customer satisfaction
- H6: Complaint handling has positive relationship with customer satisfaction
- H7: Access has positive relationship with customer satisfaction

3. Research Methodology

In this section of research data collection methods and respondents are described.

Research design and sample

The methodology used in obtaining information about customer satisfaction in postal services conducted at a sample of the general consumer population. The survey questionnaire is design and distributed to target respondent randomly. The target population for this study is the local postal services customers in Greece. In this study participated people who have use Greek postal services. Questionnaire is design to apply to a sample of population which answered in general questions about (e.g. Gender, Age group, Education level, Occupation, Location) and postal service characteristics specifically. Questions were either multiple choice or answerable on a 5- point scale (from 1 to 5).

Data collection

Data was collected with the help of questionnaire as a tool. The questionnaire distributed to respondents from May to June 2014. There were 80 questionnaires that were distributed. Total 60 questionnaires were received. The response rate was 75 percent. Sample was taken from many regions of Greece. The survey questionnaires were conducted via face to face interviews plus email so as to ensure that the survey encompasses a broad geographical area. Other incomplete questionnaires were discarded.

Statistical analysis

Statistical package (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collection in this study. Frequency and percentage are the type of analysis that being used in this research. For data processing, statistical techniques were used for different purposes.

Data analysis

Collected data was analyzed to determine how the sample of the research responds to the items under investigation. The demographic characteristics of respondents on the various parameters like Gender, Age, Education level, Occupation, Location are represented as follows:

Table1: Demographical analysis

Characteristics		Frequencies	%
Gender	Male	24	40
	Female	36	60
Age group	Under 20	7	11.7
	21-30	14	23.3
	31-40	16	26.7
	41-50	15	25
	Over 50	8	13.3
Education level	Primary education	0	0
	Secondary education	16	26.7
	Bachelor degree	32	53.3
	Master/ Doctoral	12	20
Occupation	Public services	24	40
	Private sector	7	11.7
	Military (Army, Navy, Air force, Police)	6	10
	Student	7	11.7
	Independent business	7	11.7
	Farmer	1	1.7
	Other	8	13.3

Location	Macedonia/ Thessaly/Thrace	3	5
	Aegean islands/ Crete	35	58.3
	Peloponnese	5	8.3
	Central Greece/ Athens	15	25
	West Greece/ Epirus/ Ionian islands	2	3.3
	Other	0	0

Approximately 40% of the occupied in public services and 60% were female. Furthermore, majority of the respondents hold bachelor degree. Moreover, majority of the respondents used post office for their transactions and preferred safety as 1st priority 83.3%. Regarding location, the majority of respondents lived in the Aegean islands and Crete.

Table 2: Customer behavior and economic crisis

Attitudes/ Priorities/ Preferences		Frequencies	%
Postal services (which have used)	Letter	57	95
	Newspapers or flyers distribution	52	86.7
	Parcels	59	98.3
	Post office counter services	48	80
	Other postal services	23	38.3
Buying behavior (importance of factor)	Reputation	13	21.7
	Safety	43	71.7
	Timeline (reliability)	41	68.3
	Open Hours	16	26.7
	Service inside post office	27	45
	Service outside post office	17	28.3
	Price	38	63.3
Transaction (place)	Environmental protection	15	25
	Post office	29	48.3
	Internet	19	31.7
Priorities (very important)	Both	12	20
	Access	0	0
	Ownership	2	3.3
	Innovation	1	1.7
	Price	7	11.7
Contact information	Safety	50	83.3
	Post office	10	16.7
	Electronic website	46	76.7
Frequency of Problems	Catalogue	4	6.7
	Access	8	13.3
	Staff	8	13.3
	Website	6	10
	Postman	15	25
How to make complaints	Call center	9	15
	Oral in Post office	29	48.3
	By phone	24	40
	Complaint form	7	11.7
	I don't say	12	20
Attitude about during economic crisis (Agree & Strongly agree)	I don't have	5	8.3
	Less Transactions	22	36.7
	I search more in order to find cheaper prices between companies	38	63.3
Future use	I prefer more electronic website transactions	32	53.3
	More	10	16.7
	Less	4	6.7
Recommendation to others	Same as today	46	76.7
	Yes	55	91.7
	No	5	8.3

It appears in the table 2 above, minority of respondents (38.3%) have used other postal services (e.g. post restante, digital services, E services, mailbox rental services). Safety, timeline (reliability) and prices are more important factors. Additionally, safety is the first priority for customers (83.3%) and majority of sample (76.7%) prefers website contact information. On the other hand there is a balance between factors about frequency of problems. The best way for making complaints is oral in post office that which is adequately explained because majority of the respondents want transactions by post office (48.3%). Moreover, the result of economic crisis is that majority of respondents search more in order to find cheaper prices between companies and also prefer more electronic website transactions. Finally, customers will want to use postal services in the future (same as today 76.7%) and they recommend it to the others (91.7%).

Findings and Analysis

This section provides the analysis of the results. The analysis is conducted using statistical tools and instruments. The techniques used in the paper include Reliability assessment, Descriptive statistics, ranking of factors affect satisfaction, correlation analysis, regression analysis, chi-square test.

Reliability assessment

In order to prove the internal reliability of this research, this study has performed Cronbach's Alpha Test of Reliability using questionnaire variables. According to (Al Karim & Chowdhury, 2014, p.5), Cronbach's alpha should be 0.700 or above to be acceptable. In this study, the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0,800 > 0.700 (greater than standard value), so it can be conducted that the measures used in this study are valid and highly reliable.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,800	,689	57

Descriptive statistics analysis

Table 4 has shown that the statistical description of dimensions where it has found that postal services customers perceived. Reliability (with the highest mean scores M=16.2000) to be the most dominant dimension. On the other hand complaints handling (with the lowest mean scores M=5.5833) was perceived on the overall as least dimension in Greek postal services.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangible	60	8,6167	2,06744
Reliability	60	16,2000	2,88068
Assurance	60	13,6167	2,96929
Empathy	60	15,3667	3,00827
Responsiveness	60	11,9167	3,17454
Complaintshandling	60	5,5833	1,82536
Access	60	7,1667	2,60486
Comfort	60	6,0000	1,77554
Valid N (listwise)	60		

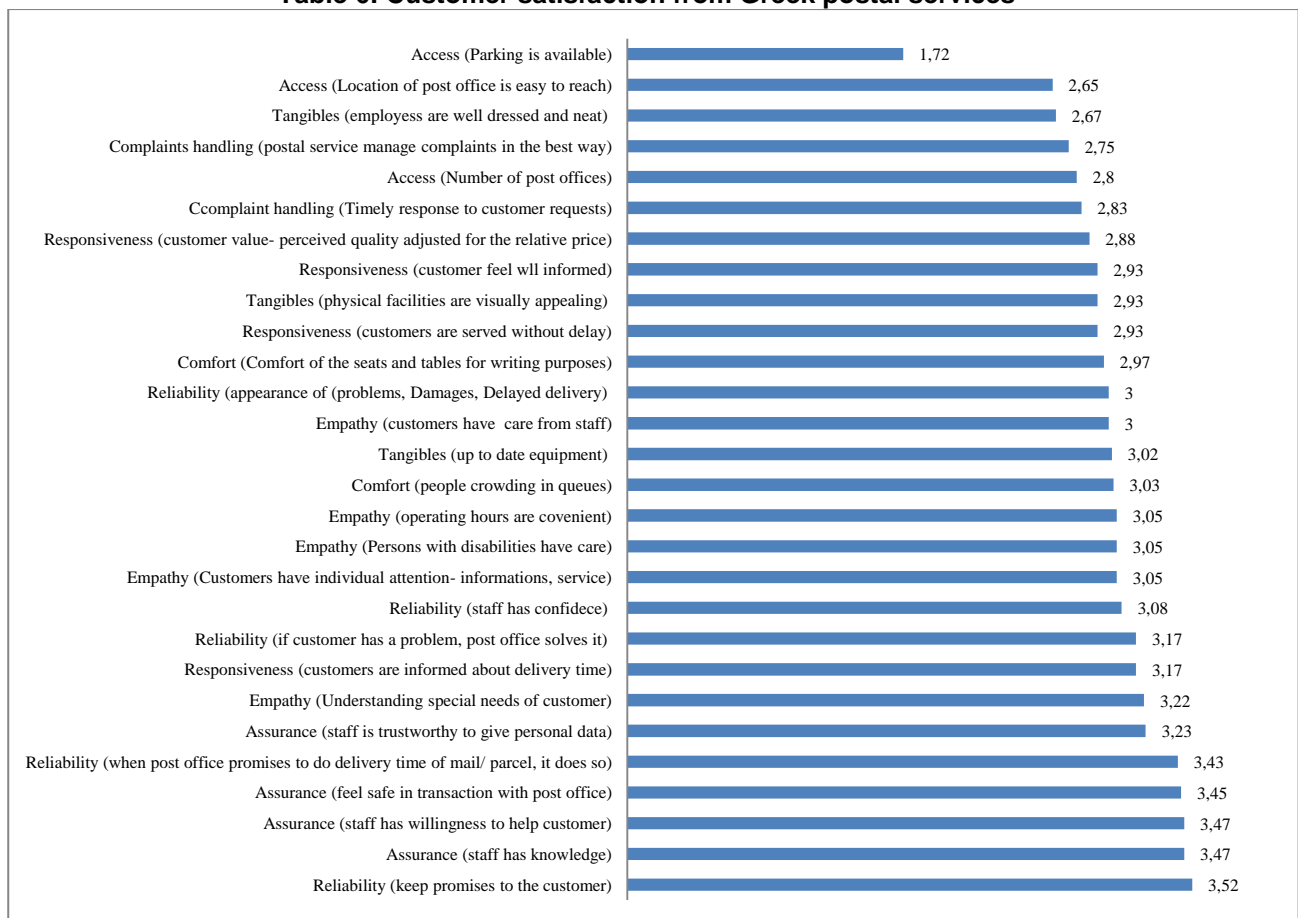
Customer Satisfaction from postal services

Table 5: Ranking of factors affecting satisfaction

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Delivery time	60	3,38	,846
Delivery frequency	60	3,18	,748
Range of products/ services	60	3,13	,791
Problems handling	60	3,02	,911
Waiting time	60	2,93	,972
Services informations	60	2,85	1,005
Prices	60	2,58	1,013
Valid N (listwise)	60		

Table 5 calculates the Median and the standard deviation for several factors affecting customer satisfaction in Greek postal services. It shows the results of individual items in a multiple item scale. Order the variables in the table (display order) from highest to lowest. The most important factor is delivery time and the least important factor is prices.

Table 6: Customer satisfaction from Greek postal services



1= Completely Dissatisfied..... 5= Completely Satisfied

Descriptive results appear in table 6. Included in the table is the mean of each variable used. Table shows to what extent has service met customers expectations. According to table, respondents had to answer 28 questions about (tangible, reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, complaints handling, access, and comfort). Customers are very satisfied with assurance and reliability characteristics. Reliability (keep promises to the customers, 3.52), has the highest score. On the contrary access issues (availability of parking and post office location) have lowers score.

Cross tabulation analysis

Cross tabulation shows if there is an association between two variables. Chi square test shows if any association is statistically significant.

Table 7. Cross tabulations

	Chi- Square Test	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Reliability* Occupation	Pearson Chi-square	119,978	72	,000
Assurance* Gender	Pearson Chi-square	20,774	11	0,036
Empathy* Occupation	Pearson Chi-square	113,155	72	0,01
Complaints handling* Occupation	Pearson Chi-square	63,529	42	0,018

From association between demographical and independent variables only these are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) and χ^2 has very high score.

Correlation analysis

This analysis shows if there is a correlation between two metric variables. Correlation can be weak (close to 0) or strong (close to 1), also can be positive (variables move in the same direction) or negative (variables move in opposite directions).

Table 8. Correlations

Assurance* Reliability	Pearson correlation	0,792	Strong
Responsiveness* Empathy	Pearson correlation	0,752	Strong
Complaints handling * Empathy	Pearson correlation	0,714	Strong
Responsiveness* Complaints handling	Pearson correlation	0,705	Strong
Economic crisis (more electronic transactions)* Assurance	Pearson correlation	0,293	Weak
Economic crisis (more electronic transactions)* Reliability	Pearson correlation	0,243	Weak

From the correlations analysis, Table 8 shows strongest correlations. Table 8 presents highest positive strong correlations.

Regression analysis

Regressions will determine the significant relationship between dependent (customer satisfaction) and independent variables (Tangible, Reliability, Assurance, Empathy, Responsiveness, Complaints handling, and Access) and strength of the relationship (Kurniawan, 2010, p. 40).

Table 9. Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
1	,678 ^a	,460	,450	11,39101	TANGIBLE
1	,826 ^a	,682	,676	8,74077	RELIABILITY
1	,803 ^a	,645	,639	9,23392	ASSURANSE
1	,860 ^a	,740	,735	7,90396	EMPATHY
1	,853 ^a	,727	,723	8,09202	RESPONSIVENESS
1	,821 ^a	,674	,669	8,84604	COMPLAINTS HANDLING
1	,604 ^a	,364	,353	12,35553	ACCESS

Table10. Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	41,048	6,353		6,461	,000
	Tangible	5,039	,717	,678	7,025	,000

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	13,115	6,498		2,018	,048
	Reliability	4,404	,395	,826	11,150	,000

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	27,880	5,640		4,943	,000
	Assurance	4,156	,405	,803	10,264	,000

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	16,956	5,354		3,167	,002
	Empathy	4,393	,342	,860	12,844	,000

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	35,277	4,090		8,625	,000
	Responsiveness	4,128	,332	,853	12,439	,000

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	45,878	3,703		12,389	,000
	Complaintshandling	6,911	,631	,821	10,954	,000

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	58,951	4,704		12,531	,000
	Access	3,560	,618	,604	5,766	,000

The correlation analysis is showing that customer satisfaction is correlated with each variable and has a positive and highly significant relationship (R values Table 9). These relationships are describing that each variable is affected by other variables that show the acceptance of hypotheses by the respondents. Table 10 shows coefficient of seven variables and customer satisfaction. Beta value is describing that if seven independent variables change one unit, dependent variable will change as shown in Table. In the last column of table 10, the standard Error (0,000) is showing high significance of each independent variable on customer satisfaction. From tables 9, 10 above resulting seven hypotheses become accepted.

As shown in tables 9, 10 hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, and H7) are supported.

- In H1, Tangible has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=5.039$) ($t=7.025$)
- In H2, Reliability has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=4.404$) ($t=11.150$)
- In H3, Assurance has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=4.156$) ($t=10.264$)
- In H4, Empathy has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=4.393$) ($t=12.844$)
- In H5, Responsiveness has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=4.128$) ($t=12.439$)
- In H6, Complaints handling has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=6.911$) ($t=10.954$)
- In H7, Access has a positive significant direct effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta=3.560$) ($t=5.766$)

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted with purpose of measuring customer satisfaction in Greek postal services. It is tried to investigate the relationship how postal services characteristics affect customer satisfaction. The primary objective of this research was to analyze consumer views about postal services provided. Seven hypotheses were developed on the bases of literature review. The sample size and the number of definite customers are limited. The data was collected through convenience sampling method. For getting data, questionnaire was used. The responses were analyzed through Excel & SPSS software by using Pearson's correlation, cross tabulations, Reliability assessment and regression method.

Firstly, frequencies of demography are normalized. Furthermore, safety, timeline (reliability) and prices affect customer behavior. Big percent of customers use Greek post offices. Safety is priority for customers. Delivery time, delivery frequencies and services availability have important role in customer decisions. The research study has shown that independent variables have a very important role in making customer satisfied.

This research highlights the existence of relationship between independent and dependent variable, should be noted that the study helps postal operators to choose properly the elements of services. The value addition in this kind of study is that Tangible and Complaints handling influence more than the other variables customer satisfaction in Greek postal services. These results indicate a need for the postal operators to concentrate their efforts on improving factors in order to raise the level of customer satisfaction.

Suggestion for future research

The sample group consists of only 60 respondents in future a more strong investigation is needed to reach a strong conclusion.

Future research should be conducted to measure customer satisfaction in Greek postal services in order to further investigate potential differences in customer satisfaction between areas or cities or remote places (e.g. urban area, rural area, insular area)

Further research should be extended to study the impact of information technology especially the Internet usage and new services (e services, digital) on the customer satisfaction of postal services in Greece.

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