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# **Impact of Antecedents on Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study researches the impact of antecedents of customer satisfaction in business translations. The detailed review of extant studies had revealed that there was a paucity of studies that specifically dwelt on customer satisfaction in the business translation industry. As such its antecedents were not clearly identified, and therefore, their impact was yet to be studied. The study made use of multi-phase mixed methods research. The first phase was qualitative, where select industry experts were interviewed to validate the initial research framework that had been prepared on the basis of the literature review. The second was quantitative, where data was collected using questionnaires, and the data thus collected was analyzed using SPSS software and its PROCESS macro used to assess any presence of mediation. The third phase was qualitative, wherein a focus group was conducted, and the results analyzed to yield more insights on the results of the analysis undertaken in the previous phase. The results indicate that perceived quality and perceived value are both antecedent to the customer satisfaction, and although initial results from the first phase interviews suggested the presence of mediation, detailed quantitative analysis clearly suggested otherwise. Further studies in this area could, if planned accordingly, and with larger samples, explore other possible factors (adj R sq being 0.65) that may be influencing the customer satisfaction in business translations.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, business translations, antecedents, perceived quality, perceived value, multi-phase mixed method research, quantitative research, qualitative research, focus group

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## **1. Introduction**

Business translations, as an industry, is growing. Worldwide revenues are many billions of US Dollars, projected to reach close to 15 billion US Dollars by 2027. Customer satisfaction has been the subject of myriads of studies (eg., Ogiemwonyi et al., 2020, Leninkumar, 2019, Choi and Kim, 2013). Similarly, the industry of business translations has undergone a number of studies – including a SERVQUAL-based study on translations (Yao & Yang, 2021), on the subject of customer satisfaction in business translations, there is a real paucity of research. Further, businesses must necessarily be oriented towards customer satisfaction, and hence, increasingly, more and more companies are adopting customer satisfaction as a key performance indicator (Cengiz, 2010). The primary target of this research was to analyze and discover the primary antecedents of customer satisfaction in business translation industry and assess their respective weightages. A multi-phase mixed methods research paradigm was employed. To undertake this research, in the first instance, a thorough review of extant literature was carried out, both on customer satisfaction and its antecedents, as well as on business translations. This provided the basic framework, on the basis of which an initial research model was formulated. Interviews were initially carried out with select industry experts to validate this initial model, and based on the insights received from the experts, the initial research model was adjusted. Next, questionnaires were sent to collect data, and the data thus received was analyzed using SPSS, which included using its PROCESS macro to check for any mediation. Regression analysis was used to develop a model for customer satisfaction in business translations [CSAT-BIZTRANS]. Subsequently, a small focus group was carried out, and the results analyzed, to yield more information on the results of the analysis carried out in the previous phase. The results of this study indicate that perceived quality and perceived value are the primary antecedents of customer satisfaction in business translation.

### ***1.1 Customer Satisfaction***

Customer satisfaction is pivotal for businesses, for their overall health, and to ensure that they can gain "competitive advantage" (Cengiz, 2010). Researchers down the years have studied customer satisfaction at length (Gaudenzi et al., 2020; Leninkumar, 2019; Abdullah et al., 2014; Choi and Kim, 2013). Despite that, customer satisfaction is still the holy grail of academic researchers, myriad studies on it being undertaken in the past and continuing till this day. Customer satisfaction is highly subjective. It is a construct, extremely personal and impacted a lot by the customer's expectations, and can be considered to be the extent to which an individual customer reckons that a provider of services or goods has been successful in satisfying customer requirements; it may also be noted that customer satisfaction is not intrinsic to a customer or for a service or goods, but rather it is a function of the relation between a customer and the provider of goods or services. Further, customer satisfaction may be deemed to be the end-result of a psychological

process. This process itself consists of multiple steps and refers to all the activities, undertaken, all the steps Customer satisfaction thus indicates that there has to be a target that the consumer would like to have, the meeting of this aim can only be assessed by comparing with a norm, and that this assessment of the satisfaction depends on the intercession of two or more catalysts: a result and a norm for reference (Cengiz, 2010).

Customer Satisfaction has been researched extensively over the last two decades, across multiple industries. Service quality was found to be an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Al Hakim and Maamari, 2017; Bashir et al., 2020). It does not follow however that dimensions of service quality are generalisable across industries or across cultures - to the contrary, they need to be customised or adapted (Al Hakim and Maamari, 2017). This is in line with the generic finding that the dimensions of service quality and the determinants of customer satisfaction that matter overall, depended on the specific context - context here referring to both culture (or geography) as well as to industry. Quality is always a critical antecedent of customer satisfaction. However, it must also be appreciated that in many cases, the constructs traditionally considered in assessing customer satisfaction, like quality and value, are often quite inadequate to fully explain customer satisfaction (Al-Ali et al., 2015; Rabo and Ang, 2018), and other factors like price (Rana et al., 2014; Limakrisna and Ali, 2015) may be considered. Perceived value, along with perceived quality, has a significant effect on customer satisfaction - the dimensions may change depending on the industry and the geography, but in general, the construct has a direct impact (Alshibly, 2015). Also, employees are often overlooked in such studies but there is a lot of literature that suggests otherwise - employee satisfaction leads to improved employee performance, which in turn also affects customer satisfaction (Antoney et al., 2016).

Customer satisfaction has no significant relationship with monetary promotions (Hong and Slevitch, 2018). This shows that while money is important, there are other factors more important. Different factors of service quality impact customer satisfaction to different extents - which will depend on the specific case (Singh et al., 2019; Al Hakim and Maamari, 2017; Hung et al., 2014). In the specific context of e-commerce - all the more relevant in today's times - organisations working in this space should look to continually embellish their products & service offerings (Wilson and Christella, 2019); in addition, gender may have a moderating effect on the influence of website knowledge on e-customer satisfaction (Pereira et al., 2016). Customer satisfaction is also influenced by innovation which is no longer an optional facet of organisations but almost a mandatory aspect, and it also has a moderating role on the influence of value on customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers may not necessarily recommend a product to friends and family (Udofia, 2019). Trust is another key antecedent of customer satisfaction that may be considered, especially when one is talking about an industry like banking (Mahaputra, 2017); another factor which is worth considering is security which has a negative correlation to customer satisfaction in the banking domain (Murugiah and Akgam, 2015). As has been already mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction is highly dependent on their expectations - which is also factored in by the SERVQUAL scale commonly used to measure service quality. Customer Satisfaction is also directly influenced by the mindset of an organisation. Its DNA - to use a metaphor - can be gauged from its mission statement. The same mission statement, incidentally, has a direct correlation with customer satisfaction as found in an interesting study by Nwachukwu and Zufan (2017) - this particular study was in the telecom sector, future studies in other industries may clear the picture if this inference can be extrapolated to other industries. Emotional responses and reputation are among the additional significant factors that have come up and these could be further studied by other researchers. In some manufacturing sectors, whilst perceived quality and perceived value are both antecedents of customer satisfaction, the latter exerts a stronger influence on customer satisfaction (Samudro et al., 2020)

## 1.2 Perceived Quality and Perceived Value

*Perceived quality* contrasts with objective quality (Susilowati and Sugandini, 2018). Just like quality itself, it lends itself to myriad definitions. Yet, it is necessary to have a cogent and consistent definition, at least an operational one. It has been defined variously by different researchers, but for the purpose of this analysis, the definition that will be considered is one of the earliest ones - it is "how a user assesses a "product's overall excellence or superiority" [Zeithaml (1988)]. Similarly, for *perceived value* too, one does not find too many operational definitions. A definition that may be referred to defines value as "... the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988). This definition proffers the postulate that perceived value is a one-dimensional construct, which may be evaluated just by checking with interviewees to assess numerically the value they receive through their purchases. Both *perceived quality* and *perceived value* are highly subjective parameters, dependent entirely on the perceptions of the customers. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to understand perception itself. Perception may be deemed to be a "process of acquiring and processing of information" (Démuth, 2013). As is evident from this concise explanation, perception, by its very definition, is inherently not objective, depending as it does, on individuals' unique manners of acquiring and processing information.

From an elementary perusal of the myriad studies on customer satisfaction, it is quite clear that perceived quality and perceived value are critical to customer satisfaction [major frameworks like the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI) having acknowledged that through their frameworks], it may be useful to observe what the relation between these two pivotal constructs has been noted as in studies done hitherto. A glance at the ACSI and ECSI models imply that perceived quality influences perceived value. On the contrary, a few researchers found in their study that perceived value was one of the factors that influenced perceived quality (Susilowati and Sugandini, 2018). A few others noted that perceived quality and perceived value are both antecedents of customer satisfaction, without being related to each other (e.g. Ibrahim and Borhan, 2020). This does imply that the relation between these two vital constructs could well depend on the context, or at least on the industry. If the latter holds true, it would be imperative to at least start somewhere (as there has been, as has been mentioned earlier on numerous occasions, little prior research on customer satisfaction in business translations). As a starting point, for the purpose of this study, the relation indicated in the ACSI and the ECSI would be assumed i.e., *perceived value is directly impacted by perceived quality*. Also, as has been mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction has been the subject of myriad studies down the years. In a large number of them (e.g., Ibrahim and Borhan (2020)) perceived quality and perceived value have been found to be antecedents of customer satisfaction. In fact, similar conclusions have been arrived at by almost all researchers, whoever worked

on and with these constructs. The same can be observed in the ACSI and ECSI models. Hence, for the purpose of this study, as a starting point, it is being considered, that *perceived quality and perceived value directly impact customer satisfaction*.

### 1.3 Business Translations

Translation has myriad challenges, the first of which is that it has no unambiguous definition (Sokolovsky, 2010). It may be defined nonetheless, as the process of rendering text written in one language, to text written in another language, such that the meaning and the sense of the original document remain intact. Then there is its multidimensionality – it may be considered either a process or a product (Vilceanu, 2017). The translation itself that is delivered, the target text (the translated text) is the product, and the entire experience that the customer experiences, being the service (different factors that make up the perceived service quality as well as the perceived product quality are clearly called out in later chapters). This uncertainty leads to Translation Service Providers (TSP) each having their own mechanism for managing translation quality. It has also been observed that the quality ratings in many cases are not reproducible or repeatable (Sofyan and Tarigan, 2018). In such a scenario, it is natural for these quality ratings to come under question. If the quality ratings themselves come under question - and it has been seen earlier than quality is one of the key antecedents of customer satisfaction - the extent of the challenges in evaluating the customer satisfaction for business translation clients can well be gauged.

The multi-dimensionality – and interdisciplinarity – of translation, has led to myriad complexities in the measurement of translation quality, and consequently its management. To add to that, a detailed review of the extant literature on Translation Studies and studies in the related discipline of Applied Linguistics conducted by scholars worldwide, and available open-source from databases such as Google Scholar and ScienceDirect revealed, as observed by Drugan (2014), that there have been very few in-depth studies on translation quality in a business context, most studies having been based on translations of individual literary texts; some others have been on specific approaches to translation quality assessment, often set in an educational context. As can be seen in the above paragraphs, there have been some studies on Translation and Translation Quality. However, as has been elucidated on more than one instance before, Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations is an area that is rather under-researched, which is the gap this study seeks to bridge.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1 Research Question and Initial Research Model

#### Research Question

What is the impact of key antecedents on customer satisfaction in business translations?

#### Initial Research Model

As already discussed, in the area of business translations, there is a paucity of research on customer satisfaction. As a starting point, existing studies were reviewed to understand what antecedents have been found for customer satisfaction in other similar studies (from other industries) and in major frameworks of customer satisfaction like the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) and the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI). These were used as the basis for formulating the Initial Research Model which is depicted below.

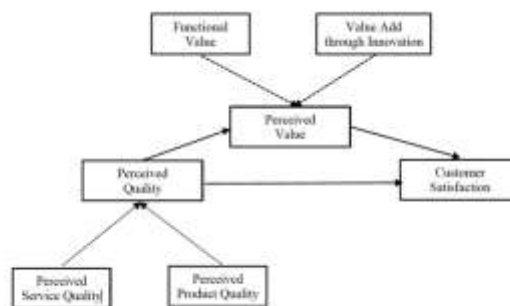


Fig. 1 Initial Research Model

Source: Author (Derived from literature review, and an analysis of major customer satisfaction indices like American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), and European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI).

With reference to Fig. 1, Perceived Quality is the Independent Variable, Perceived Value is the Mediator Variable and Customer Satisfaction: Dependent Variable. Each of these is a second order latent variable.

## 2.2 Research Method

### Research Design

A multi-phase mixed method design was adopted, the rationale for which is provided in detail below.

The research design has been depicted diagrammatically in Fig. 2.

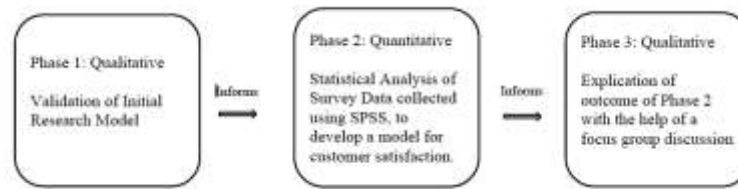


Fig. 2 Research Design

Source: based on Creswell (2014)

The schema shown above (Figure 2) depicts, at a very broad level, the design of this research study. The reason for adopting this particular research design is elucidated in the next paragraph.

The Initial Research Model is based on literature review and on major existing frameworks like ACSI and ECSI. This however, needed to be validated, as translation being a unique domain, had its own nuances, and hence the views of experts, were essential to validate the model. To do this, select industry experts were interviewed one-one, using semi-structured interviews, and the insights thus received, were analysed using thematic analysis. Consequent to the analysis in this initial phase, the Initial Research Model was revised, and the Revised Research Model developed. Based on this Revised Research Model, questionnaires were developed to collect quantitative data on completed translation projects. This questionnaire was emailed to respondents to fill them up with data from projects that he/she had delivered in the past one year. Once the responses were received, they were analysed using SPSS package, and SPSS' PROCESS macro was used to assess any possible mediation. Based on this statistical analysis, the Revised Research Model was further revised, and this revision to the Revised Research Model, led one to arrive at the final model for customer satisfaction in business translations [CSAT-BIZTRANS].

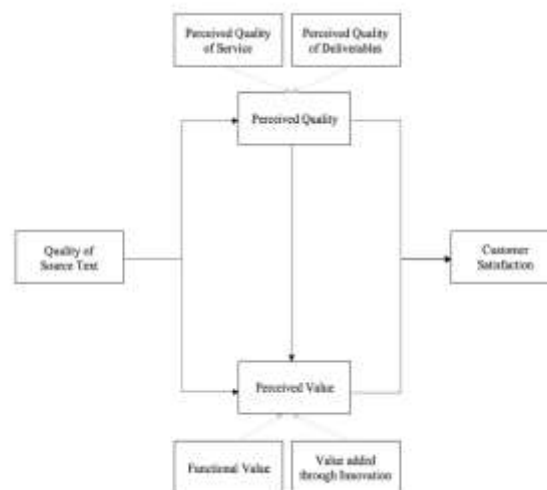


Fig. 3 Revised Research Model

Source: Author (with inputs from industry experts)

As per this model, we have Quality of Source Text as independent variable. Perceived Quality and Perceived Value, as mediator variables and Customer Satisfaction as the dependent variable.

### Summary of Research Design and Research Methodology

These three phases are conducted sequentially as indicated in Fig. 2.

### Table 1 Summary of Research Design and Research Methods

Phase	Type of Research	Methodology of Data Collection	Sampling Method	Sample Size	Methods of Data Analysis
I	Qualitative	Interviews (1-1, in-depth, semi-structured)	Non-probability (convenience)	10	Thematic analysis
II	Quantitative	Surveys (formal questionnaire)	Non-probability (convenience)	90	Regression (including mediation) analysis
III	Qualitative	Focus Group	Non-probability (convenience)	5	Thematic analysis

### 2.3 Assumptions made

#### Phase 1

- Absence of bias: This is natural to creep in. A basic assumption made is that the responses were bereft of any major bias, a big assumption but was necessary to proceed with the analysis.
- Adequacy of sample: Convenience sampling was used, and the sample size was not large (10). It is assumed that this did not affect the outcomes.

#### Phase 2

- Adequacy of sample: Whilst the sample size by itself is adequate in terms of sheer numbers, all of these responses (90 responses were received) were received from just one person although the datapoints were from different domains (like digital, legal, and human resources). It is being assumed here that this did not affect the outcome.
- Equal weight of sub-components within the constructs: Perceived Service Quality and Perceived Product Quality are assumed to equally influence Perceived Quality, and Functional Value and Value Add through Innovation are assumed to equally influence Perceived Value.
- Assumptions for linear regression: a) The dependent variable linearly depends on the independent variable(s) b) The residuals are not dependent c) Residuals are homoscedastic d) The residuals are distributed in a way that meets the criteria of normality.

#### Phase 3

- Adequacy of sample: The cohort was relatively small and chosen through convenience sampling. It is assumed that this did not affect the outcome

### 2.4 Limitations of the Research

Following are the chief limitations of this study:

- This study focuses on customer satisfaction as perceived by translation service providers, as per the information and feedback they get subsequent to the services provided by them; it does not however, consider the perspective of the customers themselves. Further studies on this can examine the subject from the perspective of the customer, taking their inputs into consideration.
- Owing to limitations of time, sample sizes for each phase, especially the qualitative phases, are limited. Subsequent studies of longer duration could look at taking inputs from large cohorts of respondents
- While 90 responses (from 90 projects) were received, for the quantitative phase, spanning different domains like human resource, digital and legal documents, they were all received from one respondent alone. In other words, these were all data from one particular organisation. In order for the outcomes to be fully generalizable, further studies are recommended in this regard.

## 3. Analysis of Empirical Data

### 3.1 Validating the Initial Research Model

Qualitative research was undertaken to validate the initial research model. For this purpose, a small cohort of 10 industry experts, selected for their expertise and experience, and identified by means of convenience sampling, was interviewed one-one. As mentioned earlier, since this particular area (Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations) is relatively under-researched, it was felt that it would be appropriate to have the initial research model validated by industry experts and get their valuable insights on the model. Accordingly, industry experts were interviewed, and their views sought on the model. Invites were sent to industry experts. 21 experts were invited, from whom, 10 agreed to be interviewed.

Once their inputs were received, the insights were analyzed using thematic analysis. The consequent outcome of this analysis was that the Initial Revised Model as depicted in Fig.1, underwent a modification and became the Revised Research Model, as depicted in Fig. 3. The Revised Research Model has the Quality of the Source Text as the independent variable, Perceived Quality and Perceived Value as mediator variables, and Customer Satisfaction as the dependent variable (please refer Fig. 3).

It may please be noted that for the rest of this paper, few abbreviations are used for convenience' sake. These are described below:

CSAT: Customer Satisfaction

QST: Quality of Source Text

PQ: Perceived Quality

PV: Perceived Value

### 3.2 Developing a Regression-based Model for Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations (CSAT-BIZTRANS)

#### Development of Hypotheses

From the Revised Research Framework the following, the following hypotheses can be developed:

H1: Perceived Quality mediates the influence of Quality of Source Text on Customer Satisfaction

H2: Perceived Value mediates the influence of Quality of Source Text on Customer Satisfaction

H3: Perceived Value mediates the influence of Perceived Quality on Customer Satisfaction

The following hypotheses would be tested too to check presence of direct impact of each of the three constructs on Customer Satisfaction.

H4: Quality of Source Text has a direct influence on Customer Satisfaction

H5: Perceived Quality has a direct influence on Customer Satisfaction

H6: Perceived Value has a direct influence on Customer Satisfaction

#### Collection of Data

A questionnaire was designed to collect the data. Information was sought on each of the constructs Quality of Source Text, Perceived Quality, Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction (in Business Translations) and was sent to translation service delivery managers. The data received was analyzed using SPSS software, and its PROCESS macro. Cronbach's alphas was used to assess the reliability of the instruments (reliability of the scales was found to be acceptable, Cronbach's alpha for the three scales ranging between 0.716 and 0.969).

Now, the next step is to test the hypotheses that have been formulated. Mediation analysis is undertaken using PROCESS macro for SPSS, and the SPSS output from the mediation analysis is shared in the Annex. From this it can be seen that:

- For the overall outcome variable CSAT, 0 lies in between LLCI and ULCI for both QST and PQ. In addition, p-value is high for both (0.2758 for QST and 0.3188 for PQ); for PV, p-value is 0.0189 (which is acceptable at 95% confidence interval, also, 0 does not lie within the LLCI and ULCI. At this stage it is clear PQ does not mediate the effect of QST on CSAT.
- QST does not have any significant effect on either PQ (R-sq: 0.0027, p: 0.62) or PV (R-sq: 0.0394, p: 0.06, 0 in between LLCI and ULCI). In other words, there is no way we can assert statistically, at 95% confidence interval, that QST influences either PQ or PV. Now, the research model here (Revised Research Model, Figure 10) has indirect effect alone, and no direct effect of QST on CSAT.
- The third mediation track that was modelled was that, PV mediated the influence of PQ on CSAT. The SPSS output for this mediation analysis is shared below. In this output, it can be seen that while, there is ground for reckoning that PV mediates PQ influence on CSAT (coefficient of indirect effect: 0.2533, 0 does not lie between LLCI and ULCI), there is no statistical basis for averring, at 95% confidence interval, that PQ has a direct effect on PV (p = 0.4483, besides 0 lies in between LLCI and ULCI). Hence mediation is ruled out in this track too.

The three constructs, QST, PQ and PV, are then analysed to assess their effect on Customer Satisfaction (in Business Translations). In the first instance, all the three constructs are taken as regressors and sought to predict CSAT. It is found that, for QST, the p-value is > 0.6, and hence there is no statistical basis for accepting that QST contributes to CSAT. The regression is repeated, this time without QST. In this case, R-squared is 0.657, and  $\alpha \leq .001$ .

The final regression equation (ignoring the constant as for the constant,  $\alpha = .618$ ) is:

CSAT-BIZTRANS:  $CSAT = 0.483*PQ + 0.480*PV$ .

### 3.3 Results of Hypothesis Testing

Before the data analysis of Phase 2 commenced, there were 6 hypothesis statements: H1 to H6. The results of the analysis are presented below in tabular form.

**Table 2 Results of Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis Number	Hypothesis Statement	Rejected
H1	Perceived Quality mediates the influence of Quality of Source Text on Customer Satisfaction	Yes
H2	Perceived Value mediates the influence of Quality of Source Text on Customer Satisfaction	Yes
H3	Perceived Value mediates the influence of Perceived Quality on Customer Satisfaction	Yes
H4	Quality of Source Text has a direct influence on Customer Satisfaction	Yes
H5	Perceived Quality has a direct influence on Customer Satisfaction	No
H6	Perceived Quality has a direct influence on Customer Satisfaction	No

#### *Exploring Possible Factors Affecting Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations that are not explained by CSAT-BIZTRANS*

The final Model for Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations [CSAT-BIZTRANS] was derived from the data received in Phase 2. Now, R-squared for the regression equation was 0.657. In other words, 34.3% of the variation in the dependent variable, viz., Customer Satisfaction in Business Translations, is unexplained by the model predictors, Perceived Quality and Perceived Value. It would be interesting if further insights could be gleaned on what other parameters could be contributing to the Customer Satisfaction (in Business Translations). In order to get further insights into the above, a focus group was planned, with 5 senior industry experts. They appreciated the model and averred that the model was similar to what they had been experiencing, in terms of the antecedents of customer satisfaction. They also shared that the Quality of Source Text was not a significant factor affecting customer satisfaction as the customer accepted that that was not in the service provider's hands.

### 3.4 Implications of the Study

#### **Practical Implications:**

- Delivery managers responsible for delivery of translation projects will be able to estimate upstream, the potential Customer Satisfaction for their projects, and accordingly make interventions that will enable them to achieve their desired Customer Satisfaction levels.
- With the help of Customer Satisfaction data from completed projects, translation delivery managers can compute Perceived Quality and Perceived Value for their projects, thus helping them better engage with their customers.
- As has been mentioned in the Introduction and the chapter on Literature Review, there have been myriad studies on Translation Studies, including on Translation Quality, however very few till date on customer satisfaction and this will hopefully encourage further research by the translation industry into the business side of translation studies, including, but not restricted to customer satisfaction

#### **Scientific Implications:**

- Hitherto there has been very little research conducted in this area, and from that perspective, this study is pioneering; however this is just a starting point, and a lot more needs to be done
- Just like such studies have hardly been done before in Translation Studies, similarly research could be undertaken in other such areas so far underresearched

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- Based on the research undertaken, it may be concluded that, Business Translation, as an industry, is unique (because of its multidimensionality and interdisciplinarity), and hence, results that can be observed in other industries (service or manufacturing) are not generalizable here.

- The regression-based customer satisfaction model that was developed for business translations, CSAT-BIZTRANS, indicates that Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) for business translations is directly dependent on Perceived Quality and the Perceived Value. However this model has an R-sq of 0.657. Further studies could be carried out to understand the balance 34.3% variation.
- Owing to time and budget constraints, the sample sizes were relatively small. Further studies could be planned with more time and more resources
- This particular study was restricted to the niche domain of business translations. More studies could perhaps be planned in other areas where customer satisfaction also remains under researched.

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