Net Promoters Score (NPS) And Its Relation to Other Marketing Customer Satisfaction Measures

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Abstract

In our paper we intended to verify the relationship between the NPS and other customer satisfaction measures commonly used in consumer research. We collected the results of 10 customer satisfaction surveys, we harmonized and combined all the data and used a simulation with the bootstrap method to generate two sets of subsamples. For each subsample we calculated the NPS and other customer satisfaction measures. Next, we examined how these measures correlate with each other. Then we were changing the trichotomy of the NPS scale and observing changes in correlation of new-formula NPS and other satisfaction measures. In our simulations, we achieved better compliance with the other satisfaction indices when the NPS score-classes was set as: Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-7) Promoters (8-10). Therefore we proposed a modification of the NPS indicator for the purposes of customer satisfaction surveys.

Keywords: consumer research, customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction measurement, Net Promoters Score (NPS).

Introduction

Every company operating on the market wants to maintain satisfied and loyal customers. Falkowski and Stachiewicz (1999) states that post-purchase satisfaction is one of the essential conditions for creation of loyalty. Thus loyalty is the result of many satisfying transactions, it requires time and the company's commitment.

Loyal customers trust the company, know its offer very well, therefore service of them is easier, more efficient and cheaper (Ostrowska, 2010).

Companies willingly use various methods of customer satisfaction and loyalty measuring. Easy and not time-consuming methods are particularly appreciated. They can provide valuable information customer satisfaction, repurchase intentions or willingness to recommend a company or products. One of such method which meets the requirement of simplicity is Net Promoters Score (NPS).

The NPS is often used as a measure of customer satisfaction or loyalty. This approach can be found in numerous customer surveys performed online or in traditional method. However, the NPS was not intended as an indicator of satisfaction or loyalty. In the opinion of its creator, Reichheld (2003), it was supposed to speak of the brand's competitive potential and position.

In our paper we intended to verify the relationship between the NPS and other customer satisfaction indices commonly used consumer research. We wanted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the correlation between the NPS and other popular customer satisfaction indicators.
2. Does the change of proportions between the promoter, neutral and detractors fractions have a significant impact on the improvement of these relations?
3. Can the NPS be used as a measure of customer satisfaction?

We used results of 10 customer satisfaction surveys to answer these questions.

Theoretical Background

Net Promoter Score introduced by Reichheld (2003) is intuitive, popular and a very simple metric used in a variety of industries for measuring customer loyalty. As notice Schneider et al. (2008) for many business leaders the NPS is a useful

tool to guide business decisions. So far it has been used by many companies in the world e.g.: General Motors, Delta Air Lines, eBay, Aviva, AXA, Electrolux, Orange, Siemens, Sony and many more (Net Promoter System, n.d.).

The NPS can be used for monitor customers' overall perceptions of the brand, products and their relation with the company (relationship NPS) or monitor customers' assessments of transactions with the company and improve specific offerings or service functions within a company (transactional NPS) (Følstad and Kvalep, 2018).

The NPS method is very simple. Respondents answer one simple question about recommendation of a company, brand, product etc. Answers are measured o 11-point scale from 0 (not al all, very unlikely) to 10 (extremely likely) – Figure 1.
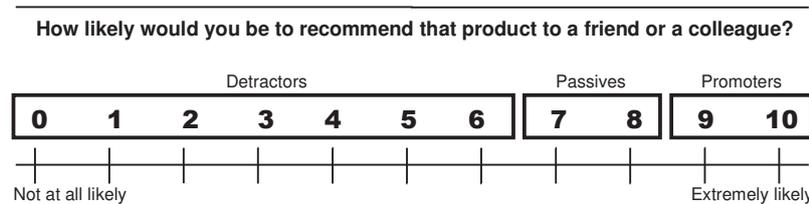
How likely would you be to recommend that product to a friend or a colleague?

	Detractors						Passives		Promoters	
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**

Not at all likely   Extremely likely

Fig. 1: Graphic presentation of the NPS method

Then the respondents are divided into three fraction as follows (Reichheld, 2003):

- Promoters: score 9 – 10.
- Neutrals/Passives: score 7 – 8.
- Detractors: score 6 – 0.

The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. Passives or neutrals are not taken in the calculations. Unfortunately it causes that a lot of valuable information is lost (Grisaffe, 2007; Raassens and Haans, 2017).

The NPS express only an intention to recommend, it is a kind of consumer loyalty declaration. It does not explain respondent's reasons, does not indicate what must be done, improved or changed in the future.

Despite its simplicity and universality, the NPS has supporters and opponents. In studies published by various scientists, we can find examples confirming the relationship of the NPS, e.g. with company growth, profitability, WOM (word-of-mouth), consumer expenditures or loyalty (Marsden et al., 2005; Mecredy et al. 2018; Korneta, 2018; Stander, 2016). On the other side there is a lot of studies which does not confirm these relationship.

For example Hayes (2008) claims that the NPS is not the best predictor of business performance measures. Ostrowska (2010) has a similar opinion. The author believes that not every loyal customer will bring the company more and more profits automatically.

Moreover, according to Ostrowska (2010), it is not possible to indicate a directly proportional correlation between loyalty and profitability, because each industry has a different specificity. This relationship is a result of many factors, such as the specificity of the product and even adopted definition of loyalty.

Grisaffe (2007) argued that the NPS is not sufficient as an approach to customer loyalty measurement and management. For example Keiningham et al. (2007) found that American Customer Satisfaction Index (ASCI) had a stronger correlation to revenue than the NPS. The similar opinions can be found in studies by Morgan and Rego (2006), Keiningham et al. (2008), Sharp (2008), Hayes (2008), Shulman and Shargeant (2013).
Studies that tried to confirm the link between business performance and the NPS often does not find statistically significant relationships (Lawrie et al., 2006). Insead od the NPS, ss claims Askoy (2013), firms could benefit from the use of more sophisticated and advanced modelling approaches, which have the potential to uncover patterns in customer data and to link with business results.

As we see, the enthusiasm for the NPS, presented by its creator F.F. Reichheld is intertwined in literature with its criticism. Discrepancies in opinions and research results on NPS led Zaki, Kandeil et al. (2016) to formulate several important implications for managers:

- NPS alone is not sufficiently accurate,
- the combination of multiple data sources (using predictive variables such as the RFM model, demographics, active customers and textual customer complaints), along with the techniques proposed by authors, measures customer loyalty more accurately than a single loyalty metric,
- organizations should compare their customers' self-proclaimed referral intention (NPS rating) with their actual spending patterns.

Despite controversy and divergent opinions, the NPS is broadly usen in consumer research. It also found application in other areas of research, for example in employee loyalty surveys (Legerstee, 2013; Dinesh & Rajasekaran, 2018; Sedlak, 2020). Authors, instead of asking customers the question about a product or company (NPS), asked employees if they would recommend their employers/workplace (eNPS – Employee Promoter Score).

Research Methods

In our study, we used a simulation with the bootstrap method. We collected the results of 10 customer satisfaction surveys. They were performed in various industries and on various sizes of samples (Table 1). We conducted some of them ourselves, some of the data were obtained from other authors and we use them with their consent. All of these studies were survey studies and were conducted in a consistent manner. Despite the differences in the questionnaires, each questionnaire contained a question about the overall level of satisfaction (measured on a 5-item scale), a question about repurchasing or reuse the service intentions (also measured on a scale 1-5) and a question of the NPS method (How likely… etc.). We harmonized and combined all these data to obtain a consistent set of 946 cases.

Table 1: Customer satisfaction surveys used in the study

Industry	Sample size	CSAT
Public transport	127	2.95
University	97	3.38
GSM telephony	144	3.13
Basic health care	100	2.89
Household appliances	60	3.77
Social security	104	3.39
Travel agencies	100	3.97
Tax office	53	4.34
Restaurants	81	4.31
Cosmetics	80	4.39
Total	946	

Most of customer satisfaction indices can only be calculated for a certain group of customers (for example for whole sample). Therefore, we had to extract some subsamples from our dataset. We decided to use the simulation with the bootstrap method. We made two draws:

- we randomly selected 1000 subsamples of 30 units (i.e. small subsamples),
- we randomly selected 1000 subsamples of 100 units (i.e. large subsamples).

For each subsample, we calculated the following satisfaction indices:

- customer satisfaction index (CSAT), which is a mean value of answers to questions about overall satisfaction measured on a scale of 1-5,
- customer loyalty index (LOY), which is a mean value of answers to questions about the repurchasing or reuse the service intentions (measured on a scale of 1-5),
- Top 2 Box (T2B) indicator – showing the fraction of satisfied and very satisfied customers,
- Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) – calculated according to the methods presented by Biesok & Wyród-Wróbel (2012).
- apostles' faction (APO) – a fraction of customers who are satisfied or very satisfied and declare their willingness to repurchase/reuse.

Next, we examined how these measures correlate with each other. We used the Pearson's correlation coefficient here. Due to the large count of subsamples in both simulations, all calculated correlation coefficients were significant at the level of p <0.001.

In the second part of the study, we wanted to investigate how changing the structure of the NPS index would affect its relationship with other satisfaction indicators. For this purpose, we were changing the trichotomy of the NPS scale. Among many possible configurations, we chose a few examples and calculated new-formula NPS and other satisfaction measures for every subsample. Then we examined their common relations using the Pearson's correlation coefficient. This showed that one of the NPS structures correlates better with the satisfaction indicators than the NPS in its original shape.

Findings

In the first simulation we generated 1000 subsamples of 30 cases. Table 2 presents the values of customer satisfaction and loyalty indices and their descriptives obtained in this simulation.

Table 2: The values and descriptives of customer satisfaction and loyalty indices obtained in simulation 1

	CSI	CSAT	T2B	LOY	APO	NPS
Mean	3.660	3.442	0.482	3.638	0.423	-16.816
Median	3.661	3.433	0.500	3.633	0.433	-17.000
Std. deviation	0.125	0.177	0.089	0.191	0.088	14.021
Skewness	0.028	-0.145	-0.082	-0.018	0.059	0.147
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk test	0.141	0.002	< .001	0.008	< .001	< .001
Minimum	3.295	2.900	0.200	3.067	0.133	-53.000
Maximum	4.173	3.967	0.770	4.167	0.767	30.000

The distribution of the NPS index obtained in the first simulation is clearly positively asymmetric (Fig. 2). The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test show that this is not a normal distribution.
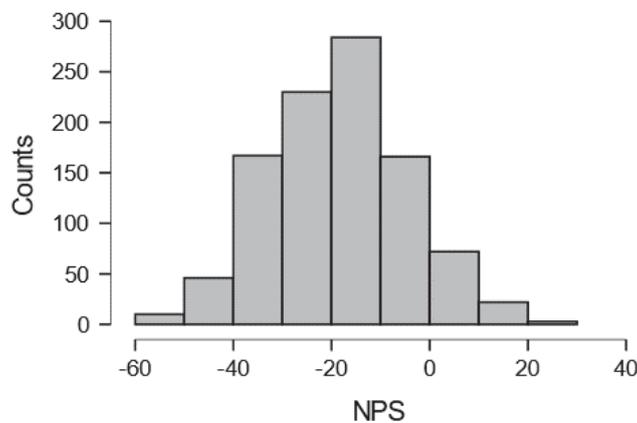

Fig. 2: NPS distribution in simulation 1.

The simulation showed that all satisfaction indicators are positively correlated with each other and show either moderate or quite strong correlations. The NPS index correlates most strongly with the repurchase / reuse intention index and less strongly with CSI, CSAT and T2B indices, but the differences are not large (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between indicators (Pearson's correlation coefficient) obtained in simulation 1

	CSI	CSAT	T2B	LOY	APO	NPS
CSI	1.000					
CSAT	0.654	1.000				
T2B	0.552	0.828				
LOY	0.561	0.651	0.558	1.000		
APO	0.559	0.753	0.887	0.648	1.000	
NPS	0.589	0.614	0.589	**0.637**	0.624	1.000

In the next step we were changing the way in which individual answers to the NPS question are assigned to particular fractions of respondents. We started with the original NPS structure: Detractors (0-6) Passives (7-8) Promoters (9-10) and the experimented with the score-classes. We investigated how the new structure of the indicator affects its correlation with other satisfaction measures. Best results, i.e. the highest correlation, were obtained when the structure of the NPS was as follows: Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-7) Promoters (8-10). The results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Changes in the structure of NPS indicator and its impact on the correlation with other indicators in simulation 1

Structure of NPS	Mean NPS	CSI	CSAT	T2B	LOY	APO
Detractors (0-6) Passives (7-8) Promoters (9-10) Original NPS structure	-16.8	0.589	0.614	0.589	0.638	0.624
Detractors (0-5) Passives (6-8) Promoters (9-10)	-8.5	0.594	0.642	0.608	0.664	**0.632**
Detractors (0-4) Passives (5-8) Promoters (9-10)	4.1	0.589	0.665	0.565	0.692	0.574
Detractors (0-4) Passives (5-7) Promoters (8-10)	22.4	0.584	0.676	**0.610**	0.687	0.597
Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-7) Promoters (8-10)	29.1	**0.615**	**0.676**	0.586	**0.695**	0.582
Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-6) Promoters (7-10)	46.2	0.562	0.644	0.529	0.687	0.530
Detractors (0-2) Passives (3-6) Promoters (7-10)	52.3	0.546	0.611	0.519	0.642	0.516

Note: the highest value of correlation coefficient is underlined.

We made similar calculations simulating a large sample. In the second simulation, we drew 1000 subsamples of 100 cases. Table 5 presents the values of customer satisfaction and loyalty indices and their descriptives obtained in the second simulation

Table 5: The values and descriptives of customer satisfaction and loyalty indices obtained in simulation 2

	CSI	CSAT	T2B	LOY	APO	NPS
Mean	3.667	3.460	0.493	3.648	0.433	-16.001
Median	3.667	3.460	0.490	3.650	0.430	-16.000
Std. Deviation	0.066	0.089	0.046	0.101	0.047	7.515
Skewness	-0.013	0.143	0.090	0.084	0.103	0.038
P-value of Shapiro-Wilk	0.746	0.009	< .001	0.199	< .001	0.042
Minimum	3.470	3.230	0.360	3.250	0.300	-40.000
Maximum	3.854	3.750	0.650	3.970	0.580	7.000

The NPS distribution in the second simulation was close to the normal distribution (at the significance level of 0.001 we can state that it is a normal distribution - Fig. 3).
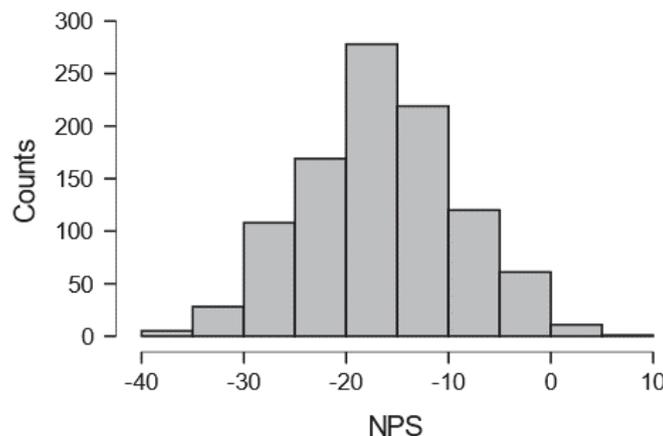

Fig. 3: NPS distribution in simulation 2.

Similarly to simulation 1, the NPS index showed the greatest correlation with the loyalty index (Table 6). Changes in the structure of NPS led to similar conclusions – the highest correlation with other measures of satisfaction occurs when the structure Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-7) Promoters (8-10) is taken into account (Table 7).

Table 6: Correlations between indicators (Pearson's correlation coefficient) obtained in simulation 2

	CSI	CSAT	T2B	LOY	APO	NPS
CSI	1.000					
CSAT	0.663	1.000				
T2B	0.550	0.830				
LOY	0.603	0.647	0.553	1.000		
APO	0.569	0.757	0.878	0.658	1.000	
NPS	0.588	0.622	0.591	0.670	0.659	1.000

Table 7: Changes in the structure of NPS indicator and its impact on the correlation with other indicators in simulation 2

Structure of NPS	Mean NPS	CSI	CSAT	T2B	LOY	APO
Detractors (0-6) Passives (7-8) Promoters (9-10) Original NPS structure	-16	0.588	0.622	0.591	0.670	0.659
Detractors (0-5) Passives (6-8) Promoters (9-10)	-7.5	0.605	0.650	0.605	0.700	0.666
Detractors (0-4) Passives (5-8) Promoters (9-10)	4.7	0.597	0.658	0.564	0.683	0.599
Detractors (0-4) Passives (5-7) Promoters (8-10)	23.2	0.567	0.672	**0.607**	0.685	0.611
Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-7) Promoters (8-10)	29.6	**0.608**	**0.686**	0.605	**0.711**	0.623
Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-6) Promoters (7-10)	46.7	0.547	0.661	0.563	0.709	0.574
Detractors (0-2) Passives (3-6) Promoters (7-10)	52.8	0.527	0.623	0.547	0.673	0.550

Note: the highest value of correlation coefficient is underlined.

Discussion and conclusions

All indicators analysed by us correlate with each other on moderate or high degree. The NPS indicator in its basic form most strongly correlates with the repurchase/reuse index. On the other hand, it correlates poorly with popular satisfaction measures, such as CSI, CSAT or T2B. Thus, we can assume that NPS reflects customer loyalty better than customer satisfaction.

We can suspect that the reason for this is the structure of the NPS index itself and disproportionate score-classes -7 out of 11 points of the NPS scale (0-6) are the negative fraction (Detractors), and only 2 points are the positive fraction (Promotors).

In our simulations, we achieved better compliance with the other satisfaction indices when the NPS score-classes was as follows: Detractors (0-3) Passives (4-7) Promoters (8-10). Therefore, we propose a modification of the NPS indicator for the purposes of customer satisfaction surveys – let's call it the NPSS (Net Promoters Satisfaction Score). In our proposal, the scale is divided more evenly (Figure 4). This concept can be used in future new research, but also applied to the already collected data because it does not change basic elements of the NPS index methodology.
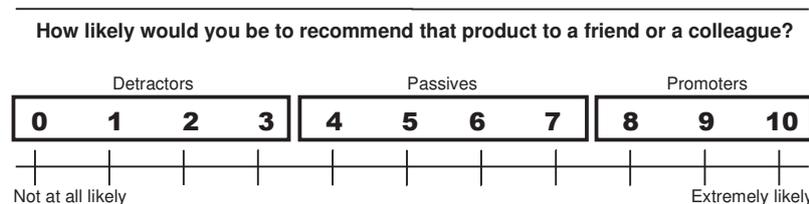
How likely would you be to recommend that product to a friend or a colleague?

Detractors				Passives				Promoters		
0	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**

Not at all likely   Extremely likely

Fig. 4: Our proposal of the NPSS trichotomy

For the NPS, 0 is the boundary between "bad" and "good" values. Our proposition of the score-classes scheme increases the mean value of the NPS (29.1 versus 16.8 in simulation 1 and 29.6 versus -16 in simulation 2). That is why the new measure will require the development of a new interpretation of its value.

The NPS scale and its trichotomy is widely discussed in the literature. For example Schneider et al. (2008) drew attention to inequality of the scale proposed by Reichheld. In their opinion, many respondents who do not show particular attachment to a brand or product will choose the mid-point of the scale, treating it as neutral. Thus they will be classified as Detractors, although "they are not necessarily detractors in the sense that they might recommend against the company, rather they abstain from making any recommendation". The authors also propose to reduce the scale to 7 points, which in their opinion improve the validity of the measurement. Similar seven-point scale was used e.g. by Mitsis and Foley (2008) with score-classes: Promoters (6-7), Detractors (1-4), Passives (5).

Eskildsen and Kristensen (2011) tested the NPS scale versus a 10-point scale with a 'No Answer' choice and found out that those who selected 'No Answer' in the 10-point scale would have chosen 0 or 5 in the NPS scale. This boosts the number of Detractors and distorts the results. This makes the NPS an incompetent metric for customer loyalty (Eskildsen and Kristensen, 2011 as cited in Enqvist, 2014). In healthcare industry Krol et. al. (2014) compared the original scale of the NPS with other trichotomy, i.e. Detractors (0-5), Passives (6-7) and Promoters (8-10) and stated that this classification may lead to a too negative assessment of patients' willingness to recommend. Some implementations of NPS methodology use 5 – point scale (Sauro, 2017, Jeske et al. 2011). Other, e.g. Fornvielle (2016) use shorter, 3-point scale (1 – detractor; 2 – neutral; 3 – promoter). The literature describes other proposals for modifying the scale of the NPS method. However, Lavrie, Matta and Roberts (2006) made the most far-reaching thesis. According to them the score-classes cannot be reliably pre-specified because they are dependent on the respondent scores for an individual industry and score-classes can only be identified through analysis of the data.

This shows that a discussion between enthusiasts and critics of the NPS will probably develop in the literature. Both sides will present many arguments for or against the use of NPS. The NPS index is widely and often used in consumer research and its users should know all its advantages and limitations. Already now various studies shows that Reichheld's (2003) thesis that the NPS is "the one number you need to grow" is much exaggerated. Therefore, future research should continue to demonstrate the usefulness or uselessness of the NPS as a consumer research method and analyse the use of NPS in various industries or markets.

We presume that the modification of the NPS method will remain an important research topic, but we believe that that scholars should concentrate their energy on developing new methods.

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