RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perceived Justice in Service Recovery and Customer Satisfaction: Evidence from the Malaysian Hotel Industry

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Abstract:

The tense competition in service industry has driven companies to place extra attention towards service recovery to ensure continuous success. Due to the astonishingrate of the development of the hotel industry in Malaysia for the past decade, it has urged hotel providers to reconsider their business strategy in order to achieve customer satisfaction and sustain their business. As such, the purpose of this study is to examine the effects of service recovery dimensions (distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice) on customer satisfaction, particularly in the context of hotel industry in Malaysia. Data collection was done through self-administered questionnaires distributed to 400 respondents who have experienced staying in any Malaysian hotels. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data set, various statistical tests were performed such as preliminary and descriptive analysis and reliability test. Regression analysis was performed to examine hypothesised relationships. The findings revealed that the respective service recovery dimensions are significantly related to customer satisfaction. In summary, a better understanding of service recovery aids hotel providers in handling service failures more effectively otherwise it might result in customer dissatisfaction with poor service recovery strategy.

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Distributive Justice, Interactional Justice, Justice Theory, Procedural Justice, Service Recovery.*

Introduction

Hotel industry has been growing exponentially and has been one of the most significant contributors to the growth of tourism industry in Malaysia. In addition, 2014 has been officially declared as the year to visit Malaysia, adding vibrancy and potential to the development of hotel industry. In fact, past research by Sumaco, Imrie & Hussain [1] show that hotel industry is closely related to tourism industry, highly dependable to each other, which has accounted for about 16 percent to Malaysia's GDP in 2013 [2]. As such, it is clear that more and more new hotels are needed to absorb the growing demand for rooms and other hospitality services. Hotels are tiered in different star rating valuation to display status, image and brand equity. In conjunction with Visit Malaysia Year 2013/2014, budget allocation of RM358 million has been spent by government to further promote the country's tourism industry, which indirectly stimulates additional impetus to the hotel industry to provide positive momentum to the economy especially through creating job opportunities and reducing the number of unemployment rate in Malaysia [3].

The need for hotel operators to be more careful in handling their guests has become critical in order to stay competitive in the hotel industry as the expectations of customers are ever rising. Besides, it is imperative for hotel operators to continue incorporating new service elements into the service delivery. Hotels operators should anticipate that different guests are alwayswith various levels of service expectations. However, it is important that hotels first need to satisfy the basic needs of customers instead of paying too much emphasize on unnecessary services. Customers tend to be dissatisfied if the perceived service quality is not up to the expectations, which eventually affect the customer relationships in long-term. Furthermore, without a proper and well-structured service recovery procedure to handle service failures, hotels are at risks to lose their customers because unable to meet customer expectations. Eventually, hotels are the ultimate losers because dissatisfied customers will not return to the same hotel anymore in the future.

One of the best ways to strengthen customer relationship is by listening to their complaints. Customers' voice is often received in the form of complaints reported to the hotel as results of the occurrence of service failure. The importance and value of customers' complaints for an organization was further highlighted by Dolinsky [4]. As such, customer complaints or feedbacks are imperative to be included in service recovery process, supported by Schoefer and Ennew [5] stating that customer complaints or feedbacks are important sources of ideas that help to

foster the growth of an organization by enhancing the current services provided to the customers. The management of service failure is important, for if failed can be detrimental to a hotel. The main objective of managing service failure is to minimize the negative impact of the bad experience that a customer suffers, and ultimately encourage customer satisfaction. Supported by Tax, Brown and Chandrashekaran [6], they suggest that service recovery affects customer outcomes in terms of regaining customer satisfaction, repurchaseintentions and positive word-of-mouth. However, past literatures from Hui [7] and Kuenzel & Kataris [8] concentrate on customers' viewpoint in measuring their level of satisfaction. For that reason, it is very interesting to have a deeper exploration on the customers' perception on service recovery on customer satisfaction. In view of that, this study aims to investigate the influence of service recovery on customer satisfaction; by primarily determine the dimensions of service recovery, and latter examine the impacts of these dimensions on customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Service Failure and Recovery

Service failure occurs when a customer has negative feelings, dissatisfied or having an unpleasant experience during a service encounter [9]. Some aspects of service failure has been explored by Bitner, Booms and Tetreault [9], such as the firm lacks of capability to perform the requested service, the service is not executed according to standard procedure, the service is delayed or the service performance falls below the acceptable level of quality.Of course, it is expected that customers will feel angry and disappointed after encountering a service failure. Nevertheless, the dissatisfaction can be minimized if the firm can provide a persuasive reason for the service failure and quickly implement a service recovery. A study by Hart, Heskett and Sasser [10] suggests due to the key characteristics of service businesses which are heterogeneity and non-separation, it can be a challenge for enterprise to provide consumers with a consistently satisfactory service and product. Heterogeneity is due to the fact that services are all related to human beings, and non-separated is due to consumers must be present in the service factory to receive the service. As a result, a comprehensive service recovery procedure is important to be developed in order to effectively counter the two major challenges.

Service recovery has been more important than before as service industry is growing rapidly especially in developing and developed countries. Therefore, it has beenacknowledged as one of the most significant determinants of customer satisfaction, especially in the hotel industry [6, 11-13] . For the past decade, service recovery has caught the attention ofmany hospitality operators. Most of them have introduced service recovery to be part of the company policy in order to address the customer dissatisfaction [14]. Previous literature in service recovery shows that the upset and

disappointed customers will spread the bad experience with the service provider to others from ten to twenty people depending on the level of dissatisfaction [15]. Previous research also suggests that consumers' expectations are not only from the initial service encounter but also from service recovery failures [16]. Consumer expertise or familiarity with a product category plays an important role in the formation of customer expectations [17]. In comparison to new consumers, frequent consumers such as travelers tend to have more precise expectations, in this case would be the frequency of overbooking in the hotel industry.Experienced consumers usually have realistic expectations for service recovery. On the other hand, their perceptions of service failures and recovery outcomes might be different from consumers who have relatively low level of familiarity.

In service marketing study, customers' input could be as the one-off costs which linked to a service failure such as economic, time, energy and physic costs [18]. Therefore, it includes the outcomes actions in service recovery strategy such as cash refund, apology, replacement etc. The outcomes should be perceived as fair by the customers in order to satisfy them. According to Hoffman and Kelley [18], they proposed that perceived justice is the outcomes of service recovery. It is a very important aspect to be considered when hotel operators are trying to formulate a service recovery strategy. Service recovery process involves those activities which require a company to address a customer complaint due to the service failure [19]. A customer who is dissatisfied with the service may never come back and may spread the negative experience to friends and family members. In fact, the most essential aspect in service recoveryis to identify the moment when the servicehas failed to meet customers' expectations. Usually companies are unaware that because customers' expectations are different.

There are three ways a customer may react in response to a service failure 1) Take some form of public action (including complaining to the firm or to a third party such as a customer advocacy group 2) Take some form of private action (including abandoning the supplier, switching providers, and spreading negative word of mouth) 3) Take no action. Customers may pursue any one or a combination of any of the alternatives. Managers need to be aware of the negative impacts regardless of any types of response a customer pick. The extent might be beyond the loss of a customer's future revenue stream as they might spread the bad experience to others that potentially creates negative perceptions. Therefore, a sound and well-structured service recovery policy plays an important role to improve customer satisfaction. Service recovery policy involves actions taken by service providers torespond to service failures [20].

Customer Satisfaction

Having a concrete service recovery program is critical to hotel service providers because it will further result

on customer satisfaction [11] [12] [6] [13]. In hotel service industry, the service recovery plan is vital to overcome hiccup that may happen throughout the time in order to retain the customer loyalty. According to Zemke [15], customer that has encountered service failure will spread negative word of mouth to other people. As the demand or needs between customers are varied, the service recovery process needs to create dynamic approach towards solving any issues. Therefore, hotelier has established a contingency procedure to avoid dissatisfied customer [14]. Similarly, Smith et al. [13] state that service failure and recovery experienced by the customer will generate perceptive reactions toward the contentment of the customer. Thus, customer satisfaction can be explained as a unit of a customer observes the hotel excellently deliver their services [21].

Perceived Justice

In order to understand service recovery, justice theory has been used as the framework to observe service recovery processes [22]. The reasoning of justice theory is that customer expects their service recovery process to be fair, and would generate negative responses if the customers believe they were treated unfairly, which will affect their satisfaction and future behavioral motive. This theory has been used to reinstate the feeling of justice upon customer's loss as a remedy, and enhance the relationship between service provider and its customers. Hence, customers will judge their affiliation with service provider using fairness as underlying basis [23]. The perception of justice is connected to overall customer satisfaction [24]. It consistently exists in consumption experience, beyond the small amount of complained customers [25-26]. Therefore, justice theory has become important to be applied in the context of service recovery, supporting the theoretical framework [27]. It consists of three factors such as interactional, distributive and procedural fairness [13, 6, 28-29].

Distributive Justice

Distributive justice is sometimes known as outcome justice in a service failure or recovery setting. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the service recovery [20]. When an individual perceives that benefits have been allocated rightfully, it will restore the person's perceived distributive justice [27]. Empirical studies showed that perceived fairness of tangibleoutcomes have a positive effect on service recovery evaluation [13, 29, 31-32]. Previous literature in service recovery has measured the distributive justice such as justice, fairness, need, value and reward of the outcomes [33]. Therefore, the first hypothesis developed for the study is: H1: Distributive justice has a positive effect on customer satisfaction towards hotel services in Malaysia.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice refers to the policies and rules that any customer has to go through to seek fairness. Not only companies are expected to take full responsibility to service failure, but the recovery process must also be convenient, accessible, and responsive for customers to seek for compensation [34]. Moreover, service recovery process must be flexible and comprise customer inputs. Procedural justice also includes policies, procedures and tools adopted by service providers to act as a communication medium with customers so that time neededto manage the complaints can be greatly reduced [35].

Besides, service recovery often involves numerous stages of procedures and processes [35]. Based on previous studies from Blodgett, Hill & Tax [36], Tax et al. [6], Thibaut & Walker [37] and Lanza et al. [34], there are six dimensions of procedural justice namely, flexibility, accessibility, process control, decision control, speed of response and acceptance of responsibility. Therefore, the second hypothesis developed for the study is: H2: Procedural justice has a positive effect on customer satisfaction towards hotel services inMalaysia.

Interactional justice

Interactional justice emphasizes on the interpersonal interactions during the process ofservice delivery. It involves the employees of the firm who provide the service recovery and their behavior toward the customer [38]. Interactional justice can also be defined as the evaluation of degree which the customers haveexperienced justice in human interactions process, that involves the employees of the serviceprovider during the service recovery process [38]. Often customers require explanation for the service failure and employees must make an effort to solve the problem.Previous literature shows that there are six dimensions for interactional justice such ascourtesy, honesty, offering explanation, empathy, endeavor and apologies [6, 34, 39-40]. As such, the third hypothesis developed for the study is: H3: Interactional justice has a positive effect on customer satisfaction towards hotel services inMalaysia.

Based on past studies review, the proposed conceptual framework is as shown in Figure 1.

Methodology

As for this study, the items for the service recovery factors were developed based on the series of in-depth and focus interviews with the tourists and experts from hospitality industry. From the interviews, 12 items were identified related to the service recovery. Moreover, the customer satisfaction in this study was adapted from the scale developed by Ting, Wang, Tseng, Kuo & Lai [41] and was operationalized based on tourists overall satisfaction about the hotel that they stayed. As for this study, a three-section self-administered survey focused on demographic variables, service recovery items, and customer satisfaction.

Demographic questions in this study included gender, age, occupation, nationality, marital status, frequency of hotel stays and travel category. Moreover, all other measurement items for the constructs in this study
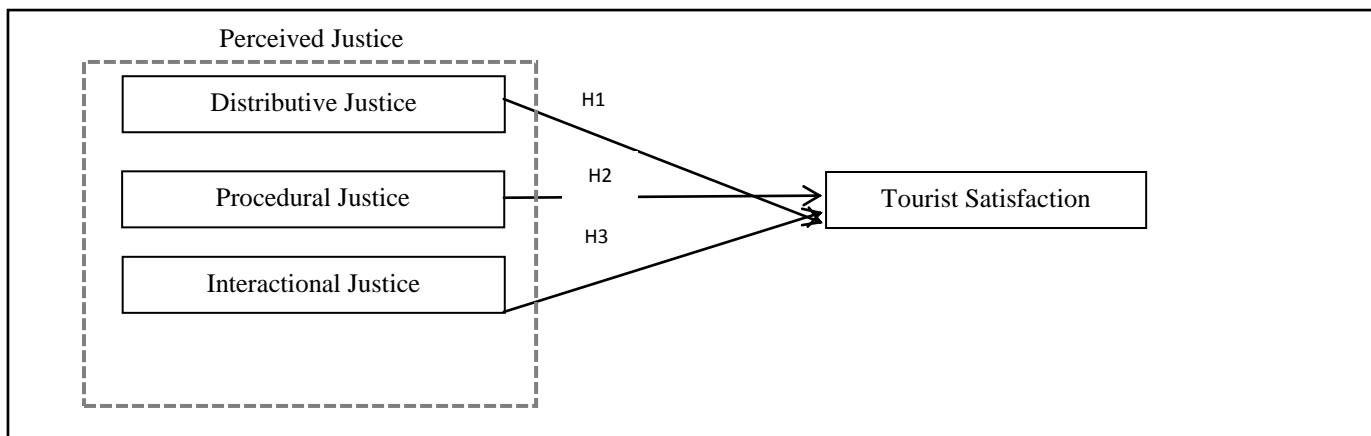
Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, from 5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree.

Since this questionnaire is newly developed, thus a pilot test was carried out before the actual data collection to ascertain the reliability of the survey instrument and test for vagueness and clarity of items. A pretest of the questionnaire was conducted on 20 tourists in order to assess the questionnaire items' sequence adequacy, task relevance, and wording clarity. The respondents were asked to provide comments on the questionnaire content and structure. After the screening process, the pretest respondents indicated that the questions of the survey are comprehensible and relevant, confirming the face validity of the scales.Moreover, a convenience sampling approach has been employed in this study. The target population contained 500 tourists from Malaysia and other countries. The sample size for this study is supported by Comrey & Lee [42], whereby it was reported that the sample size of 500 will provide "very good" result for data analyses including multiple regressions.

Research Findings

Sample Characteristics

Out of the 500 distributed questionnaires, a total number of 442are usable for further analysis by employing SPSS software. Table 1 illustrates the general demographic profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents are Male (55.33%) and in the age group of 26-35 years old (29%). As for the context of occupation, most of the respondents were working for a company (41.2%) or self-employed by having their own business (32.8%), whereby the rest were unemployed. In terms of Nationality, majority of the respondents are non-Malaysian (73.1%) compare to Malaysian (26.9 %). Furthermore, most of the respondents are married, followed by single respondents. In terms of the frequency of staying in hotels for the past 1 year, most of the respondents (40.5%) have stayed in a hotel for around 1- 3 times, while the rest have stayed with hotels for more than 3 times.

Besides, majority of the respondents were travel along with their family members (50.2 %).

Table 1: Demographic profile respondents (n= 442)

Variable	Details	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	205	46.4
	Female	237	53.6
Age	18-25 years old	88	19.9
	26-35 years old	128	29.0
	36-50 years old	86	19.5
	51-65	72	16.3
	66 and above	68	15.4
Occupation	Student	40	9.0
	Working for company	182	41.2
	Owner of a business	145	32.8
	Retired	57	12.9
	Others	18	4.1
Nationality	Malaysian	119	26.9
	Non Malaysian	323	73.1
Marital Statues	Single	192	43.4

	Married	245	55.4
	Divorced	5	1.1
Frequency	1 to 3	179	40.5
	4 to 5	137	31.0
	More than 5 times	126	28.5
Travel Category	Single Traveler	78	17.6
	Family	222	50.2
	Business	81	18.3
	Others	61	13.8

Exploratory Factor Analysis of Service Innovation factors

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted in this study in order toidentify the underlying relationships between measured variables. The 12 items identified for the service recovery based on the focus group interview were analyzed using varimax rotation procedure, which is used to simplify the expression of a particular sub-space in terms of just a few major items each [7]. Based on the results from Table 2, there are three factor groupings resulted from the factor analysis of 12 items. These groups accounted for almost 69 percent of variance explained and

identified as distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice. Moreover, the results from table 1 indicated none of the items dropped from the statistical consideration, as all the loading for items were above 0.70, which met the requirement suggested by Hair et al. [43]. The results also consistent with the requirement by Hair et al. [43], whereby all the factors have eigenvalue exceeding 1.0.

In the context of reliability, all the factors under service recovery are above the recommended threshold of 0.70. For example, the value of Cronbach's alpha for distributive justice was 0.885, procedural justice was 0.816, and interactional justice was 0.836. Having met all the prerequisite requirements for EFA, this evidently shows that all the items for the service recovery in this study are valid and reliable.

Table 2: Principal Components of Service Innovation Items

Items	Factor Loading	Eigen Value	Variance	Mean	S.D	Cronbach Alpha
Distributive Justice						
The hotel manager was able to offer an appropriate compensation for the service failure.	.828	5.732	47.763	4.870	0.968	0.885
The quantum of compensation was adequate.	.813					
The compensation offered by the hotel fulfilled my expectation.	.786					
The compensation was offered in a sincere manner.	.781					
Procedural Justice						
I was given an opportunity to express my complaint.	0.837	1.362	11.348	5.342	0.807	0.816
The hotel has a proper procedure in handling my complaint.	0.834					
The hotel provided proper explanation to my complaint.	0.854					
The hotel responded promptly to my complaint.	0.861					
Interactional Justice						
The hotel demonstrated appropriate concern about my complaint.	0.847	1.202	10.017	5.371	0.828	0.836
The hotel employees are well trained in handling service recovery.	0.835					
The hotel provided proper effort towards service recovery.	0.868					
I am satisfied with the hotel's overall service recovery actions to my complaint.	0.815					
Total Variance Explained					69.128	
KMO					0 .914	

Hypotheses Testing

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine hypotheses developed (H1 to H3). Overall, the regression model and the statistical results presented in Table 3 revealed that all the service recovery factors identified in this study (distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice) were found to have a significant positive direct effect on the customers'

satisfaction. For example, as for the relationship between distributive justice and customers satisfaction (H1), the ß= 0.210 and p-value < 0.001 indicated that there is a significant positive association between both variables. In other words, distributive justice has a significant direct positive influence on customers' satisfaction in this study.

As for the relationship between procedural justice and customer satisfaction, the results of ß= 0.322 and p-

value < 0.001 indicated that the relationship existed with respect to this assessment, thus supporting the hypothesis 2. This means that procedural justice have a significant positive direct effect on customers satisfaction. Similar to above finding, the relationship between interactional justice and customers satisfaction (H3) was also supported by the statistical result (ß= 0.399, p-value < 0.001). This scenario shows that interactional justice has a significant influence on the customers' satisfaction in this study.

Table 3: Results of the Regression Analysis

DV	IVs	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Beta	t-value	p-value	Results
CSTAT	DJ	0.764	0.584	205.173	0.210	5.553	0.000*	Supported
	PJ				0.322	7.845	0.000*	Supported
	IJ				0.399	10.028	0.000*	Supported

Notes: DV= Dependent Variable; IV = Independent Variable; CSTAT = Customer Satisfaction; DJ= Distributive Justice; PJ = Procedural Justice; IJ= Interactional Justice; *Significant at 99% confidence level.

Discussion and Implementation of the Study

The result for the relationship between distributive justice and customer satisfaction, procedural justice and customer satisfaction, and interactional justice and customer satisfaction are positively related. For all this three components is under the service recovery. In addition, customer satisfaction also has positive relationship with customer loyalty. It is similar with Zemke [15] proclaims that customers' satisfaction and future loyalty are dependent on customers' feelings on whether they had been treated fairly or not. Therefore, hotel providers should quickly recover the problem and conflicts arise to make customers satisfied and loyal to the hotel. Based on the results from previous studies, on the relationships between service recovery and customer satisfaction, it was found that there is a strong and positive relationship between service recovery and customer satisfaction [6,17,44-45]. Thesestudies also indicate that customer satisfaction positively related with the level of service recovery effort.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that service recovery is a complex process whereby each dimension (distributive justice, procedural justice and interactional justice) has positive effects towards customer satisfaction. Customers perceive the three dimensions as a single dimension as lack of any of the dimension can lead to customer dissatisfaction. In addition, customer satisfaction also provides positive effects towards customer loyalty on the hotel services, indicating that service recovery is important to not only increase customer satisfaction, but also increase customer loyalty. To make the customers revisit the same hotel, the services provided must be good andservice failure need to be minimized. Only by doing so, customers feel satisfied and will be loyal to the hotel. In conclusion, service recovery is important to make customers satisfied and make a positive influence on the customer loyalty to the hotel.

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