

The impact of employee interactions towards customer satisfaction in cruise services

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to measure the relationship between emotions, role perceptions, perceived control and customer categories towards customer satisfaction. Emotions, role perceptions, perceived control and customer categories are representing the elements of customer interaction which play its own role towards the customer satisfaction based on the situation and type of service based. This study is focusing on the cruise services where both customer interactions and customer satisfaction is important. Data were collected from 150 respondents who voluntarily participated in the survey exercises. Questionnaire were distributed to all tourist who come to Indonesia through cruise services. The results indicate that only two factors are important towards customer satisfaction in relation to the customer satisfaction related to cruise services. Emotions and perceived control are positively significant towards the customer satisfaction. The findings provide a good indicator for the service-based operators to look into those two factors in order to serve customer better. This study is very unique as customer interactions in cruise services is limited within the limited scope. Employee need to be ready and well trained in facing all type of customers. Customer for cruise services coming from various background with a various purposes and intentions. Therefore, meeting the customer needs and wants over a couple of days may give tough challenge should it was not address from the beginning.*

Keywords: *Tourism, Experience, Customer, Cruise, Theming*

I. INTRODUCTION

In September 2019, the tourism minister of Indonesia reported that the country is looking for opportunity to boost the cruise ship tourism in Indonesia. According to the minister the numbers of tourist that come to the country through the cruise services is getting increased. In 2019, the numbers of tourist that come through cruise is increased by 20% as compared to last year. Such situation is a positive indicator to the country and local tourism industry players to take the opportunity on the new business and market. AS part of the initiative, the minister, Indroyono said that "Our aim is to increase the number of foreign cruise travelers as the potential is still huge. We can promote our island destinations to these tourists". Based on that a few collaborations with overseas partners have been established in order to increase the number of tourist to Indonesia. The minister also claimed that "in the next five years, there will be 127 new cruise ships built across the globe and 27 of them are giant ones that can accommodate 3,000 to 7,000 tourists". Such big numbers of service providers will provide a benefits not only to tourist but also to the national income.

It was also reported by the tourism portal (Indonesia.travel) that Indonesia is at the 7th ranks of popular destination visited by cruise ships. Indonesia recorded 465 visits by cruise in 2018 which roughly carries almost 300,000 of tourist. The number is expected to increase by 31% by the end of 2019 and another 20% by the end of 2020. It was also reported that Indonesia is expecting arrival of tourist to reach more than 500,000 by 2020.

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High numbers of tourist and services of cruise ships indicates the important of the role of employees in managing their customer behaviors over the period of cruise. Employee interactions is among the important things that the cruise ships management need to consider and put as priority. Happy customer means positive customer experience. Marketers claimed that happy customer will get satisfied and the satisfied customer may retain and make a repeat purchase. That simple literally equation explains that customer is important in the business as it may bring more revenues and sustain in the market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction by definition is the overall customer feeling towards the overall performance or services delivered by the service providers compared to the customer expectations (Oliver, 1993). Customer will become satisfied should the services given by the service provider is meeting the customer expectations (Razak & Shamsudin, 2019). High customer expectation with low service delivery will lead to customer dissatisfaction (S. Hassan, Shamsudin, & Mustapha, 2019). (Salem, Shawtari, Shamsudin, & Hussain, 2016) suggested that service provider to be more focused on customer so that they can provide the services based on customer needs and wants. The needs and wants of customer is however is varies based on customer expectations and experiences (M. F. M. F. Shamsudin, Ali, Wahid, & Saidun, 2019). Past researches (Sallaudin Hassan & Shamsudin, 2019) recommended that service provider to be more market driven in order to provide better services that can meet the customer expectations (Davras & Caber, 2019). Level of satisfaction will be based on the comparison between pre and post consumptions or purchased of a services or products (Borishade et al., 2018; Hirata, 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Zhang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2019). (M. Shamsudin et al., 2015) highlighted that customer satisfaction can be well explained by the expectancy disconfirmation theory (Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010b). The theory revealed that customer will become dissatisfaction should the performance received is below expectations. At the same time the level of satisfaction will increase should the performance delivered is meeting or above the expectations (Lankton & McKnight, 2007; Serenko & Stach, 2009; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010a).

Mohd Farid Shamsudin and Razali, (2015) claimed that customer satisfaction can be derived from subjective elements such as emotions and customer needs. At the same time customer satisfaction can also influenced by the objective factors such as product features and the product itself (Ghazzawi & Alharbi, 2019; Herhausen, Kleinlercher, Verhoef, Emrich, & Rudolph, 2019; Yang & Ng, 2010). Customer experience before the cruise and after is very important. Service provider need to carefully understand the customer needs in taking the cruise. (Eberle, Milan, & Dorion, 2016; Lau, Cheung, Pires, & Chan, 2019; Yilmaz, Ari, & Gürbüç, 2018) stated that customer decide to purchase based on their needs. Customer decided to onboard the cruise because there is a need for the customer to take vacations and enjoyed the holiday on the package as provided. The first expectations derived from the information received that translated into emotions parts to customer (Famiyeh, Asante-Darko, & Kwarteng, 2018; Moghavvemi, Lee, & Lee, 2018). Such elements are very subjective and differs between one to another customer (Mohd Farid Shamsudin & Razali, 2015). The objective parts are quite straight forward where customer will evaluate the product itself based on their experiences. Customer will make decision making based on the features that they enjoyed or obtained during the trip is meeting their expectations or not (M. Shamsudin et al., 2015).

Past research (Famiyeh et al., 2018; Kant & Jaiswal, 2017; Moghavvemi et al., 2018) indicates that there are many reason that can lead to customer satisfaction. Service provider must listen to customer son that they can provide the service that customer really wants. (Ahmed, Tarique, & Arif, 2017; Janahi & Al Mubarak, 2017) stated that customer in the 21st century is very knowledgeable as they have access to information (Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015; Oh, 1999).

Customer can have determined what type of products or services that they liked and interested to purchase or subscribe (Fransen, Rompay, & Muntinga, 2013; Girish & Lee, 2019; van der Westhuizen, 2018). The competition among the industry players create a big space for customer to be demanded as they have high bargaining power (Akroush & Mahadin, 2019). Cruise operator should evaluate the needs of customer before split the packages or products into segmentation. (Khan & Rahman, 2016) highlighted that the role of employee towards customer satisfaction. Service provider must ensure that the employee is giving their best effort in putting customer as priority (M. F. Shamsudin, Nurana, Aesya, & Nabi, 2018). Employee services and interactions can be the total sum of customer experience that may lead to customer satisfaction or not.

Customers always expect that the service customer is able to solve their problems (Miao & Wang, 2016; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Schillewaert, & Baker, 2012; Terho, Eggert, Haas, & Ulaga, 2015). Service provider should always alert and ask around should there is anything that they can improve in order to service the customer better (M. F. Shamsudin, Razak, & Salem, 2018).

Past research (Gligor, Gligor, & Maloni, 2019; Javalgi, Hall, & Cavusgil, 2014) also recommended that service provider to listen to customer feedback and complaints in order to improve their services. Customer complaint is important as the customer is highlighting something that is important for the service provider to action for the benefits of long term relationship (Belwal & Amireh, 2018; Ghazzawi & Alharbi, 2019; Xia & Jin, 2008). Customer feedback should give priority as they make effect customer switch or exit from the customer lifecycle(Sallaudin Hassan & Shamsudin, 2019; M. F. Shamsudin, Shabi, & Salem, 2018)stressed that service provider should have learnt from customer feedback.

Becoming customer oriented may let the service provider to be more consistent in providing the services to customer (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019; Bazneshin, Hosseini, & Azeri, 2015; Zailani, Ali, Iranmanesh, Moghavvemi, & Musa, 2016). Customer oriented is part of the business organizations strategy to be closer to customer by putting priority to them (Mikulić & Prebežac, 2012; Nield, Kozak, & LeGrys, 2000). Service providers should conduct market sensing on how to understand customer better. Service provider should also closely monitor the competitor action so that they can always compete at the best situation (Cong, 2016; Medina-Viruel, López-Guzmán, Pérez Gálvez, & Jara-Alba, 2019). Customer have choices and they know what exactly that they want (Razak & Shamsudin, 2019; M. F. M. F. Shamsudin, Esa, & Ali, 2019). Service providers must try to understand customers and the result will be customer satisfaction and business growth.

Customer liked to be noticeable and appreciated especially in a focused product such as cruise. The cruise management should always communicate to customer on their schedule or any other information that may lead to customer awareness or knowledge that is continuously updated for the customer action (Ortmeyer & Huber, 1991; Shamim & Mohsin Butt, 2013). Service providers should improve the level of service especially from the customer services personnel or employees (Ahn & Back, 2019; Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019). (M. Shamsudin et al., 2015) reminded that customer is a profit and not overhead. Service provider should know that each customer carries the customer life time value that may bring impact to the service providers in the long term (Hasim, Shamsudin, Ali, & Shabi, 2018). Marketing scholars since many decades ago warned that service providers to keep customer satisfied as they have high potential to stay with the service provider. Satisfied customer, according to (M. F. M. F. Shamsudin, Ali, Nadzri, & Wahid, 2019) may help the service provider to maintains market growth and sustainability.

Satisfied customer according to (M. F. M. F. Shamsudin, Ishak, et al., 2019) will helps the service providers to spread good branding about the service providers. Satisfied customer will talk to their close networking and share their experiences. The brand of service providers may increase due to popularity and good name carried by the customers. Word of mouth can be used as a tool to convey and share messages to other potential customer about the services and

products (S. Hassan et al., 2019). (Chicu, Pàmies, Ryan, & Cross, 2019; Kim, Cho, & Kim, 2019; Rita, Oliveira, & Farisa, 2019) however, highlighted that the current customer may not use the traditional word of mouth but they used media social that can reach wide coverage and beyond limitation. Customer can do product review, comments or share their experiences in order to invite more customer visit and purchase the tickets. Satisfied customer will have the tendency becoming loyal and in the long term may bring benefits to the service provider.

2.2 Employee Interactions

Employee interactions is very important especially in service based industry. The role of employee has been mentioned in many studies related to service quality and customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction derived from their overall experiences dealing with the service providers. Employee interactions is part of the elements in providing the positive customer experiences towards achieving customer expectations. In Service quality (A, VA, & A., 2005; Berry, Parish, & Dikec, 2019; Oliver & Swan, 1989) the role of employee can be measure using almost all the dimensions. Employee need to make sure that the received the order and deliver accurately under the reliability dimensions. Employee also need to interact with more sympathy under the empathy dimension. Beside that employee need to be more reactive by understanding customer under the responsiveness dimension. Finally, the employee roles in portraying the high assertion is demanded in the assurance dimensions. Overall, past research (Berry, Zeithaml, & Parasuraman, 1985; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1993; Teeters & Boatman, 1995) indicates that role of employee especially interactions with customer is really important especially related to customer servicing.

Customer oriented organization must have focused on selecting the best employee to be at the front liners. Employee should have at least good emotional intelligence so that they can served customer better. Employee who have good emotional intelligence can adjust or adapt themselves according to customer. Recent research indicates that employee with high emotional intelligence can be more empathy, tactful and thoughtful. Such ability will definitely make customer happy especially over long durations at cruise services. Employee who have emotional intelligence would be able to satisfy customer over the long term of cruising. Such thing can add more weightage towards overall customer experience cruising with the service provider.

Past research indicates that employee must also show humility in order to serve customer. Employee who portray humility will always become humble when dealing with customer. They will try their best to accommodate customer request. Cruise services normally will take more than a day to services. Such longer period would need a strong character of humility in order to face the same customer over period of cruise. The danger is when the employee failed to entertain the customer request where it will have spoilt perhaps half of the journey and lead to a negative experience.

Employee interactions require patience especially when the position is at the registration or customer service counter. Almost every customer wanted them to entertain fast and quick but most of the times the challenges come during the peak hours where there are too many customers and each is coming with unique problems. Patience elements is important to have in the spirit of employee as they can handle the situations and continue smile during the hard time. Employee without patience will quickly lose control, high tamper and worse is diluting the overall customer experiences.

Many studies related to good listening conducted especially related to customer service and sales performance. The skill of listening need to be acquire and trained. Most business organizations perhaps overlooked the important of listening. Good listening staff will be able to handle customer correctly and provide solutions accurately. Research indicates that not all problems brings by customer is standards. As such employee need to listen carefully and be more empathy. Customer may come from a various background and their problems could be different from the other.

Attentiveness is another high skill that need to be instill in all frontlines and employee who deal with customer directly. It is not easy to being detail. Being detail or detail oriented is important as it may lead to a quick and fast solutions. Most of the time employee always jump to conclusion and try to solve customer problem. As the result they failed to meet the customer needs. Service based organizations need to trains their staff to be more details. Certain job scope requires attentiveness as it might have involved with security or safety.

The final dimension of employee interaction is multitasking. It is when the employee is not only knowledgeable but willing and able to solve many type of problems. Employee should not keep customer wait for longer time while waiting for other employee to helps. The multitasking staff normally is able to solve all problems because they are empowered, knowledgeable and skillful. Such action will immediately influence customer to be happy and satisfied. They are happy because the staff know how to deal with customers, being humility, attentiveness, good listener and possess high emotional intelligence.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is about the impact of employee interactions towards customer satisfaction in cruise services. The research is aims to identify whether there is any positive relationship between employee interactions towards customer satisfaction. Employee interactions was represented by emotions, role perceptions, perceived controls and customer categories. The results were obtained through relationship measurement based on the data collected using questionnaire. The research used quantitative method thus 150 respondent involved in the data collection process. Questionnaire was divided into 2 parts which part A is about respondents’ profile and part B is about the items on the relationship to be measure. There are 22 items adapted from past researches. Breakdown items per dimension is emotions (5), role perceptions (4), perceived controls (5) and customer categories (4). Customer satisfaction is represented by 4 items as well. All items used in the questionnaire used 7 Liker-point scales which 1 = strongly disagree and 7 is strongly agree. Analysis of data was based on structural data modelling and the results as per discussed in the following section.

IV. FINDINGS

Table 1, representing the overall details and summary of respondent that participate in the data collection. There are 68 (45.33%) male and 82 (54.67%) female took parts in the questionnaire. Majority of respondent is above 40 years old and most of them are looking for “all in one” vacation. Majority of respondent are with basic degree and above. It is also noticeable that majority are self-employed rather that attached with government or private sectors.

Table 1: Respondents’ profile

Descriptions	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	68	45.33%
Female	82	54.67%
	150	100.00%
Employer		
Government	30	20.00%
Private	55	36.67%
Self-employed	65	43.33%
	150	100.00%
Age		
<20 years	4	2.67%

20 - 29 years	10	6.67%
30 - 39 years	26	17.33%
40 - 49 years	38	25.33%
50 and above	72	48.00%
	150	100.00%
Education level		
Secondary school	6	4.00%
Bachelor's degree	98	65.33%
Master's degree	45	30.00%
Doctorate	1	0.67%
	150	100.00%
Reason for cruise		
All in one vacation	61	40.67%
Value	29	19.33%
Family get together	14	9.33%
Pampering	21	14.00%
Food	25	16.67%
	150	100.00%

Table 2 shows the summary statistics of the constructs used in the research. A value for emotions is 0.873, role perceptions (0.914), perceived control (0.871), customer categories (0.912) and customer satisfaction (0.812). All α readings was good and above the minimum recommended value. Emotions have the highest mean (5.983) while role perceptions is 4.789.

Table 2: Summary statistics of the questionnaire survey

Constructs	No. of items	Mean	SD	α
Emotions	5	5.983	0.134	0.873
Role perceptions	4	4.789	1.172	0.914
Perceived control	5	5.728	1.080	0.871
Customer categories	4	5.525	1.236	0.921
Customer satisfaction	4	5.301	1.325	0.812

Notes: SD, standard deviation, α , Cronbach's overall α 0.902

Table 3 depicts the result of principal component analysis. The factors with values greater than 1 were considered for the study. All the 22 items were found with their communalities greater than 0.50 and were retained for the analysis.

Table 3: Result of principal component analysis

Items	Emotions	Role perceptions	Perceived control	Customer categories	Customer satisfaction
EO 1	0.854				
EO 2	0.752				
EO 3	0.822				
EO 4	0.893				

EO 5	0.754				
RP 1		0.752			
RP 2		0.822			
RP 3		0.893			
RP 4		0.754			
PC 1			0.866		
PC 2			0.814		
PC 3			0.697		
PC 4			0.811		
PC 5			0.801		
CC 1				0.878	
CC 2				0.865	
CC 3				0.877	
CC 4				0.787	
CS 1					0.920
CS 2					0.903
CS 3					0.864
CS 4					0.845
Eigenvalue	8.527	4.117	2.763	2.413	1.782
Variance explained (%)	35.521	17.135	11.531	11.365	5.985

Table 4 represent the measurement model results in which the result for composite reliability (CR) for all constructs is 0.89, 0.96, 0.97, 0.92 and 0.93. All composite reliabilities were also larger than the commonly accepted cutoff value of 0.60. AVE represents average variance extracted for the constructs is reported as 0.67, 0.73, 0.78, 0.89 and 0.91.

Table 4: Measurement model results constructs

Constructs variables	Standardized loadings	t-statistics	CR	AVE
Emotions				
EO 1	0.881	15.783**	0.89	0.67
EO 2	0.912	16.251**		
EO 3	0.714	12.227**		
EO 4	0.697	11.362**		
EO 5	0.698	11.707**		
Role perceptions				
RP 1	0.810	12.318**	0.96	0.73
RP 2	0.861	13.234**		
RP 3	0.914	14.644**		
RP 4	0.866	13.455**		
Perceived control				
PC 1	0.920	18.255**	0.97	0.78
PC 2	0.925	11.428**		
PC 3	0.723	19.254**		
PC 4	0.831	10.347**		
PC 5	0.827	10.214**		
Customer categories				
CC 1	0.921	17.366**	0.92	0.89
CC 2	0.932	18.544**		
CC 3	0.824	18.915**		
CC 4	0.815	11.328**		
Customer satisfaction				
CS 1	0.902	18.145**	0.93	0.91
CS 2	0.932	11.878**		
CS 3	0.853	19.564**		
CS 4	0.844	10.877**		

Table 5 represent the structural equation modelling results in which 2 relationships were found significant (emotions towards and perceived controls towards customer satisfaction). Another two were found not significant (role perceptions and customer categories towards customer satisfaction)

Table 5: Structural equation modelling results

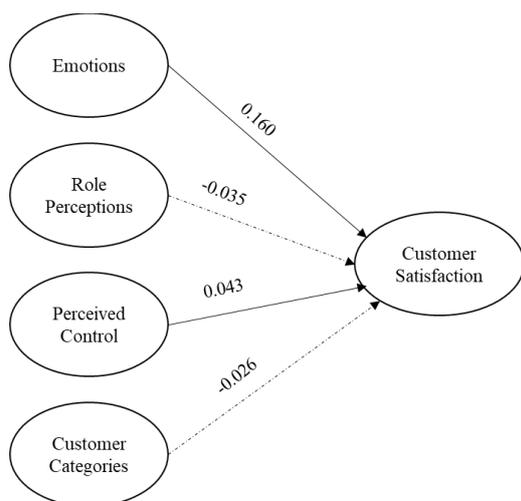
Hypothesis	Std β	S.E	Sig	Outcome
H1 :Emotions --> Customer satisfaction	0.160	0.036	**	H1: Supported
H2: Role perceptions --> Customer satisfaction	0.035	0.031	P>0.05	H2: Not supported
H3: Perceived control --> Customer satisfaction	0.642	0.028	**	H3: Supported
H4: Customer categories --> Customer satisfaction	0.026	0.027	P>0.05	H4: Not supported

Note: **P<0.01

Four path coefficients were estimated to test the hypothesized, causal relationships in the model. The role perceptions and customer categories factors on customer’ satisfaction at cruise were low (β Role perceptions = -0.035 and β Customer categories = -0.026) and non-significant (P for Role perceptions =0.357 and P for Customer categories = 0.469). Therefore, H2and H4 were not supported.

Conversely, emotions and perceived controls factors have positive effects on customer’ satisfaction (β Emotions = 0.160, β Perceived controls = 0.642), supporting H1 and H3. The perceived controls factor was the strongest predictor (β = 0.642), followed by emotions (β = 0.160). The aforementioned dimensions explained 64.2 per cent of the variance in customer’ satisfaction with cruise. The proposed structural model and results of hypothesis testing are shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Figure 1: Confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model. Path coefficients are standardized regression coefficient



Notes: Solid lines represent statistically significant relationships, and broken lines represent non-significant relationships

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research presented four dimensions under employee interactions towards customer satisfaction in cruise ships services. The four dimensions as per analyses above are emotions, role perceptions, perceived control and customer categories. The results show that only two dimensions supported the relationship towards customer satisfaction. Those are emotions and perceived control. The results indicate that role perceptions and customer categories were not supported towards customer satisfaction. The results show that only emotions and perceived control elements can have derived to customer satisfaction in the case of cruise ships. Why emotions is important towards customer satisfaction? Emotions in customer interactions focused on the anticipation of customer emotions in different situations. It means that employee will adapt the customer situation and react accordingly. Adaptive emotions can make customer feel better and recognized. Understanding the customer emotions is important because service provider can actually have engaged expert in managing customer. Service provider should hire and train the employee who can address customer feeling accordingly. Good employee interactions should be able to reach out to customers with negative feelings. It is important that employee to know their role and focused on satisfying customer. Employee should know how to create a positive emotional impact for a long-term customer relationship.

Perceived control is also important towards customer satisfaction, In perceived control employee will do their best to increase customer overall experiences during the cruise trips. A simple acknowledgement such as customer baggage will lead to a positive customer experiences. One thing that employee and service provider need to be aware is not to make false or dishonest promise. Employee must always keep promise and that can keep customer satisfied. Other than that, industry players also need to know that customer interaction is the platform between customer and service provider. Therefore, employee should treat their customer properly to avoid hard feeling or misunderstanding. Good customer interactions is actually is a good investment in customer retention that can provide advantage over long term period.

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