FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER DISSATISFACTION IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY: A REVIEW

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Introduction

Today's consumers are more challenging because they are more educated and knowledgeable about their rights. Therefore, it is vital and essential to make sure that the consumers are satisfied when they are purchasing a product or using a service that is provided by firms or service providers. Understanding consumer satisfaction is important because consumer have varying ideas of what to expect from their experience (Harris, 2007).

Consumer dissatisfaction has been a significant interest to both academician and business world (Velazquez, Saura and Contri, 2007). From the business perspectives, the importance to understand the consumer satisfaction is because consumer is the reason for their existence (Valdani, 2009). There is assumption that the high qualities of service actually encourage satisfied guests to return for repeat visits to the same hotel and conversely low quality of service leads to low satisfaction, discouraging guests from returning (Carev, 2009).

One of the reasons for dissatisfaction is service failure. Service failures are critical incidents in consumer experience. Therefore, when there is a service failure, this can lead to dissatisfaction. Colgate and Norris (2001) added that service failure is a problem that a consumer has with a service. Weiner (2000) mentioned that, the level of dissatisfaction were likely to be higher if the guest encounter a service failure and did not see any effort made by the service provider in performing the recovery.

Dissatisfaction can be defined as the disconfirmation of service expectation caused by the service failure (Michel, 2001). Consumer becomes dissatisfied when they experience product or service performance below expectation (Oliver, 1997). A category of particular practical interest involves situations

where an acquired product or service contains a defect or deficiency (Thørgerson, Juhl and Poulsen, 2009).The expectations are determined by factors such as advertising, prior experience, personal needs, word-of-mouth and the image of the service provider (Michel, 2001). Bateson and Hoffman (1999) stated that, consumer often complaint to express their dissatisfaction when there is a service failure from the service provider. Apart from that, the consumer might also switch to other service provider (Ross, 1999). This was also supported by Tax and Brown (1998) that mentioned that service failures are the reason that the consumers become dissatisfied and their switching behavior.

Difference between products and services

The fundamental goals for consumer are the feeling of satisfaction when they purchase a product or services. Consumers need to allocate their monetary resources among available products and services to maximise their satisfaction (Chen-Yu, William and Kincade, 1999). Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1995) stress that satisfied consumer often share their experience with their relatives and friends and encourage them to try the product or service.

There is a different between consumer of products and services. Basically for products, when the consumers encounter any dissatisfaction or any products defect, they can refer to the firm or organisation because certain product has warranty coverage. However, in dealing with service provider, it is important for them to get things right at the first encounter. When the consumers feel that they are not treated the way they are supposed to be, it will lead to dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is important for firms and service providers to understand not only the satisfaction of the consumer but also the factors that influence consumer dissatisfaction.

Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2006) mentioned that service product is different because service is something that is intangible, heterogeneous, and simultaneous in production and consumption and this will bring a different result in consumer behaviour especially the consumer evaluation processes from those in assessing physical goods. Zeithaml *et al.* (2006) added that it is more difficult to evaluate the service products for the consumer because services are high in experience qualities and credence quality.

Li (2010) mentioned that services can fill all five needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs starts with physiological needs, safety and security needs, social needs, ego needs and self-actualisation needs. Zeithaml *et al.* (2006) stated that the services will become more important when the level of needs is high. In other words, the

higher the level of the needs, the more important the services become. There is a different in motives when consumer is purchasing the services compared to purchasing products. Not like the typical purchasing of goods, consumers rely much heavier on personal sources during the information search stage. When purchasing goods, the consumer is given certain alternatives in the given category. This is however to be less likely with services. There is one more stage that the consumer will face, which is different with purchasing product, and that is the consumer experience stage. The experience stage of the consumer is the one that largely influences the evaluation process.

Dissatisfaction

Most of the literature today on consumerism is focusing on achieving the consumer satisfaction. However, it is important to understand the other side of the satisfaction. What are dissatisfaction and its consequences? Literature review on consumer dissatisfaction has received significant interest during the consumerism movement in 1960's and 1970's (Lundstrom and White, 2006). During this period, the view on consumerism was the rights of the consumer to safety, to be informed, to choose and to be heard. When any of these rights is violated therefore it will lead to dissatisfaction (Day and Aaker, 1970).

Kim, Kim, Im and Shin (2003) stated that knowing the causes and consequences of this type of consumer behaviour is a key in an environment with ever increasing competition between products and types of sales outlet. Liu *et al.* (1997) also added that a central aspect of successful customer relationship management is the effective management of post-purchase satisfaction. This is because the impact of consumer satisfaction and quality perception on long-term performance of service firms is supported not only by theory but also by empirical studies (Duque and Lado, 2010). For example, the investment in improving consumer satisfaction has been demonstrated to provide superior returns to shareholders (Aksoy *et al*., 2008). Therefore, it is important for the marketers to find ways to improve consumer satisfaction rating (Duque *et al*., 2010).

Harris (2007) pointed out four situations that will happen when the consumers become dissatisfied:

- The organisation will lose the profit. When consumer become dissatisfied, they will churn or do business with the competitors. Although at first, this will not give that much problem to the firm but over a period of time this can be quite damaging

- The organisation will lose the job that the consumers (client) provide to them. This is because, when the consumer become dissatisfied, the organisation will have no one to serve thus will lead to job loses to the organisation because they do not need to employ people to work for them.

- Thirdly, the organisation will lose their reputation. This is through the negative word-of-mouth. The consumer will possibly share their experience with their friends and family. This will make the future consumer of the organisation to lose their trust and thus will not buy any product or use any services provide by the organisation

- Finally, the organisation will lose their future business. As mentioned above, words travel and when this happened, the consumer will possibly not trust the organisation.

Dissatisfaction in Malaysia

Dissatisfaction in Malaysian consumer can be traced through the number of complaints received by the National Consumer Complaint Centre (NCCC). These are the numbers received from those who expressed their dissatisfaction. Below are the details of the number of complaints received at the NCCC from the year 2006 until 2010.

Table 1: Number of Complaint Received at the NCCC

Year	Complaints Received
2006	18,345
2007	24,873
2008	28,080
2009	32,369
2010	34,381
Total	**138,048**

Source: National Consumer Complaint Centre

Through this table, the number of complaint is increasing year by year. And it is important to understand that, this is from those who express their dissatisfaction. According to Hirschman (1970) there are three mechanisms that the consumer can do in order to express their dissatisfaction. First is by exiting the organisation. Exit here means to leave the organisation and discard from doing business with them. This type of consumer did not give any feedback towards their dissatisfaction and tend to ignore it by leaving the organization. Secondly is by voicing out their dissatisfaction. This is how the

figure shown above is gathered. When the consumer voice out their dissatisfaction, they give the organisation and service providers time to rectify the problem by performing service recovery. Through this action, the organisations are able to know about any dissatisfaction from their consumer. The third mechanism that Hirschman (1970) mentioned is loyalty. This is the type of consumers that still have trust with the organisation or service provider and stay loyal to them. Although they encounter some dissatisfaction, they still do business with the organisation or service providers. An extension towards Hirschman's model is being done by Huefner and Hunt (2000). They mentioned that, apart from those three mechanisms, there is another behaviour that the consumers are able to do. It is an aggressive behaviour called retaliation. Retaliation is a part of getting back to the organisation or service providers about any dissatisfaction caused by them. For example, in a supermarket, in order to express their dissatisfaction, the consumer may perform certain vandalism just to express that they are not happy with the products and services provided by the organisation.

Factors influencing dissatisfaction

Attribution

Consumer research generally advocates the Weiner's (1986) dimension of attribution which are locus of causality, controllability and stability (Varela-Neira, Vazquez-Casielles and Iglesias, 2010). The attribution plays an essential role in explaining dissatisfaction after service failure (Tsiros, Mittal and Ross, 2004). Consumer may attribute the failure to diverse causes, but those causes can be described through the three dimensions of attribution. (Varela-Neira *et al.,* 2010). This is supported by Singh (1988) which states, according to the theory of attribution, dissatisfaction is part of an attributional process where the consumer looks for reasons to explain the difference between his or her expectation. Laufer (2002) added, attributional style refers to the way people explain the causes of specific events and problems in their lives and in the lives of others. Pyszczynski and Greenberg (1981) stated that the disconfirmation of expectation is the most important causal agent for generating the attributional processing. Kelley (1967) mentioned that early attribution theory was purely cognitive whereby the locus of causality or causal responsibility was the result of a logical inference process performed on information concerning the actor and his or her behaviour. There are two types of explanations that are given to explain the causes of events by people. First is external attribution where the individual attributes the causes to environmental factors and second, internal attribution where the causes are attributed to the dispositional factors (Heider, 1958).

There are different behaviours found when studying the attribution between cultures was made. In recent review of studies (Choi, Nisbett and Norenzayan, 1999) comparing North American and East Asian perceivers, researchers concluded that the sharpest differences in attributions for the cause of an individual's behavior lie in the weight accorded to the context of constraints and pressures imposed by social group. Choi *et al*. (1999) also suggest that different thinking styles between Asian and Western cultures may explain some of the differences in attribution. Lloyd (1990) added the Westerners use analytic thinking, paying attention primarily to the object, categorising it on the basis of its attributes, and attributing causality to the object based on rules about its category membership. Meanwhile Choi *et al.* (1999) mentioned that the Asian perceive and reason holistically, attending to the field in which objects are embedded and attributing causality to interact between the object and field.

Weiner (1985) stated that in this process, there are three criteria that can be used when identifying the cause of the success or failure of their experience. The criteria are origin, stability and control.

- **Origin (Locus of Causality)**
  This related to whom and what is to blame for the service failure (Varela-Neira *et al*., 2010). These causes may be internal, external or situational. Internal is when the consumer assumes that he or she has caused the result (Weiner, 1985). From these criteria we can assume that the problem caused is from the consumers' fault. External is when the consumer is blaming the company who supply the product (Weiner, 1985). Hui and Toffoli (2002) also added, in general, consumer have an esteem-related bias and tend to blame the service failures on suppliers, instead of themselves to protect their ego. Situational is the surrounding factors of thirds parties that leads to dissatisfaction. To conclude these criteria Chang (2008) stated that when the consumers are disappointed with the services or the products because it do not fulfill their expected needs or not worth their price, consumer may attribute their dissatisfaction to others, or themselves, depending on the circumstances. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) added the reason for this situation is that the consumers believe they themselves are partly responsible for their dissatisfaction. The consumer may feel more responsible for their dissatisfaction in purchasing the services rather that product (Zeithaml *et al*., 2003). This is because when buying products, it is usually covered by warranties or guarantees which indicate that if something goes wrong, it is not the responsibility of the consumer (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2003)

- **Stability**
  When evaluating stability, the consumer wonders how likely it is that the cause that gave rise to the result will occur again (Weiner, 1985). Weiner (1985) also added that in the stability dimension, it refers to the signals that indicate whether the same problem or success of a product is likely to be repeated in the future. Folkes (1988) also stated that attribution of stability indicates whether the cause are perceived as relatively permanent and stable or as temporary and variable. Tsiros *et al*. (2004) added consumer update their assessments of the service and incorporate them into their dissatisfaction judgments only when they consider the cause of failure to be stable.

- **Control (Controllability)**
  According to Taylor (1994), this attribution refers to whether the cause of the failure is under the service provider control. Maxham and Netmeyer (2002) stated that the consumer tend to be understanding and forgiving when they perceive that the service failure is out of their service provider's control. Weiner (1985) describe controllability as the power that is available to the consumer or other parties in certain situation to alter the result. For example, if consumers attribute a disappointing service experience to an external, uncontrollable cause, the consumer will put less blame to the firm or service provider (Weiner, 1986). In contrast, if the problem is being regard as controllable, the blame is targeted to the perceived entity that had control (Weiner, 1985).

Equity/Inequity

Equity theory is concerned with the balance, and perceived fairness, of the inputs and outputs of a particular transaction (Boote, 1998). According to Adams (1963), equity theory refers to a need mechanism in the individual that is activated when the ratio of resources received to investments made by the individual is not equal to the ratio for others in the exchange relationship. According to Walster, Walster and Berscheid (1978), inputs are defined as "the participant's contributions to the exchange which are seen by the participant or an observer as entitling him to rewards" and outcomes are defined as "the positive and negatives consequences that a participant or observer perceives a participant has incurred as a consequences of his relationship with another".

According to Boote (1998), there are three possible outcomes of a given transaction as prescribed by equity theory. First is equity. Equity is the case

where inputs and outputs of either side are perceived to be of an equal degree. Inequity exists when one side in the transaction is perceived to have gained the upper hand. Second is positive inequity. Positive inequity is the case where from your point of view you have gained more from the transaction, in terms of inputs or outputs than the other side. Third is negative inequity. Negative inequity is the case where the other side is perceived to have more than you. From an equity perspective, consumer dissatisfaction is the result of negative inequity, where the consumer perceives to have gained less from a transaction than the seller. A complaining behaviour is, therefore, likely if dissatisfaction is caused by negative inequity. Adam (1963) also suggests that the state of perceived inequity creates tension which an individual wishes to reduce. Walster *et al*. (1978) added, methods of reducing perceived inequity might include changing one's input into the relationship, changing one's perception of one's outcomes from the relationship, or leaving the relationship.

Lapidus and Pinkerton (1995) stated that, according to equity theory, the consumer evaluates his/her inputs and outcomes and compares them to the perceived inputs and outcomes of the seller in an effort to assess the equity of the transaction. The difference between traditional and contemporary equity theory as mentioned by Oliver and Swan (1989) is where in the traditional equity theory the consumers compare their outcomes with the merchants' outcomes whereas in contemporary equity theory which assumes multidimensional inputs and outputs, these have to be translated into common units by the consumer and merchants in order to draw conclusions regarding the equity of the exchange.

According to Oliver and Swan (1989), equity is also known as distributive justice. Distributive justice is the evaluation of the situation whether they are equitable or not. The evaluation is important as the consumer will compare whether the investment that they made with the product or service that they purchased is equivalent to what they paid. Equity is based on the evaluation of two dimensions. First is fairness and second is known as preference (Messick and Sentis, 1979; Oliver and Swan, 1989).

- **Fairness**
  Fairness is the form of justice whereby the individual get "what is right" and "what they deserve (Velazques, Blasco, Saura and Contri, 2009).

- **Preference**
  Preference refers to an exchange outcome in which the perceiver receives more benefits or outcomes that the other party (Velazques *et al*, 2009). Velazques *et al*. (2009) describe this as inequity and the

advantageous of inequity and the opposite of disadvantageous inequity.

Service recovery expectation

When there is a service failure, the action taken by the service provider in response towards the service failure is refers to as service recovery. When consumers' levels of perceptions do not match the level of expectation it will lead to a service failure. Miller, Craighead and Karwan (2000) defined service recovery as action being taken to resolve the problems, to alter the negative attitudes of the dissatisfied consumers and finally retain these consumers. According to Lewis and McCann (2004) in a hotel industry, it involves a high degree of interaction between employees and consumers and thus leads to the opportunity for the service failure to occur. The service recovery expectation is when the consumers predict the action that the firm will handle when they complaint (Oliver, 1997).

Lin (2010) added, service industries are currently faced to develop new consumer and maintain the existing consumer that they currently have. Although the consumer has experience dissatisfaction, the consumer may not complaint but still have expectation towards service recovery (Lin, 2010). This was also agreed by Kelley and Davis (1994) which state that, because of the consumer retention, that is why service recovery is important. Maxham and Netemeyer (2003) explained that, there is a possibility that the organisation can make the matter worse if the recovery effort is not properly managed after a service failure.

Consumer from different cultures have different perceptions on the reason for service failures based on the study of Matilla and Patterson (2004) which compared the consumers in the west and the east from the cultural perspectives. Matilla and Patterson (2004) stated that the East Asian and American consumers shows a differential sensitivity to situational constraints which influences consumers' attribution process and this lead to the consumer being moderates in their satisfaction with the service recovery process. This was similar to the study done by Poon and Low (2005) which found out that the post-recovery satisfaction was higher among Western travelers than the Asian consumer.

Consumer characteristic (Demographic)

Past research has shown that individual consumer demographic is significance on determining the level of satisfaction (Bryant and Cha, 1996; Johnson and Fornell, 1991). Subsequent studies conducted also show that

customer characteristic are also associated with the outcomes of the consumer satisfaction (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001; Cooil *et al*. 2007).

- **Gende**r
  Past research that has been done has shown that women report greater overall satisfaction than men (Bryant and Cha, 1996; Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). The reason for this is that women may be more experience shoppers with more skill at making attribute comparisons (Anderson, Pearo and Widener, 2008). The experience enable women to identify items that best fit their personal needs and leads to higher overall satisfaction than men (Bryant and Cha, 1996). Mittal and Kamakura (2001) added that women are less likely to tell the truth about negative experiences than men. Past research also identified the difference in relative weights that men and women assign to the service concepts components that are often attributable to the differences in leadership style (Eagly, Makhijani and Klonsky, 1992). Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993) mentioned that there are findings that suggest that women focus more on the interpersonal components of a service interaction. Zeithaml (1985) added, in general buying behaviour, past research has shown that women's purchases are influenced more heavily by their evaluations of personal interactions. Gilbert and Warren (1995) also stated that women's purchase behaviour is influenced by the sales personnel consolations than men's purchases. Therefore, through this statement, we can generalise that women are likely to be more satisfied than men. This will to lead to the idea that men are likely to be more dissatisfied than women.

- **Age**
  Age also plays a significant role in determining the factors influencing dissatisfaction. John and Cole (1986) stated that elderly people are, slower in encoding new information and in retrieving information store in their memory which will reduce the information processing capability. Mittal and Kamakura (2001) also stated that older people easily accept satisfaction since for them information to search for a new provider is more costly. Bryant and Cha (1996) added that there is a difference in product or service evaluations which may be due to difference in expectation. This may be caused by the difference in society and culture behaviour at birth and maturation (Bryant and Cha, 1996). By concluding both research, Bryant and Cha (1996) and Mittal and Kamakura (2001), it is agreed that past research has shown that older people tend to be more satisfied than younger people. Through this statement, it can be

generalised that younger people will be more dissatisfied than older people.

- **Income**
  Besides age and gender, income also has effect on consumer dissatisfaction. Bryant and Cha (1996) found out that satisfaction declines as the income arises. This is where the consumer experience dissatisfaction when they have a higher income. Mittal and Kamakura (2001) also suggest that older people with lower education will easily accept satisfaction since finding alternatives will be costly. Therefore, it is understood that as the level of income getting higher, the level of satisfaction will decline.

Conclusion

Malaysia is moving towards Vision 2020 and consumer play a huge role in making the vision a reality. Satisfied consumer will bring a beneficial outcome to our economy thus it is important to learn about consumer satisfaction and consumer dissatisfaction. Past researches on consumerism nowadays are basically focusing on achieving consumer satisfaction and discarding the other side of consumer satisfaction - dissatisfaction. In Malaysia there are lack of research covering the topic of dissatisfaction and what cause the consumer to be dissatisfied. Most of the research is again focusing mainly on achieving consumer satisfaction. In reality, there is always a dissatisfied consumer. Every organisation and service providers will face this situation. Therefore, it is relevant to examine not only the satisfaction factor but also the factors that influence the consumer to be dissatisfied. As mentioned by Ramanathan and Ramanathan (2011) the ability of an organisation to attract and retain customers is vital to its success. In addition, this review is focusing only on the service industry, therefore future research should be done in other industry to determine whether the factors that influence consumer dissatisfaction can be generalised to every industry in Malaysia. Apart from understanding the consumer dissatisfaction, we are also able to study the patterns of the hotel guests' behaviour towards satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is important for us to understand the behaviour because in can help our country to strengthen the economy in achieving the Vision 2020.

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