

## **THE ROLE OF SERVICE QUALITY AND RELATIONSHIP MARKETING IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY**

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### **Abstract**

*The competitive nature of hospitality industry makes it imperative for operators to constantly seek new ways to improve their services, as well as map out strategies to provide memorable experience for their patrons. In order to keep abreast of the current and future needs of the ever-evolving industry, and respond to the demands of increasingly sophisticated guests, innovation and creativity seems crucial in maintaining a competitive edge in hospitality industry. This study tries to examine the effect of service quality and relationship marketing on customer satisfaction and loyalty to enhance the competitive edge of hospitality industry. As such after reviewing many literatures it is supposed this study could shed light into the establishment of successful framework for in-house restaurants, by taking into consideration and understanding the areas of consumer perception, customer satisfaction and loyalty in this industry.*

*Keywords: service quality, relationship marketing, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this era, globalization is increasingly important. Information on factors determining the creation of loyalty among customers becomes an essential matter. Thus, the same concept applies here where it is imperative for restaurants owner to identify the factors, which influence consumer's choice in choosing one restaurant over the others, in order for them to be successful in the new or existing market. To take advantage of such a huge market potential, firms need to start in investigating the factors that producing loyalty by understanding consumer perception on the restaurants.

Keeping in view of the growing of eating out culture and the increasingly competitive environment, it is definitely important for firms to be customer-oriented by understanding customer needs and supplying their customers with the service that fill the void. At the hearts of most marketers, it is of great interest to find out: what makes restaurants patron loyal? This research aims to study loyalty at in-house restaurants by investigating the impact of service quality and also relationship marketing as two important constructs on customer satisfaction and loyalty. From previous researches can conclude that one of the certain ways of growing profit is to make customers loyal. As such, customer loyalty has been well-researched topic in the hospitality industry.

According to studies, customers display differing degrees of loyalty or allegiance in various aspects of their daily interactions. It has been stated that customer satisfaction is connected positively with loyalty in hospitality (Chitty et al., 2007), (Kandampully and Surhatano, 2000). Moreover, (Olson, 2002) stated the Satisfaction–Loyalty model which shows that high level of perceived service quality would provide a high level of customer satisfaction, which positively impact on customer loyalty.

Moreover, in the recent years, customer relationships have received considerable attention from both academics and practitioners (Berry, 1995; Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999a). The popularity of relationship marketing stems, in part, from the assumption that building customer relationships will lead to increased profits for the organisation in the form of customer satisfaction, loyalty, word-of-mouth, and increased purchases. Relationship marketing (RM) has been put forth as a way for firms to develop mutually beneficial and valuable long-term relationships with customers (Ravald and Grönroos, 1996).

As a result, another aspect which could lead to increase the customer satisfaction and in turn enhancing the loyalty is to growing the relationship between company and customer which lead to achieve privileged information about what customer's need is. The information sought will be able to provide useful insight to restaurants owners on the important factors that would contribute to a successful restaurant.

### **Problem statement**

In this study, the problem statements are as follows:

First, the research aims to investigate the key determinants of service quality that contributes to customer satisfaction at in-house restaurant.

Second, the research aims to determine factors that contribute to relationship marketing towards customer satisfaction at in-house restaurant.

Third, subsequent problem statement arises is whether customer satisfaction exerts some influence in driving loyalty at in-house restaurant; As loyalty is deemed as essential in the growth of businesses, Generating loyalty is one of major marketing objective which is followed by key players in different industries and deliver to business customers (Bansal and Gupta, 2001). According to (Bowen and Chen, 2001) customer should feel more than satisfaction and just making customers satisfied could not be enough. This will result customer loyalty. Making loyalty is going to be one of obligation for each business to achieve competitive advantage.

### **Research Objective**

The overall objective of this research is to provide insight on loyalty at restaurants inside hotels, which shed light into the establishment of successful, those kind restaurants, by taking into consideration the understanding in the areas of consumer perception, customer satisfaction and loyalty. Most marketing literature cited that loyalty is a direct reflection of customer experience with the service/product. Particularly, satisfaction plays a crucial role in determining future patronage of a service provider (Oliver, 1999); (Hess and Story, 2005); (Berschler, 2006). Hence, it is pertinent to understand what drives customer satisfaction.

In this study, one of the research objectives is "Identifying the key determinants that contributing to customer satisfaction at in-house restaurants, particularly the effect of service quality and relationship marketing as two important antecedents of satisfaction." This objective will serve as the basis of this research. The subsequent objective arises whether customer satisfaction exerts some influence in driving loyalty at the in-house restaurants.

### **SERVICE QUALITY**

Restaurants is a kind of producer and service provider at the same time, regarding the fact that it serves customers as a service providers as well as preparing meal as a producer. In other words there is a mixed of tangible and intangible together. To understand the role of restaurants as a service provider should consider the relationship between customers and staff while serving customers, greeting them and taking order or delivering service, also to better know about considering food as a product should think over the taste, quality and price of the meal. This is a the fact that when customers refer to a restaurant to have meal they experience receiving a combination of service and product, although their main purpose is eating, their experience of dining out would be a combination of having meal as a product and receiving service from the way staff treat them to the ambiance and physical appearance of restaurants such as lighting, the location of restaurants, music and decoration. All those elements mentioned above can contribute to customer satisfaction towards dining in restaurants.

In other words, the quality of food, physical ambience and the level of service they received influence their level of satisfaction regarding those restaurants. This can affect their decision to choose where to have their breakfast, lunch or dinner. As long as customer consider value for money they are more likely to be sensitive in making choice of the place for dining out. Therefore there are several factors accounted for preferring a family dining restaurant over another. Although the food can satisfied customers at a certain family chain restaurant, the quality of service or ambience might affect their decision. Thus customers' experience of food is not the only reason to choose a restaurant as long as they take into accounts other factors such as service and physical environment.

According to previous research regarding the influential factors which affect customer satisfaction when they patron a restaurant, some elements are recognized as the most important indicators of satisfaction including hygiene (Aksoydan, 2007), freshness, quality of food and food portion (Myung et al, 2008). In study of (Namkung and Jung, 2010) price, speed of service, taste of food and presentation were the major indicators of satisfaction in restaurants. Quality of food and service in study of (Goyal&Singh, 2007) were determiners of satisfaction towards restaurants.

The measurement scale for satisfaction which uses SERVPERF focuses on performance perceptions instead of expectation of services (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). (Qin and Prybutok, 2008) used the modified SERVPERF approach (performance perception alone) to examine the relationships among factors such as service quality, food quality, price/value on customer satisfaction and satisfaction towards behavioural intentions. The research was based on the survey conducted on college students at south-western university. In addition, in the study of (KisangRyu and Heesup Han, 2009), they have done a research to examine the relationships between three dimension of quality including quality of food, service quality and physical environment, also they perceived, price as a moderator, towards satisfaction. They furthered their study by examining the association between satisfaction and behavioral intention towards quick casual restaurants.

Regarding the direct association between service quality dimension and customer satisfaction, according to (Jamal and Anastasiadou, 2009), reliability, tangibility and empathy positively related with customer satisfaction. In study of (Hon Tat.et.al., 2011) findings also revealed that among the five SERVPERF dimensions, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, assurance was found to have the strongest positive influence on customer satisfaction towards FFRs.

Table 1: Service Quality dimensions

Construct	Dimensions	Elements	Source
Services Quality	Tangibles	Clean dining area	Cronin and Taylor (1992);
		Well-dressed employees	
		Using disposable gloves and hair net	
		Seating availability	
		Parking availability	
	Reliability	Providing service as promised	Cronin and Taylor (1992)
		Sympathetic and reassuring Dependable on-schedule service Accurate charge	
	Assurance	Trust employees Feel safe for financial transactions	Cronin and Taylor (1992)
		Friendly employees Knowledgeable employees	
	Responsiveness	Telling exact service time	Cronin and Taylor (1992)
Employees available to requests			
Prompt service			
Empathy	Employees willing to help	Cronin and Taylor (1992);	
	Convenient operating hours Convenient locations		
Recovery	Completely packaged food	Olorunniwo et al. (2006), Hong Qin and Victor R. Prybutok (2009)	
	Employees quickl apologize for mistakes		
	Cares about customer's complaints		
	Skills and ability to deal with complains		
		Employees empowered to provide compensation	

## RELATIONSHIP MARKETING

Gronroos (1990b, p. 5), defines relationship marketing in the following way: "Relationship marketing is to establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises".

Relationship marketing (RM) has been put forth as a way for firms to develop mutually beneficial and valuable long-term relationships with customers (Ravald and Gronroos, 1996). RM is believed to work most effectively when customers are highly involved in the good or service, there is an element of personal interaction, and customers are willing to engage in relationship building activities (O'Malley and Tynan, 2000).

As a result, relationship marketing tries to provide close relationship with customers to enable them to express their needs and communicate to the firm effectively, which can lead customers to feel satisfy. However, most researches and relationship concept or relational marketing to date conducted from the view of western countries and there are few researches in Malaysian and Asian context. Being culturally collectivist (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Ndubisi, 2004) and having unique relationship structure grow the needs of accurate strategy which suites Malaysian and benefit this distinct culture to increase satisfaction. Hence, another aspect which could lead to increase customer satisfaction and in turn enhancing the loyalty is to growing the relationship between firm and customer which lead to achieve privileged information about what customer's need is.

### **Relationship Marketing Dimensions**

Relationship marketing has been supposed as a key competitive advantage by which a company can succeed in such a fierce business environment (Bejou et al., 1996). Understanding the success of the development of long-term relationships with customers, therefore, becomes critical in the process of gaining competitive advantage. (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) developed a model of relationships between firms that proposed trust and commitment as central to the development of long-term relationships. Regarding assessing the influence of relationship marketing on customer satisfaction the study of (Nelson OlyNdubisi, Chan KokWah, 2005), (Amy Wong, 2002) and (NurHaryani, 2011) was used.

### **Trust**

Trust is referred to “a tendency to be depends on one with whom you have agreed to undertake something” (Moorman et al, 1993). A misuse of trust by any of parties including supplier, providers and middles could result the abandonment of the relationship. (Schurr and Ozanne, 1985) argued that trust is feeling confident that partners will keep their promise and commitment and will not violent his obligation. Some others have described it as a behavior in the opportunistic way (Dwyer et al, 1987), share value (Morgan and Hunt, 1994), mutual purpose (Wilson, 1995), uncertainty (Crosby et al, 1990), positive result of action (Anderson and Narus, 1984) not breaking the promises (Bitner, 1995).

In literature, it is often argued that successful relationship marketing requires relationship trust. it is assumed that trust has an important role to accomplish in the evolution of enduring business relationships. Marketing scholars have recognised the importance of trust in developing and managing business relationships. It is a substantial dimension in the interaction

and network approach, services marketing (Grönroos, 1990) and a basic feature in relationship marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

### **Commitment**

Commitment is defined as keeping the on-going relationship seems important for parties as they tried the best to maintain it. Therefore, the committed person will put maximum effort to ensure the relationship will last indefinitely (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). (Kelley and Davis, 1994) examined customer commitment as a general trait, adapting (Mowday, Steers, and Porter's, 1982) measure of organisational commitment.

Likewise, (Morgan and Hunt's, 1994) study in relationship marketing adopted the same scale. Moreover, (Wilson, 1995) argued another view of commitment as a social bond which could be defined as the degree of personal friendship and liking shared by a buyer and seller as well as linking of personal selves or identities through self-disclosure; closeness providing support or advice; being empathetic and responsive; feelings of affiliation, attachment, or connectedness; and shared experience (Turner, 1970). Both a firm and customer should commit to each other in order to satisfy with the service. (Mowday et al., 1982) believed those individuals who get more benefit and get more advantage from the relationship, more likely to put more value for commitment.

### **Communication**

The ability of providing information which is reliable and accessible time to time is called communication. Recently, communication is defined as an interactive conversation which during the process of buying-selling will occur between customers and service/good providers or even after consuming may continue (Anderson and Narus, 1990). Communication also has been defined as a process of constantly sharing information with customers regarding service, changes and delivery system and even solving problem. In the early stage the process of providing information for customers is called awareness. Through awareness firm communicators have the responsibility to develop customers' interest, promoting service or goods, and increasing their purchasing willingness also facilitate the purchasing process (Ndubisi and Chan, 2005).

Communication in relationship marketing means providing information that can be trusted; providing information when delivery problem occurs; providing information on quality problems and fulfilling promises. The process of establishing relationships that have meaningful sales results will require communication, trust and satisfaction between both the buyer and seller. Of several factors that determine customer satisfaction, components of service provider's

communication contribute noticeably to the creation of a strong bond between the service provider and customer (Booms and Nyquist, 1981).

### **The concept and Importance of Customer Satisfaction**

Customer satisfaction has been the subject of many researches. The concept of customer satisfaction refers to the degree of meeting or exceeding customer needs and expectations by receiving a service either product. (Schiffman et al 2010); (Levens, 2012); (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). If the quality of product or service could not meet customer expectation, customers would be dissatisfied towards that certain product or service. If service or product performance could meet customers expectation the satisfaction will be occurred while the service performance beyond the expectation, customers feel satisfied or tend to stick in the certain service or good provider. When customers' needs and expectation fails towards receiving service in restaurants, regardless of this restaurant fails for one or a few aspect of service such as food, ambiance or cost, customers will experience dissatisfaction. Those customers, who feel satisfaction regarding overall experience, would be satisfied. On the other hand other customers, who generally found the quality of service or product is below their expectation like unattractive ambiance and low quality of food, are dissatisfied. Customer satisfaction depends of different variables which totally leads to satisfaction including satisfaction towards the performance of product, consuming a product, quality of the service and many other diminutions. The experience customers have with receiving a service is different from consuming a good or using a product regarding the transaction between customers and restaurants' staff and also amenities provided (Schiffman et al, 2010). It is important to notice that long run business performance and the degree of success in organization is a result of customer satisfaction which leads to loyalty, gaining profit and return patronage (Gilbert, 2006); (KisangRuy and Han, 2009); (Ladhari et al, 2008); (Namkung and Jang, 2007); (Singh, 2006); (Kim et al, 2009).

### **Loyalty**

Importance of customer loyalty as a key competitive advantage beside the positive impact on firms leads marketers to know more about this construct and its particular dimensions. According to this not having enough knowledge about loyalty may face firms with negative result such as determining wrong measurement in identifying loyalty, recognizing wrong customers behaviors to allocate rewards in loyalty program and not having a logical linkage between customer loyalty and performance of firm. While researchers' interests grow towards loyalty, understanding service loyalty concept and measurements is being more complicated. Generally



speaking loyalty in service firms refers to customers' tendency towards that service. In primary research loyalty has defined as a particular behavior such as repurchase or switching intention. After many researches, researchers introduced two dimensions which were used as most common measurement scales in loyalty constructs. These two dimensions include repurchase intention and attitudinal tendency (Pritchard et al, 1999). In new research towards loyalty, researchers use three dimensions for measuring loyalty regarding service which are included behavioral, attitudinal and cognitive dimension. Moreover, evaluating the loyalty of customers with the behavior dimension involves frequently the improper combination of both attitudinal and behavioral attributes (Back, 2005). Particularly, according to (Back, 2005) to evaluate the loyalty of customers in industry like hospitality, attitudinal should be consider more than other dimension.

Therefore, Attitudinal approach, in this study, is taken to evaluate the loyalty by measuring specific rang of latent behaviors which are set off by experiences in a particular restaurant. When customers are committed strongly or there are deep intention to rebuying, recommending to others and paying more, there is likelihood to become a loyal customer (Getty and Thompson, 1994).

### **Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty Relationship**

Researchers assume that the relationship between satisfaction and the different facets of attitudinal, intentional and behavioural loyalty is positive, but varies between products, industries and situations. The few empirical studies that test the relationship between satisfaction and perceived or actual buying behavior or loyalty have suggested a moderate to low relationship compared with studies assessing attitudinal and intentional loyalty (Szymanski and Henard, 2001). In addition, most studies testing the moderator effect between satisfaction and loyalty use an attitudinal or intentional assessment of loyalty.

According to (Bowen and Chen, 2001) customer should feel more than satisfaction and just making customers satisfied could not be enough. This will result customer loyalty. Making loyalty is going to be one of obligation for each business to achieve competitive advantage. It becomes increasingly important that researchers consider the customer satisfaction measurement in order to achieve loyalty. (Fornell, 1992) believed that more customer satisfaction leading to more loyal customers for businesses also encouraging customers to not leave the competition. There are other views in this aspect such as (Anton, 1996) who argued that satisfaction has a positive relationship with repurchase decision, also could lead customers to recommend it to others, making loyalty and increasing market share. Customers who feel loyalty towards the firm will purchase again and again over a long time (Evans and Berman,

1997). It is also predicted that satisfied customers might repeat and become loyal (Guiltingan et al., 1997). On the other hand, there is also another view by (Sivadas and Baker-Prewitt, 2000) who argued that satisfaction can lead to recommendation of department store and repurchasing from it but cannot directly affect loyalty. According to this satisfaction will not lead to loyalty by itself. However, satisfaction can trigger desirable attitude like recommending and repeated purchasing of store which those behavior are related to loyalty. While customers recommend a store to others increase the chance of re- patronage and loyalty for that store. Therefore, it seems recommending a store to others will lead to loyalty. Customers will recommend the store to others if they feel satisfied and experiencing favorable attitude towards the store.(Evans and Berman, 1997) believed that there is a likelihood companies with more satisfied customers can experience more loyal customers who spend over long time.

## CONCLUSION

The study tries to investigate customer satisfaction through two important constructs including service quality and relationship marketing. This combination allows researcher to develop a new framework to evaluate and compare the effect of each variable on customer satisfaction simultaneously which provides a total understanding of importance of each antecedent of quality of service and relationship marketing towards customer satisfaction. Moreover to evaluate the influence of those constructs this research tries to choose the appropriate dimension based on pervious literatures. To investigate the effect of quality of service on satisfaction the research mostly followed the studies of (KisangRyu and Heesup Han, 2009) and (Hong Qin, Victor R. Prybutok, 2009). Both study mentioned above use SERVPERF as (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) justify their SERVPERF or performance-only instrument in place of the gap measurement approach. In addition, they provided empirical evidence that the SERVPERF instrument outperforms the SERVQUAL scale across four industries: fast food, dry cleaning, banks and pest control. The performance-only measures are used and suggested by many scholars in various industries (Gilbert et al., 2004). Besides the research of (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) in fast food industry, (Jain and Gupta, 2004) compare weighted and un-weighted versions of the SERVQUAL and SERVPERF instruments by conducting a survey of FFR customers in India. They found that the SERVPERF scale is more effective in explaining the service quality constructs and variations in service quality scores within the restaurant industry.

Furthermore, based on reviewing many literatures regarding influence of relationship marketing on customer satisfaction the works of (Nelson OlyNdubisi, Chan KokWah, 2005), (Amy Wong, 2002) and (NurHaryani, 2011) were followed; also customer satisfaction in this research measured as overall satisfaction as an important advantage of the cumulative

satisfaction construct over a more transaction-specific view point is that, it is better able to predict subsequent behaviours and economic performance (Johnson et al., 2001)

Next step of this research is to examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. Accordingly this research used studies of (Sunghyup S.H.,2010) and (Heesup Han and KisangRyu, 2009) to assess loyalty which was focused on measuring attitudinal loyalty; as especially in the hospitality industry, the attitudinal approach to assessing the level of customer loyalty should be more focused (Back, 2005); (Schall, 2003).

In conclusion, this research with the help of previous literatures opens a new sight towards obtaining loyal customers in hospitality industry especially at in-house restaurants which is the area of focus in this research. People who are in charge of restaurant industry and hotel owner should find out the most effective factors to provide customer loyalty, in order to apply them into their policy and strategy. This study could provide better understanding of customers in this sector. The study could be examined in different part of hospitality industry, not just in-house restaurants which is the major focus of this research as the finding might be varies according to the type of service and context of the study.

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