

The Effect of Employee Ethics, Trust, and Service Quality to Customer Satisfaction: A Study on Malaysian Telecommunications

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to expand our knowledge by examining the effects of employees' ethic, trust and service quality dimensions on customer satisfaction in telecommunication industry; and to identify the most important factors effects of Customer Satisfaction, if any.

Design/methodology/approach: Descriptive analysis were used in this study. 413 samples were taken from the data gathered from Telecommunication's customer in Selangor, Malaysia and we distributed online survey (263 responses) to random customer through any social media platform (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and others), and distributed hardcopy using a convenient sample to 150 customers for any telecommunications service provider.

Findings: This study found out that the dimensions of service quality and customer trust which the company must focus to provide better service for customer satisfaction. This study also found that salesperson ethical treatment is not significantly affect customer satisfaction in telecommunication industry.

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation of the study is that it was confined to the Selangor area only. so, the findings of Selangor cannot be generalized for the entire nation. Secondly, present study focuses only on Telecommunications Service Industry. Secondly, present study focuses only on Telecommunications Service Industry.

Practical implications: The research results provide the telecommunications service provider with some knowledge and feedback in the development of management strategies to increase customer satisfaction. Telecommunications service providers must emphasize the importance of customer trust and service quality in their strategic business planning to increase customer satisfaction.

Originality/value: This study contributes to the factors affect the customer satisfaction literature by proposing future research avenues.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Employee Ethics, Trust, Service Quality, Telecommunication.

Introduction

Customers have the option of switching from one service provider to another in the telecommunications business due to a tough competitive market where customers desire better services at reduced pricing. The telecommunications business has an annual churn rate of 10% to 67 percent, which may be loosely defined as the process of client turnover, and it costs 5-10

times more to attract a new customer than it does to keep an existing one. Celcom, Maxis, Digi, Telekom, U-Mobile, and some are among the major telecommunications companies operating in Malaysia. Companies are competing for market share in a highly competitive market environment. Organizations have identified over time that customer satisfaction is the key to success. With the current rate of growth and intense competition, it was necessary to grasp the needs of customers, and companies are doing so. Because services are intangible, companies that provide services sometimes find it difficult for customers to evaluate them. As a result of the increased competition and deregulation, many retail companies are looking effective ways to differentiate their services. Even when a consumer is satisfied after a single encounter with a service provider, it is extremely challenging for marketers to give the same level of satisfaction in future interactions because services are heterogeneous in nature (A.P. Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The issue that today's marketers face is determining how to please customers in order to generate long-term profit. However, nothing is known about how to please customers (Gremler, Brown, & others, 1996). As a result, understanding the factors that influence customer brand loyalty in the in-service market is vital.

The research surveyed 413 respondents from Selangor and was focused on the telecommunications industry. Less product differentiation between the products/services given by firms, more demanding customers, and cost optimization by companies characterise the twenty-first century. Customer happiness is critical for corporate success in this situation. The cost of acquiring new consumers is 5 times higher than the cost of retaining old customers, according to Edward & Sahadev (2011); Kotler (2010); Reichheld & Schefer (2000). In this situation, client satisfaction is critical to the company's success. The goal of this research is to learn more about the effects of salesperson ethics, customer trust, and service quality on customer satisfaction in the telecommunications industry. The focus of the study is to identify the most important factors effects of Customer Satisfaction, if any. The research objectives driving this study are to identify the impact of salesperson ethical treatment, customer trust and service quality on customer satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunication industry.

The paper has four parts. First, it reviews the extant literature relevant to employees' ethic, trust, service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction. Then, the research methodology is presented, and data analysis techniques are discussed. Next, the findings are discussed and summarised. The paper concludes with discussion of theoretical and managerial implications and directions for further research.

Literature Review

Customer Satisfaction

Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence including competence, courtesy, credibility, and customer satisfaction has been considered one of the most important constructs and one of the main goals in marketing. In the study by Kim (2019), he explains that customer satisfaction is the key factor which is used to measure the company internal and external performances and assigning funds to each activity. The literature supports that satisfied customers are willing to more services or products, recommend them to others, and less price sensitive. The unsatisfied company do not take time to switch that brand (Lin & Wu, 2011). Therefore, achieving high levels of service is one method to keep customers both satisfied and loyal (Perng, 2007).

Customer satisfaction is a consumer's assessment of whether a product or service provides an adequate level of consumption (Zhang & Shao, 2019). Motion-related fulfilment after it has been used (TRAN, VO & DINH, 2020). According to (Zhang & Shao 2019), customer happiness is based on the customer's impression rather than the product or service itself. Similarly, (Tamon, & Tumewu, 2019) claims that customer happiness is determined by the

customer's assessment of the value obtained. Furthermore, a study by Wu & Li (2017), discovered that perceived value has a favourable impact on satisfaction. It is therefore assumed that the level of satisfaction varies depending on the customer with the same level of service (Davras & Caber, 2019).

Salesperson Ethical Treatment

Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence including competence, courtesy, credibility, and customer satisfaction has been considered one of the most important constructs and one of the main goals in marketing. In the study by Kim (2019), he explains that customer satisfaction is the key factor which is used to measure the company internal and external performances and assigning funds to each activity. The literature supports that satisfied customers are willing to more services or products, recommend them to others, and less price sensitive. The unsatisfied company do not take time to switch that brand (Lin & Wu, 2011). Therefore, achieving high levels of service is one method to keep customers both satisfied and loyal (Perng, 2007).

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Customer Trust

Customers who are loyal are more resistant to unfavourable word of mouth and less price sensitive. Furthermore, Song, Wang, and Han (2019) define loyalty as a consumer's preference for certain goods or services, and they argue that loyalty helps a company gain market share. Building a brand image is extremely crucial for service businesses because it is a strong influencer of product marketing. The brand image is defined as the brand relationships that generate preconceptions about a brand in the consumer's mind (Antwi, 2021). Service quality is defined as the difference between a customer's expectations and their perceptions. In this era of fierce competition, the importance of service quality cannot be overstated (Nikou, Selamat, usoff, & Khiabani, 2016). All businesses must build a level of service that is ultimately focused toward client happiness and loyalty in order to thrive and remain competitive. Furthermore, one of the trailblazers for client pleasure and loyalty is service quality.

Trust is defined as one party's belief that the other will meet their needs. It has received a lot of attention in the literature. Long-term loyalty stems from trust, and the two parties' relationship grows stronger as a result (Ramzan & Syed, 2018). There are two levels of trust, according to (Rauyruen & Miller, 2007). The first level of customer trust is in a certain sales representative. If a person is trustworthy, it is evident that they will buy something. Trust acts as a catalyst between buyer-seller transactions, and when it comes to satisfying the exchange

relationship, trust creates higher expectations among buyers. Trustworthy and ethical behavior is expected from others. In addition, in commercial interactions, responsibilities are met by reliable parties (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). Customers' faith in service is based on the provision of high-quality services that satisfy their expectations. A company's reputation, according to (Milewicz & Herbig, 1994), is the consistency of its operations across time. When it comes to evaluating the quality of products and services from the customer's perspective, trust is crucial, because a company's reputation is built on the quality of its products and services.

Service Quality

One of the trailblazers for customer satisfaction and loyalty is service quality. According to a study by (Sindhu & Arif, 2017), boosting service quality is an effective way to improve customer happiness, trust, and loyalty. According to the findings, perceived value, trust, and customer happiness are all linked to service quality (Ngo & Nguyen, 2016). The pricing is considered as a tool that substantially influences the customer's purchase behaviour. It is crucial in the development of marketing strategies as well as the creation of client pleasure and trust. Price perception, according to the experts, is a crucial tool in determining major customer behaviour that either enhances or diminishes customer happiness and trust (Sindhu & Arif, 2017).

The researchers examined the effects of various variables on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Studies on the telecommunications sector in China, for example, show that the quality of service has a positive, significant correlation with customer satisfaction. In addition, their paper shows that service quality and customer satisfaction are the most important factors for the success of any company. Similarly, a research paper by Akbar and (Akbar & Parvez, 2009) in the telecommunications sector of Bangladesh empirically examines the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction and loyalty. The results show that there is a positive correlation not only between service quality and satisfaction, but also between service quality and loyalty. In Pakistan, too, a study by shows that service quality and loyalty / customer loyalty are positively related. Furthermore, their study argues that for telecommunications operators to be successful in the competitive market, they need to offer higher quality services. (Srikanjanarak, Omar & Ramayah, 2013).

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

The study by Mullki & Jaramillo (2017), stated that ethical reputation has been shown to be a powerful force in establishing and maintaining customer perceived value. As perceived ethicality strengthens and reputation is established, customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention are enhanced. In B2B and B2C relationship selling contexts, salespersons who behave in an ethical manner engender customer satisfaction (Chen & Mau, 2009; Roman and Ruiz, 2005). Researchers argue that service providers can gain a lot if they understand their customers' reviews of their employees (Chen, 2016; Chu et al., 2016). Various studies indicate a connection between employee recruitment and customer satisfaction (Alhelalat et al., 2017; Huang and Xie, 2017; Nunkoo et al., 2017), which leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: The salesperson ethical treatment influence customer satisfaction positively

Trust becomes an extremely important issue in building a customer-bank relationship where customer property is held or managed (Sitorus & Yustisia, 2018). According to Mukherjee and Nath (2003), trust is very important as the basis of the partnership between buyers and sellers. In a marketing context, it is impossible to completely let go of belief in satisfaction. Trust and satisfaction are strongly linked in relationships and some of the trust concepts even include

satisfaction as a component of trust (Sidershmukh et al., 2002; Sahadev & Purani, 2008). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: The customer trust influence customer satisfaction positively

Customer satisfaction is generally defined as a feeling or judgment of customers toward products or services after they have used them (Jamal and Naser, 2003; Quan, 2010; Gupta and Bansal, 2012), whereas service quality is an overall assessment of the services and satisfaction derived from the overall evaluation of the experience with those services (Tian-Cole and Crompton, 2003; George and Kumar, 2014). Various scholars (e.g., Cronin and Taylor, 1992, Oliver, 1997, Parasuraman et al., 1988) have suggested perceived service quality to be the antecedent of customer satisfaction, whereas others (e.g., Andreassen and Lindestad, 1998, Bitner, 1990, Bolton and Drew, 1991) consider customer satisfaction as an antecedent of perceived service quality. We therefore suggest the following hypothesis:

H3: Service quality have positive effect on customer satisfaction

Figure 1 showing proposed research framework of this study.

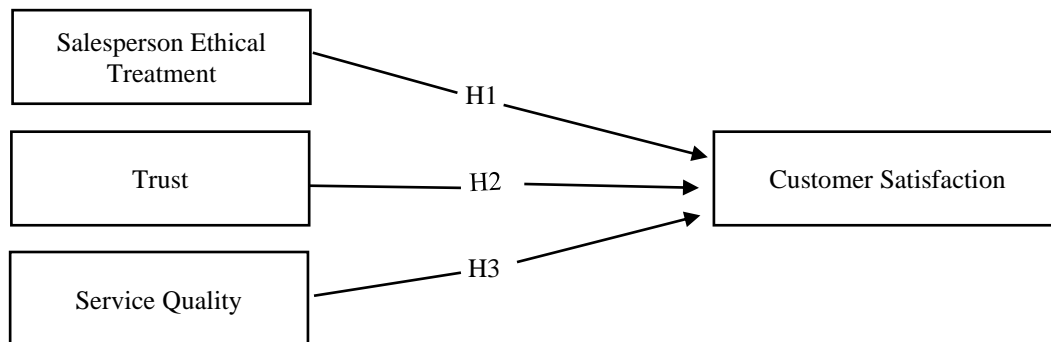


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Method

This study focuses on measuring the impact of the salesperson ethical treatment, trust and service quality in Selangor, Malaysia. Our study was empirically conducted on Telecommunication’s customer in Selangor, Malaysia and we distributed online survey (263 responses) to random customer through any social media platform (e.g WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and others), and distributed hardcopy using a convenient sample to 150 customers for any telecommunications service provider. A total of 413 questionnaires was obtained. Study constructs used showed a good level of reliability, as shown in Table I, which exceeds 0.70 values as a cut-off point (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

The research instrument used is a structured questionnaire; the first section entails personal information about the respondents and has 4 items. The second section measures overall satisfaction and includes five items. The third section is the constructs measured using five points scale (ranging from 1 = “not important” to 5 = “very important”). We managed to get a good response rate, as targeted customers were highly cooperative and live in a small country that has excellent internet facilities and efficient post system. Achieving high mean values in respect of these scores, indicated a better service quality across all the dimensions.

Table 1: Summary of Construct Measurement

Construct	Number of items	Number of Cronbach's Alpha
Salesperson Ethical Treatment	4	0.933
Trust	4	0.873
Service Quality	5	0.830
Customer Satisfaction	5	0.842

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We used the SmartPLS 3 software (Ringle et al., 2015) to create, estimate and evaluate the underlying conceptual model. PLS-SEM can be applied to both reflective and formative measurement models (Sarstedt et al., 2016), supports the estimation of relatively complex models (Ali et al., 2018) and is a causal predictive approach for SEM that researchers can use also allows to assess the predictive quality of the results (Sarstedt et al., 2017). PLS-SEM is therefore particularly useful when researchers want to estimate a structural model that explains an important target construct of interest (Richter et al., 2015; Rigdon, 2012).

We used a PLS-SEM approach since one of the goals of this study is to predict customer satisfaction from several service quality variables rather than to test a theory per se. PLS-SEM also gives fixed latent variable scores, which are necessary to conduct an IPMA, unlike CB-SEM, which is subject to factor scores uncertainty (Rigdon, 2012; Rigdon et al., 2017). The latter compares the total effect of the structural model on a predictor variable to the average latent variable scores of the predictors (Hair et al., 2019; Ringle and Sarstedt, 2016).

Findings

Sample profile and groups

The sample characteristics (see Table 2) reveal that most of the respondents were female (n = 251, 60.8%). The age above 30 in the sample were fewer (n = 115, 27.92%) than the below 30 (n = 298, 72.2%). The respondents in the sample were employed, with around 48.2% (n = 199) and about 44.3% is student (n=183). Most of the respondents subscribe to CELCOM (n = 117, 28.3%) and MAXIS (n = 104, 25.2%).

Table 2: Sample profile of the respondents

Criteria	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	162	39.2
	Female	251	60.8
Age Group	Below 20	21	5.1
	20-30	277	67.1
	30-40	75	18.2
	Above 40	40	9.7

Employment Status	Student	183	44.3
	Employed	199	48.2
	Unemployed	8	1.9
	Self Employed	23	5.6
Employment Status	DIGI	84	20.3
	MAXIS	104	25.2
	CELCOM	117	28.3
	U-MOBILE	78	18.9
	ONE-XOX	6	1.5
	TUNE TALK	24	5.8

Measurement Model Analysis

Structural model was assessed for overall explanatory power of constructs through R^2 value, predictive relevance through Q^2 value and path coefficient β -values. Findings of structural model are presented in Figure 2.

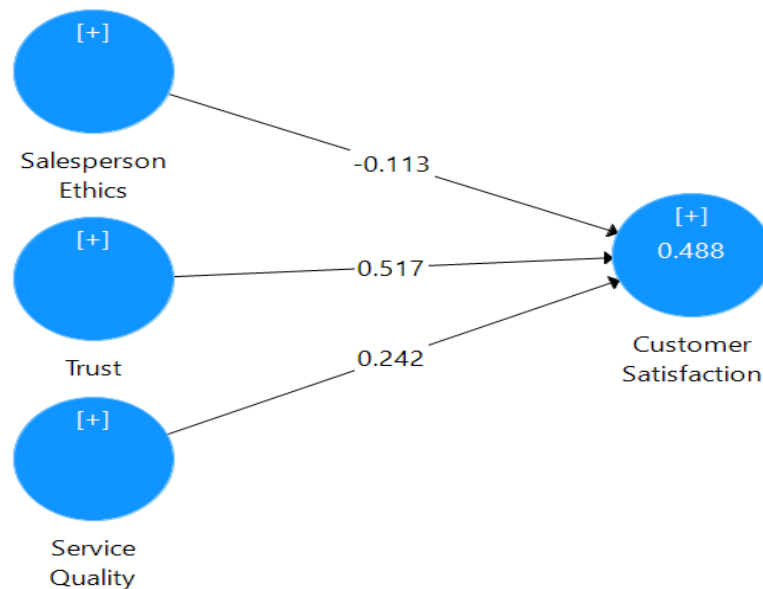


Figure 2: Findings of structural model.

These results indicate that proposed model have 48.8% of explanatory power for customer satisfaction with $R^2 = 0.488$. Moreover, it is found that effect of salesperson ethics treatment to customer satisfaction ($\beta = -0.113$; t -value = 1.595; $p = .055$) is not supported for H1. Findings of SEM analysis support H2 which is the effect of customer trust to customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.242$; t -value = 4.741; $p = .000$) is supported. Further, a strong effect of ($\beta = 0.517$; t -value = 10.226; $p = .000$) between service quality and customer satisfaction provides support for H3. A summarized overview of these findings is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Hypothesis assessment.

<i>Hypothesis Path</i>	<i>β-value</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Decision</i>
<i>H1</i> Salesperson Ethics -> Customer Satisfaction	-0.113	1.595	0.055	Not Supported
<i>H2</i> Service Quality -> Customer Satisfaction	0.242	4.741	0.000	Supported
<i>H3</i> Trust -> Customer Satisfaction	0.517	10.226	0.000	Supported

The R² value of our structural model is 0.488, as shown in Figure 2, indicating that the suggested conceptual model has acceptable explanatory relevance. Here, caution is advised, as relying solely on the R² value to support a model is not a viable strategy (Hair et al., 2017, Radovic-Markovic et al., 2017). As a result, Stone-(1974) Geisser's Q² test was employed to evaluate the structural model's predictive relevance. If the Q² value is greater than zero, it indicates that the structural model's latent exogenous components have predictive relevance for latent endogenous constructs (Chin, 2010, Hair et al., 2017). Our model's Q² value is 0.296, which supports the study's fundamental assumption, that the endogenous construct (i.e., Customer Satisfaction) involved in this study have medium predictive relevance.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research analyses the role of ethical salesperson treatment, service quality provided by service provider and trust on customer as perceived by the customer in developing customer satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunication industry. This is surprising given the fact that the results show that ethical salesperson is perceived not affected to the customer satisfaction in telecommunication industry. These finding are contrast with the finding of Hidayati & Zainurrafiqi (2021) that shown ethical criteria and their influence on customer satisfaction in banking industry. Findings of this study have shown that better customer trust will enhanced the customer satisfaction in telecommunications industry. These results support the Cheshin, Amit & Van Kleef (2018), Yildiz (2017) which have proven the positive and significant influence between trust and customer satisfaction. Trust and satisfaction are strongly associated in their relationship and some of the concepts of trust even include satisfaction as a component of trust (Sidershmukh et al., 2002; Sahadev and Purani, 2008).

This study has also provided evidence for the fact that batter service quality provided by service provider will positively affect customer satisfaction level. These findings endorse the results of previous studies, such as Farooq et. al. (2016) who observed that service quality is one of the critical success factors in today's service industry, especially when it is considered as one of the distinguishing factors.

The research results and contributions have some implications for the telecommunications service provider. The research results provide the telecommunications service provider with some knowledge and feedback in the development of management strategies to increase customer satisfaction. Telecommunications service providers must emphasize the importance of customer trust and service quality in their strategic business planning to increase customer satisfaction. While the research results provide some insight to the researchers, these results should be viewed with a few caveats in mind. In summary, the limitations associated with the research results are: (1) The judgmental sampling method was used in this study. Thus, the result cannot be generalized. (2) This study was carried out as a cross-sectional study. Thus, the changes in customer satisfaction over a period are not recognizable.

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