

The Impact Of Employee Interactions On Customer Satisfaction In Cruise Services

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the link between customer satisfaction and the perceptions of emotions, role perceptions, perceived control, and customer types. Depending on the context and type of product or service provided, factors including emotions, role perceptions, sense of control, and customer categories play a role in determining whether or not a customer is satisfied through their whole experience. When it comes to cruise services, customer pleasure and contact are critical. One hundred and fifty volunteers answered the survey questions willingly. All cruise passengers in Indonesia were asked to fill out a questionnaire. According to the findings, customer satisfaction with cruise services can be summed up in only two variables. When it comes to consumer pleasure, the role of emotions and a sense of control cannot be understated. As a result of these results, operators of service-based businesses should focus on improving their customer service. Unlike other studies, this study focuses solely on consumer interactions with cruise ships. Workers must be prepared and well-trained to deal with a wide range of customers. A wide range of people uses cruise ships for varied reasons. The findings revealed that emotions and perceived control are highly influenced customer satisfaction. It may be difficult to fulfil the demands and wishes of customers over a short period of engagement if this isn't addressed from the beginning.

Keywords: Tourism, Experience, Customer, Cruise, Theming

1.0 Introduction

In September 2019, the tourism minister of Indonesia reported that the country is looking for an opportunity to boost cruise ship tourism in Indonesia. According to the minister, the number of tourists who come to the country through cruise services is increasing. In 2019, the number of tourists that come through cruise increased by 20% compared to last year. Such a situation is a positive indicator to the country and local tourism industry players to take the new business and market opportunity. As part of the initiative, the minister, Indroyono said,

"We aim to increase the number of foreign cruise travellers 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 to increase the number of tourists 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 benefits to tourists and the national income.

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

High numbers of tourists and services of cruise ships indicate the importance of employees' role in managing their customer behaviours over the cruise period (H. C. Wu et al., 2018). Employee interactions are important things that the cruise ship's management must consider and prioritise. A satisfied customer means a positive customer experience. Marketers claim that happy customers will get satisfied, and the satisfied customer may retain and make a repeat purchase (Mohd. Farid Shamsudin, Rasol, et al., 2020). That simple equation explains that customer is important in the business as it may bring more revenues and sustain in the market.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction, by definition, is the overall customer feeling towards the overall performance of services delivered by the service providers compared to the customer expectations (Oliver, 1993). Customers will become satisfied should the service provider's general services meet the customer expectations (Mohd Farid Shamsudin, Ishak, et al., 2020). High customer expectations with low service delivery will lead to customer dissatisfaction (Kataria & Saini, 2019). Rita et al. (2019) suggested that service providers be more focused on customers so that they can provide the services based on customer needs and wants. However, the needs and wants of customer varies based on customer expectations and experiences (Mohd Farid Shamsudin, Johari, et al., 2020). Past research recommended that service providers be more

market-driven to provide better services to meet customer expectations (Davras & Caber, 2019). The level of satisfaction will be based on the comparison between pre and post consumptions or purchases of services or products (Borishade et al., 2018; Hirata, 2019; Liu et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Moura e Sá & Cunha (2019) highlighted that the expectancy disconfirmation theory could explain customer satisfaction. The theory revealed that customers would become dissatisfied should the performance is below expectations. At the same time, the level of satisfaction will increase should the overall performance delivered meet or exceed expectations (Lankton & McKnight, 2007; Serenko & Stach, 2009; Venkatesh & Goyal, 2010).

Rokhman and Abduh (2019) claimed that customer satisfaction could be derived from subjective elements such as emotions and customer needs. At the same time, customer satisfaction can also be influenced by objective factors such as product features and the product itself (Ghazzawi & Alharbi, 2019; Herhausen et al., 2019; Yang & Ng, 2010). Customer experience before and after the cruise experiences is very important. The service provider needs to understand the customer's needs in taking the cruise carefully. (Muhammad et al., 2016) stated that customers decide to purchase based on their needs. The customer decided to onboard the cruise because there is a need for the customer to take vacations and enjoy the holiday on the package as provided. The first expectations derived from the information received translated into emotional parts to the customer (Famiyeh et al., 2018; Moghavvemi et al., 2018). Such elements are very subjective and differ between one to the customer (M. F. Shamsudin, Shabi, et al., 2018). The objective parts are quite straightforward, where a customer will evaluate the product itself based on their experiences. Customers will decide whether the features they enjoyed or obtained during the trip meet their expectations or not (Hassan & Shamsudin, 2019).

Past research indicates that many reasons can lead to customer satisfaction (Mohd-Any et al., 2019). Service providers must listen to the customer's son to provide the service that the customer wants. Hirata (2019) stated that customer in the 21st century is very knowledgeable as they have access to information. Customers can determine what products or services they like and are interested in purchasing or subscribing (Ong et al., 2017). The competition among the industry players creates a big space for the customer to be demanded as they have high bargaining power (Akroush & Mahadin, 2019). Cruise operators should evaluate the customer's needs before splitting the packages or products into segmentation. Thakur (2019) highlighted the role of the employee towards customer satisfaction. Service providers must ensure that the employee gives their best effort in putting the customer as a priority (Hassan et al., 2020).

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 can solve their problems (Miao & Wang, 2016; Rapp et al., 2012; Terho et al., 2015). Service providers should always alert and ask around if there is anything they can improve to service the customer better (Mohd. Farid Shamsudin, Nayan, et al., 2020).

Past research also recommended that service providers listen to customer feedback and complaints to improve their services (Razak et al., 2020). A customer complaint is important as the customer highlights something important for the service provider to action for the benefits of a long-term relationship (Belwal & Amireh, 2018; Ghazzawi & Alharbi, 2019; Xia & Jin. Customer feedback should be prioritised as they affect customer switch or exit from the customer lifecycle (Mohd Farid Shamsudin, Hassan, et al., 2020). Thiruvattal (2017) stressed that the service provider should have learnt from customer feedback.

Becoming customer-oriented may let the service provider be more consistent in providing the services to customers (Asmelash & Kumar, 2019). Customer-oriented is part of the business organisation's strategy to be closer to the customer by prioritising them (Mikulić & Prebežac, 2012). Service providers should conduct market sense on how to understand the customer better. The service provider should also closely monitor the competitor's action to always compete in the best situation (Medina-Viruel et al., 2019). Customers have choices, and they know what they want (Abudaqa et al., 2019). Service providers must try to understand customers, resulting in customer satisfaction and business growth.

Customers liked to be noticeable and appreciated, especially in a focused product such as cruise. The cruise management should always communicate to the customer on their schedule or any other information that may lead to customer awareness or knowledge continuously updated for the customer action (Shamim & Mohsin Butt, 2013). Service providers should improve service, especially from the customer services personnel or employees (Ahn & Back, 2019). Klein and Jakopin (2014) reminded that the customer is a profit, not an overhead. Service providers should know that each customer carries the customer lifetime value that may impact the service providers long-term (Kadir & Shamsudin, 2019). Marketing scholars since many decades ago warned that service providers to keep the customer satisfied as they have a high potential to stay with the service provider. According to (Razak et al., 2020), Satisfied customers may help the service provider maintain market growth and sustainability.

According to Davras and Caber (2019), Satisfied customers will help the service providers spread good branding about the service providers. A satisfied customers will talk to their close networking and share their experiences. Recent studies highlighted that the service providers' brand might increase due to

popularity and the good name carried by the customers (Bu et al., 2020). Word of mouth can convey messages to other potential customers about the services and products (Moghavvemi et al., 2018). Huang (2017) highlighted that the current customer might not use the traditional word of mouth. Still, they used media social that can reach wide coverage and beyond limitations. Customers can do product reviews, comments, or share their experiences to invite more customers to visit and purchase the tickets. Satisfied customers will tend to become loyal and may bring benefits to the service provider in the long term.

2.2 Employee Interactions

Employee interactions are very important, especially in service-based industries. The employee's role has been mentioned in many studies related to service quality and customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction is derived from their overall experiences dealing with the service providers. Employee interactions are part of the elements in providing positive customer experiences to achieve customer expectations. In service quality, the employee's role can be measured using almost all the dimensions (Forsythe, 2016). Employees need to ensure that they receive the order and deliver accurately under the reliability dimensions (Famiyeh et al., 2018). The employee also needs to interact with more sympathy under the empathy dimension. Besides, employees need to be more reactive by understanding the customer under the responsiveness dimension (Eberle et al., 2016). Finally, the employee roles in portraying the high assertion are demanded in the assurance dimensions. Overall, past research (Berry et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1993; Teeters & Boatman, 1995) indicates that the role of an employee, especially interactions with customers, is really important, especially related to customer servicing.

Customer-oriented organisations must have focused on selecting the best employee at the front liners. Employees should have good

emotional intelligence to serve customers better (Chen, 2017). An employee who has good emotional intelligence can adjust or adapt according to the customer. Recent research indicates that employees with high emotional intelligence can be more empathetic, tactful and thoughtful (Salem et al., 2019). Such ability will make customers happy, especially over long durations at cruise services. Employees who have emotional intelligence would be able to satisfy customers over the long term of cruising (Di Vaio et al., 2021). Such a thing can add more weightage to the overall customer experience cruising with the service provider.

Past research indicates that employees must also show humility to serve the customer (Lemmetyinen et al., 2016). An employee who portrays humility will always become humble when dealing with the customer. They will try their best to accommodate customer requests. Cruise services normally will take more than a day to services. Such a long period would need a strong character of humility to face the same customer over a cruise (Sun et al., 2019). The danger is that when the employee fails 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 (Satta et al., 2015). Almost every customer wants them to entertain fast and quick, but most of the time, the challenges come during the peak hours when there are too many customers, and each comes with unique problems (Sanz-Blas et al., 2019). Patience elements are important to have in the spirit of the employee as they can handle the situations and continue to smile during hard times. An employee without patience will quickly lose control, high temper, and worse, dilute the overall customer experience.

Many studies have been conducted related to good listening, especially customer service and sales performance. The skill of listening needs to be acquired and trained. Most business

organisations perhaps overlooked the importance of listening (M. F. Shamsudin, Razak, et al., 2018). Good listening staff will be able to handle customers correctly and provide solutions accurately. Research indicates that not all problems brought by the customer are standards (H. Wu et al., 2021). As such, employees need to listen carefully and be more empathetic. Customers may come from various backgrounds, and their problems could be different from the others.

Attentiveness is another high skill that must be instilled in all frontlines and employees dealing with customers directly (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2022). It is not easy to be detailed. Being detail-oriented is important as it may lead to a quick and fast solution. Most of the time, employees always jump to conclusions and try to solve customer problems (Mohd Farid Shamsudin, Nayan, et al., 2020). As a result, they failed to meet the customer needs. Service-based organisations need to train their staff to be more details. Certain job scope requires attentiveness as it might have involved 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 types of problems (Brida et al., 2012). The employee should not keep customers waiting for a long time while waiting for other employees to help. The multitasking staff normally can solve all problems because they are empowered, knowledgeable and skilful (Sanz Blas & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2014). Such action will immediately influence the customer to be happy and satisfied. They are so glad because the staff know how to deal with customers. They are humble, attentive, good listeners, and highly emotional intelligence.

3.0 Methodology

This research is about employee interactions' impact on customer satisfaction in cruise services. The study aims to identify whether there is any positive relationship between employee interactions towards customer satisfaction. Emotions, role perceptions, perceived controls, and customer categories, employee interactions were represented. The results were obtained through relationship measurement based on the data collected through a survey using a questionnaire. Overall, 150 respondents were involved in the data collection process. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A is about respondents' profile and part B is about the items on the relationship to be measured. There are 22 items adapted from past research. Breakdown items per dimension are emotions (5), role perceptions (4), perceived controls (5) and customer categories (4). Customer satisfaction is represented by four items as well. All items used in the questionnaire used 7 Liker-point scales, of which one = strongly disagree, and seven strongly agrees. Data analysis was based on structural data modelling, and the results are discussed in the following section.

4.0 Findings

Table 1 represents the overall details and summary of respondents who participate in the data collection. There are 68 (45.33%) males and 82 (54.67%) females who took part in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents are above 40 years old, and most of them are looking for "all in one" vacation. The majority of the respondent is with a basic degree and above. It is also noticeable that the majority are self-employed rather than attached to the 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 degree	98	65.33%
Master 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 were good and above the minimum recommended value. Emotions have the highest mean (5.983), while role perceptions are 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 the principal component analysis. The factors with values greater than One 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
EMO 1	0.854				
EMO 2	0.752				
EMO 3	0.822				
EMO 4	0.893				
EMO 5	0.754				
ROP 1		0.752			
ROP 2		0.822			
ROP 3		0.893			
ROP 4		0.754			
PRC 1			0.866		
PRC 2			0.814		
PRC 3			0.697		
PRC 4			0.811		
PRC 5			0.801		
CUC 1				0.878	
CUC 2				0.865	
CUC 3				0.877	
CUC 4				0.787	
CUS 1					0.920
CUS 2					0.903
CUS 3					0.864
CUS 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 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
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Emotions				
EMO 1	0.881	15.783**	0.89	0.67
EMO 2	0.912	16.251**		
EMO 3	0.714	12.227**		
EMO 4	0.697	11.362**		
EMO 5	0.698	11.707**		
Role perceptions				
ROP 1	0.810	12.318**	0.96	0.73
ROP 2	0.861	13.234**		
ROP 3	0.914	14.644**		
ROP 4	0.866	13.455**		
Perceived control				
PRC 1	0.920	18.255**	0.97	0.78
PRC 2	0.925	11.428**		
PRC 3	0.723	19.254**		
PRC 4	0.831	10.347**		
PRC 5	0.827	10.214**		
Customer categories				
CUC 1	0.921	17.366**	0.92	0.89
CUC 2	0.932	18.544**		
CUC 3	0.824	18.915**		
CUC 4	0.815	11.328**		
Customer satisfaction				
CUS 1	0.902	18.145**	0.93	0.91
CUS 2	0.932	11.878**		
CUS 3	0.853	19.564**		
CUS 4	0.844	10.877**		

Table 5 represents the structural equation modelling results. Two relationships were found significant (emotions towards and perceived controls towards customer

satisfaction). Another two were 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 \rightarrow Customer satisfaction	0.160	0.036	**	H1: Supported
H2: Role perceptions \rightarrow Customer satisfaction	-0.035	0.031	P>0.05	H2: Not supported
H3: Perceived control \rightarrow Customer satisfaction	0.642	0.028	**	H3: Supported
H4: Customer categories \rightarrow Customer satisfaction	-0.026	0.027	P>0.05	H4: Not supported

Note: **P<0.01

Four path coefficients were estimated to test the model's hypothesised causal relationships. The role perceptions and customer categories factors on customer's satisfaction at cruise were

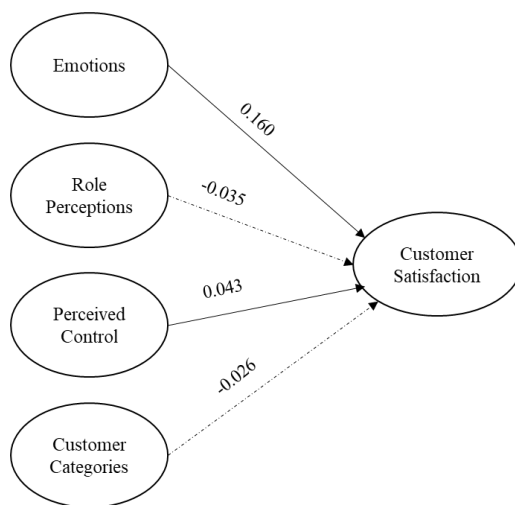
low (β Role perceptions = -0.035 and β Customer categories = -0.026) and non-significant (P for Role perceptions =0.357 and

P for Customer categories = 0.469). Therefore, H2 and H4 was not supported.

Conversely, emotions and perceived control factors positively affect 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 dimensions above explained 64.2 per cent of the variance in customer satisfaction with a 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 standardised regression coefficient



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

5.0 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 are emotions important to customer satisfaction? Emotions in customer interactions focused on anticipating customer emotions in different situations. It

means that employees will adapt to the customer situation and react accordingly. Adaptive emotions can make the customer feel better and recognised. Understanding customer emotions is important because service providers can have engaged experts in managing customers. Service providers should hire and train employees who can address customer feelings accordingly. A good employee should know how to create a positive emotional impact for a long term customer relationship. Employee interactions should be able to reach customers at first contact. It is important that employees know their role and focuses on satisfying customers.

Perceived control is also important towards customer satisfaction. Employees will do their best to increase perceived control of customers' overall experiences during the cruise trips. A

simple acknowledgement such as customer baggage will lead to a positive customer experience. Employees and service providers need to be aware not to make false or dishonest promises. The employee must always keep promises, and that can keep customers satisfied. Besides that, industry players also need to know that customer interaction is the platform between customers and service providers. Therefore, an employee should treat their customer properly to avoid hard feeling or misunderstanding. Good customer interactions are a good investment in customer retention that can provide an advantage over a long-term period.

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