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Zulhan Othman, Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari, Salleh Mohd Radzi,
Tuan Ahmad Tuan Ismail, Hairul Nizwan Abdul Majid

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The Effect of Service Delivery Failures on Service Recovery: A Causal Study

Zulhan Othman¹, Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari¹, Salleh Mohd Radzi¹, Tuan Ahmad Tuan Ismail¹, Hairul Nizwan Abdul Majid²

¹Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Malaysia

²Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Abstract

This paper empirically investigates the causal relationship between service delivery failures and service recovery. Using causal research design through a quantitative method, self-reported and self-administered questionnaire, this research surveyed the individual customers who had experience of dining at Malay medium restaurants. A total of 481 completed questionnaires were successfully collected. Through the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS software, some useful insights are significantly obtained. Result show that there is a strong link between service delivery failure and service recovery. There is evident that service delivery failure in Malay medium restaurants relate to cleanliness of the food, entertainment and dining environment. Besides that, waiting for service, unavailability of the menu card, unfriendly and unhelpful staffs also cause the causation. Most importantly, the level of service recovery in Malay medium restaurants is still poor and the employees are not properly trained to deal with customers' complaints. This pessimistic indication undoubtedly drew several practical implications to the Malay medium restaurant operators.

Keywords: Service, Delivery, Service Failure, Service Recovery

Introduction

No exaggeration that flawless service delivery cannot be guaranteed even in the finest restaurant with the best customer-oriented strategic plans and the tightest quality control systems applied (Chiang, 2007). A restaurant that involves a high degree of personal interaction between restaurant staff and customers cannot avoid errors, mistakes, failures, and complaints in the process of service delivery. Unlike manufacturing industry, where quality controls can ensure zero defects, the restaurant business cannot control all the components of service deliveries due to being dependent on human variables (Magnini & Ford, 2004). Although caution during service delivery is

applied, errors can inevitably happen and these are viewed as service delivery failures of the business (Lin, 2006).

Service delivery failures put restaurants out of business if attention is not paid to the problem (Kerr, 2004). As a central focus of this study, ethnic restaurants have been reported as having difficulties in addressing the issues of delivering consistent service and handling complaints as well combating customers' poor dining experiences (Collins, 2002; Josiam & Monteiro, 2004; Verbeke & Lopéz, 2005; Yoo et al., 2006; Choi & Matilla, 2008; Ha & Jang, 2010). According to Yoo et al. (2006) customers' complaints were not addressed efficiently and Ha and Jang (2010) stressed these disturbing issues and trends affecting ethnic restaurants everywhere. Josiam and Monteiro (2004) reported due to inconsistent service delivery, such as lack of service quality, poor service encounters and poor employee interaction with customer's Indian restaurants in the United States were having difficulty in attracting repeat customers. The positive acceptance of Chinese restaurants in Belgium, specifically in Antwerp has been tarnished by the poor service delivery provided by the restaurant operators to their customers (Pang, 2002). The same scenario occurred in Chinese restaurants in Germany where customers demand not just great food but expect efficient service in delivering the food (Leung, 2002). Verbeke and Lopez (2005) argued that poor service delivery or service deliver failure not only given significant consequences to restaurant survival but also to the country economy.

Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990) who pioneered investigation into service failures through critical incident technique (CIT) classified failures into three broad groups: (1) employee responses to delivery system failures, (2) employee responses to customer needs or requests, and (3) unprompted and unsolicited employee actions. Although many other sub-categories exist, the three classes effectively denote the fact that failures are usually tied to customer evaluations of interaction with some aspect of the service organization. It is believed that service delivery failures arise when service delivery performance does not meet the expectations of customers and it can be classified as either pertaining to the result or the process (Smith, Bolton & Wagner, 1999). Smith et al. (1999) accentuated that failure happens when the core service is performed in an imperfect or incomplete manner, causing a loss of social capital (e.g., status, esteem) for the consumer. On the contrary, an outcome failure happens when some elements of the core service are not delivered, causing loss of economic capital (e.g., money, time) for the consumer. Hoffman et al. (1995) categorized service delivery failure types are as follows: (a) core service failure consisting of product defects, slow/unavailable service, facility problems, unclear policies, and out of stock conditions; (b) implicit/explicit customer requests involving food not cooked to order and seating problems; and (c) unprompted and unsolicited employee actions as incidents of inappropriate employee behaviour, delivery of the wrong order, lost orders, and incorrect billing.

Within a restaurant, the consumer experiences process failure whenever the waiter or waitress is not providing overall acceptable services, lack of attentiveness or unavailable preferred menu items (Chan, Wan, & Sin, 2007). Consequently, restaurants cannot afford to lose new customers who have the potential to repeat their mood of patronization and become public relation

makers through positive word-of-mouth and influencing others customers to dine and consume the products or services (Magnini & Ford, 2004).

Issues

As service failures will occur even in the finest restaurant, it is imperative for a restaurant to make provisions for the recovery of these unfavourable instances and the provisions that a restaurant makes are known as service recovery. More formally, service recovery includes all actions taken by a service provider try to resolve the problem a customer has with their organization (Gronroos, 1990). An organization's ability to recover from failure is an essential element of the whole service delivery system with significant implications for customer satisfaction (Church & Newman, 2000). Duffy (1998) stated that service recovery provides opportunities to decrease costs, improve customer experience, and increase customer loyalty.

Lewis and McCann (2004) deduce that successful service recovery may depend on the type of service a business offers, as well as the nature of the failures the business encounters and how quickly the company responds to the failures. If service providers or companies do not provide better service the second time, this may lead to customer disappointment and loss of confidence in a service. Hence, one of the most important keys to providing excellent service recovery is convincing the customer to bring the failure to the provider's attention and allow the organization to implement the service recovery process (Seawright, Tienne, Bernhisel & Larson, 2008).

To date, there are an increasing number of studies looking at restaurant service failure and recovery in various settings (Boshoff & Leong, 1998; Levesque & McDougall, 2000; McCollough, 2000; Swanson & Kelley, 2001; Kivela & Chu, 2001; Matilla, 2001; Mueller et al., 2003; Wirtz & Mattila, 2004; Wildes, 2005; Sparks & Fredline, 2007). Nevertheless, the extant studies on causal relationships between service delivery failure and service recovery in medium restaurants in particular and rare using Malaysia as the contextual study setting. Thus, this study investigates the causal relationship between service delivery failures and service recovery among the Malay medium restaurants in Malaysia. This objective is further support with three hypotheses.

- H1a There is a significant effect between service failure and service recovery.
- H1b: There is a significant effect between implicit or explicit customer requests and service recovery.
- H1c: There is a significant effect between unprompted and unsolicited employee actions and service recovery.

Literature Review

Service Delivery Failure

The literature generally defines service failure as "a flawed outcome that reflects a breakdown in reliability" (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Customer satisfaction studies referred service failures as post-purchase dissatisfaction because lapses had occurred during service delivery (Goodwin & Ross,

1992). Gronroos (1988) viewed service failures as “a problem of service quality” and stating that it happens “when something went wrong or something random unexpectedly occurs”. Most service researchers agreed that service organizations are prone to error mainly due to the unique characteristics of the service that are; intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Gronroos, 1988; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). For example, not only do the service production process and consumption activities take place simultaneously, but customer and service provider interactions occur frequently as well; thus, they result in servers occasionally failing to satisfy customers (Gronroos, 1988).

Bell and Zemke (1987) thought service failure was the service process that does not conform to the pre-conceived standard an individual customer holds. From the idea of a customers’ pre-conceived standard, Kelly and Davis (1994) advocated the notion that service delivery failure may differ in the level of severity. Level of severity also may vary from person to person. This stems from the fact that customers’ behaviour comes from the way they perceived the event. Service failure also can be defined as a “customer’s perceived service problem, which causes customer inconvenience and/or customer dissatisfaction” (Weun, 1997).

Besides the severity, services failures may also differ in terms of frequency and timing that exist during the relationship as mentioned by Kelley and Davis (1994). Service delivery failure frequency may be different because of the heterogeneous nature of services. Customers who repeatedly patronize the same service provider will more often than not come across various service failures and service intervention attempts. In addition, researchers recognized that a failure is unavoidable in every service industry and they also demonstrated that it could be categorized according to its types (Kelley, Hoffman, & Davis, 1993; Kelley & Davis, 1994). The pioneer work of Bitner et al. (1990) classified incidents of service failure into three groups. The first group of service failure incidents mainly pertained to service failure itself. The second referred to employees who failed to satisfy customers’ needs and specific requests (e.g., failing to accommodate a vegetarian during an in-flight meal). The last category emphasized employees’ unprompted and unsolicited actions (e.g. the waiter did not explain the menu to the customers patiently).

Kelley et al (1994) and Hoffman et al. (1995) used the same classification scheme to demonstrate and support this typology in general retail merchandise and restaurant settings. For instance, Hoffman et al. (1995) categorized service delivery failure types are as follows: (a) core service failure consisting of product defects, slow/unavailable service, facility problems, unclear policies, and out of stock conditions; (b) implicit/explicit customer requests involving food not cooked to order and seating problems; and (c) unprompted and unsolicited employee actions as incidents of inappropriate employee behaviour, delivery of the wrong order, lost orders, and incorrect billing.

Service Recovery

Service recovery has been defined as all actions taken by a service provider in order to resolve the problem a customer has with their organization (Gronroos, 1990). Alternatively, it has been described as “the actions of a service provider to lessen and /or repair the damage to a customer originating from the provider’s failure to perform a service as designed” (Johnston & Hewa, 1997).

Basically, recovery is the methods and mechanisms by which an organization retains dissatisfied customers. While service recovery may not always completely rectify the situation, it can reduce the negative impact of the situation if a problem is handled properly.

Since early 1990s, research surrounding satisfaction and service quality has been slowly transformed to focus on the customer's reaction to service failures and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the organization's approach to service recovery. Research has elaborated service delivery failure as one of the "pushing determinants" that, if handled improperly, drives a customer's switching behaviour (Roos, 1999), thus proficient service recovery satisfaction has turn into an emerging area of interest in effort to reduce failures and increase customers' loyalty.

Matilla and Patterson's (2004) research led them to define service recovery as a process which involved actions taken by a service provider to respond to a situation where a failure occurred in the organization's core or supplementary offerings. Boshoff (1999) acknowledged Zemke and Bell's (1990) definition but contributed that an effective service recovery process was one that was proactive in nature as opposed to reactive. The researcher stressed that a formal process for evaluating the effectiveness of the service recovery process was critical for a service organization. He also distinguished that positive service recovery tactics or strategies were more likely to return customers to a state of satisfaction (Boshoff, 1999).

Nonetheless, for some service organizations, the service recovery process tends to be transaction specific, thus the organization fails to follow a formal service recovery process. Instead, some service organizations tend to respond to each situation in a unique and individual manner. While it is important to make each customer feel as if the service recovery process is tailored to meet their needs. Wildes (2005) suggested that in order to reach the maximum degree of customer satisfaction, employees must be well trained and empowered to deal with all service situations. Therefore, a formal documented approach to service recovery would aid in the training of employees and in the consistent delivery of service quality. Service recovery related literature pertaining to the hospitality and tourism sector can be found in various sub-sectors in the field ranging from hotel research to tourist satisfaction on a destination image. Researchers address the vital roles of service recovery dealing with issues of vulnerability in customer based industries, particularly hotels and restaurants (Hoffman & Chung, 1999; Yoo et al. 2006; Magnini & Karande, 2009; Kamran & Attiq, 2011).

Methodology

Sampling and Population

The methodological design of this study is dependent upon its nature. Since this study empirically investigates the effect of service delivery failures on service recovery, a causal research design using a quantitative through cross sectional approach is used for data collection. Customers who had experienced dining at Malay medium restaurants are chosen as sample and the process is undertaken in the non-contrived setting. In this sense, medium restaurant is referred to restaurants that offer full meals at a medium price in which customers recognize as "good value", with full service or consumer placing orders at the counter and having their food brought to them (Othman et al.,

2009). Only customers who had experienced service delivery failures while dining at Malay medium restaurants were included in this study. In order to ensure customers experienced the service failures, a few short screening questions were asked: (1) "Have you dined in Malay medium restaurants before?" and (2) "Have you experienced service delivery failure before?" If he or she said "Yes", a set of question was then proceeded with. Although the Malay medium restaurants are burgeoning all over Malaysia, the Klang Valley area was chosen due to its strategic location surrounding the capital city of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) which the number of Malay medium restaurants is escalating rapidly compared to other neighbouring cities and other states (Othman, 2007).

Research Instrument

The independent variable of this study is service delivery failures, implicit/ explicit customer requests and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions whereas service recovery is the dependent variable. The survey instrument is consisting three sections with Section A solicit the information on the respondent demographic profile. Section B is designed to measure the service delivery, implicit/ explicit customer requests and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions while Section C is dealing with service recovery.

Respondents are required to translate their view on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 with "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree. Most items were adapted from the previous related studies with minor modifications made on the wording (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault, 1990, Hoffman, Kelley and Rotalsky, 1995; Boshoff, 1999; Boshoff, 2005) and few was developed by the researchers to address the specific needs or to suit the objectives of the study. Owing to different educational level, the questions used is simple and understandable with least reading and writing. Before reaching into a final version, a pilot study was conducted to verify and confirm the reliability and validity of the items used.

Data Collection Process

Before the actual survey, the Malay medium restaurant operators in the Klang Valley were contacted to acquire permission to undertake the survey in their restaurant premise. After a few attempts, thirty Malay medium restaurant operators granted permission. With the arranged time and date, the survey was conducted by the researchers and with four research assistants during lunch hour just after customers had finished their meals. It is worth mentioning that the respondents were approached by asking them whether they had experienced service delivery failures while patronizing that Malay medium restaurant. In spite of having an enormous crowd during lunch hour there were several incidences whereby some respondents were reluctant to participate as they claimed to have no time. At the end, a total of 493 questionnaires were collected and 481 were found useable. The non-useable responses (12) were excluded due to the incompleteness of a certain items which are important for the study.

Results and Analysis

Respondent Profile

Number of females exceeded the male respondents with 65.5 percent against 34.5 percent. Malays constituted around 88.4 percent of the total respondents, with 7.5 percent Chinese, 3.5

percent Indian and 0.6 percent of other ethnic groups. 2.1 percent below 18 years of age, 36.8 percent in the range of 19 – 24 years, 43.5 percent in the range between 25 and 35 years, 7.9 percent in the range between 36 and 45 years, 6.2 percent in the range around 46 to 55 years and 3.5 percent above 56 years of age. 20.8 percent of the respondents were the government servants, 42 percent were students of higher institutions, 23.3 percent worked in the private sector and 11 percent were self-employed. 3.3 percent of the respondents dined between 2 and 3 times weekly, followed by 61.1 percent between 4 and 5 times, 0.8 percent reported dined only once a week.

With regard to the average spending in restaurants per week, 40.1 percent claimed to spend below RM 10.00 while 47.6 percent claimed to spend between RM 10.05 and RM 20.00, followed by 6.9 percent spending between RM 20.05 and RM 30.00. 1.7 percent reported that they spent between RM 30.05 and RM 40.00, and 0.4 percent reported spending between RM 40.05 and RM 50.00. Lastly 3.3 percent spent above RM 50 on a weekly basis.

Descriptive Statistic

A descriptive statistic was undertaken on the independent variable that are service failures, Implicit or Explicit Customer Requests and Unprompted and Unsolicited Employee Action and the dependent variable (service recovery).

Service Failures

The magnitude of the mean scores ranging from 5.39 to 5.73 indicates that the majority of the restaurant customers in this study agree with most of the items related to service failure. The item with the highest mean is sdf2 (M= 5.73, S.D, 1.132) suggests that customers perceived Malay restaurant operators serving unclean food as the worst service failure. The item with the lowest means is sdf8 (M= 5.39, S.D, 1.254) which might indicate that a noisy environment is a least concern for the customers who dine in the restaurant. This scenario might be attributed to the fact that people are accustomed to the Malay medium restaurant being noisy. Other than that, customers agree that the service failures in mid-scale Malay medium restaurants are related to failure to provide entertainment, sdf6 (M= 5.64, S.D, 1.175), a well ventilated dining environment, sdf5 (M= 5.57, S.D, 1.124) and food in Malay medium restaurants was always out of stock, sdf3 (M= 5.53, S.D, 1.043).

Implicit or Explicit Customer Requests

The deviation of the mean score ranges from 5.42 to 5.72 signifies that customers slightly agreed with some items and agreed on others pertaining to this dimension. One particular item, sdf12 (M=5.72, S.D, 1.121) has the highest mean score which suggests that customers agree that cancelling or changing orders in Malay medium restaurants is difficult. Customers agreed that this type of ethnic restaurant normally kept customers waiting for service, sdf13 (M= 5.49, S.D, 1.120) with crowded seating arrangements, sdf14 (M= 5.48, S.D, 1.216). On the other hand, item sdf16 (M= 5.42, S.D, 1.046) which carried the lowest mean score indicates that the absence of baby seats for infants and children is not deemed a serious service delivery failure. Besides the aforementioned scenarios, implicit or explicit customer requests in mid-scale Malay medium restaurants are also connected with insufficient seating arrangements, sdf15 (M= 5.48, S.D, 1.113).

Unprompted and Unsolicited Employee Actions

The spectrum of the mean score only fluctuates within a range of 5.00 to 5.31 which points out that all of the Malay medium restaurant customers slightly agreed on the items concerning unprompted and unsolicited employee actions. Customers slightly agreed that Malay medium restaurants did not provide an internet connection (Wi-Fi), sdf17 (M= 5.31, S.D, 1.136). This may be owing to the importance of using the internet and staying connected online. They also slightly agreed that employees in this type of restaurant do not comply with specific customer requests regarding food, sdf18 (M= 5.23, S.D, 1.184), did not provide individual menu cards when taking orders, sdf19 (M= 5.22, S.D, 1.275), waiters were unfriendly and unhelpful, sdf20 (M= 5.11, S.D, 1.127) and employees inattentive as represented by item sdf21 (M= 5.00, S.D, 1.228).

Service Recovery

The mean scores for the construct range from 5.58 to 5.96 which signify that most of the Malay medium restaurant customers agree with the statement in regard to service recovery. In this context, item sr14 with the mean score (M= 5.96, S.D, 0.964) indicates that customers agreed that the Malay medium restaurant operators normally did not reimburse the customers with a free meal in the event of service failure. Apart from that, customers agreed that the service recovery in mid-scale Malay medium restaurants is associated with the time taken to respond to the complaint being longer than necessary, sr16 (M=5.88, S.D, 0.940), the time taken to solve complaints being long, sr17 (M= 5.87, S.D, 0.945) and the inability of the restaurant manager to solve a complaint within short time, sr18 (M=5.61, S.D, 1.166). It can also be seen that service recovery is related to feedback about complaints from restaurant employees being communicated easily, sr5 (M=5.86, S.D, 0.964) and there is no provision for professional attire from restaurant operators for its employees, sr15 (M=5.58, S.D, 1.168). The rest of the items mainly deal with improper employees' attitudes and behaviour. For example, respondents believed that restaurant employees were not polite in attending to customers' needs, sr6 (M=5.66, S.D, 0.856), restaurant employees had to find someone else to solve customers' problems, sr8 (M=5.64, S.D, 1.172) and restaurant employees who deal with complaints worked in an untidy and unprofessional environment, sr3 (M=5.59, S.D, 1.218). Finally, based on the data, it is assumed that the level of service recovery in Malay medium restaurant is still poor and the employees are not properly trained to deal with customers' complaints.

SEM Evaluation/Analysis

Prior reporting the outcome of the proposed hypotheses, a multivariate analysis process using the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with AMOS software was applied.

Measurement Models Evaluation

The assessment of the model fit which looking at the quality, validity and reliability of the measurements of the study constructs (endogenous and exogenous variables) was undertaken using the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Twenty-one items were proposed in the instrument relating to the service failure dimension. This measurement model was statistically significant with p-value less than 0.001. The factor loadings of all the measured items are greater than 0.60 indicate that the convergent validity was obtained. The t-values (critical ratio) associated with each measured item in the scale were significantly greater than ± 1.96 at 0.05 levels or 0.01 levels respectively. The

Cronbach's α is more than 0.70 and therefore, they are convincingly above the stipulated threshold level of acceptance reliability in compliance with Nunnally (1978). AVE values were greater than 0.5 which clearly posited that convergent validity is exist (Hair et al., 2006).

A similar process was undertaken on the measurement model for service recovery. The measurement model is showing statistically significant with p-value less than 0.001. The critical ratios of the measurement model which also indicate the uni-dimensionality of the construct is greater than 1.96 at 0.01 levels. Both factor loading and critical ratio evaluated support the unidimensionality of the scale, thus the convergent validity is obtained (Hair et.al, 2006; Janssen, 2010). The composite reliability of 0.880 and AVE of 0.559 which was calculated manually are satisfactorily high, hence further validating that the existence of convergent validity (Hair et al., 2006).

In sum, the values of the ten Goodness-of-Fit Indices for two measurement models suggest that the fit of the data to the measurement models are adequate. This clearly indicates that the measurement model for service failure and service recovery exhibited strong evidence of unidimensionality, convergent validity and reliability. It has adequate measurement properties, thus qualified to be used in the second stage of the analytical process which is the path analysis. Table 1 shows the results of measurement models evaluation of the three constructs.

Table 1: Results of measurement models evaluation.

| Code | Standardized Regression (Loading) | Critical Ratio (t-values) | Composite Reliability | R ² | AVE | α |
|--|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------|-------|
| Service Failure | | | 0.889 | | 0.621 | 0.901 |
| SDF9 | .848 | 10.143 | | 0.719 | | |
| SDF8 | .963 | 2.641 | | 0.927 | | |
| SDF6 | .698 | 14.372 | | 0.488 | | |
| SDF5 | .681 | 14.222 | | 0.464 | | |
| SDF7 | .713 | 13.547 | | 0.509 | | |
| Four Items Deleted: | | | | | | |
| Implicit or Explicit Customer Request | | | 0.888 | | 0.667 | 0.884 |
| SDF14 | .906 | 7.873 | | 0.822 | | |
| SDF15 | .915 | 7.271 | | 0.837 | | |
| SDF13 | .693 | 13.853 | | 0.481 | | |
| SDF16 | .728 | 13.664 | | 0.529 | | |
| 2 Items Deleted: | | | | | | |
| Unprompted and Unsolicited Employee Actions | | | 0.808 | | 0.589 | 0.798 |
| SDF19 | .825 | 7.127 | | 0.680 | | |
| SDF18 | .850 | 6.032 | | 0.722 | | |
| SDF21 | .603 | 13.718 | | 0.363 | | |
| Three Items Deleted: | | | | | | |
| Service Recovery | | | 0.880 | | 0.559 | 0.870 |
| SR6 | 0.86 | 10.914 | | 0.743 | | |
| SR5 | 0.88 | 10.102 | | 0.774 | | |
| SR16 | 0.79 | 12.579 | | 0.638 | | |
| SR17 | 0.77 | 12.968 | | 0.599 | | |
| SR18 | 0.57 | 14.755 | | 0.328 | | |
| SR8 | 0.52 | 14.929 | | 0.272 | | |
| SR14 | 0.57 | 14.766 | | 0.325 | | |
| SR3 | 0.51 | 14.939 | | 0.268 | | |
| Eight items deleted | | | | | | |

Path Analysis

To assess all the hypothesized which is looking at a direct relationship between independents and dependent variable, path analysis using SEM was carried out. To estimate the path coefficients, a standardized parameter with maximum likelihood estimation was used. Maximum likelihood has been the leading estimation method used since the creation of contemporary structural equation

methodologies in the middle of the 1960s (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Table 2 illustrates the result of the path analysis.

Table 2: Summarized path analysis results

| Path Analysis | | Standardize d Estimates | Critical Ratio (t-value) | P | Result |
|---------------|--|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-----------|
| H1a: | There is a significant effect between service failure and service recovery | 0.165 | 1.325 | * | Supported |
| H1b: | There is a significant effect between implicit or explicit customer requests and service recovery | 0.125 | 2.498 | *** | Supported |
| H1c: | There is a significant effect between unprompted and unsolicited employee actions and service recovery | 0.122 | 1.427 | * | Supported |

Note: ***Significant at $p < 0.001$

**Significant at $p < 0.01$

The results illustrated in Table 2, indicate that three hypotheses H_{1a}, H_{1b} and H_{1c} are supported by the findings. The service failure and service recovery relationship (H_{1a}) showed a significant relationship, in which the strength of the relationship is β : 0.165, and at t-value of 1.325. Similarly, the relationship between implicit or explicit customer requests and service recovery (H_{1b}) portray almost identical result with β : 0.125, and at t-value of 2.498. This is followed by the relationship between unprompted and unsolicited employee actions and service recovery (H_{1c}) with the value of β : 0.122, and at t-value of 1.427. These findings are consistent with the studies by Jones and Sasser (1995), Smith et al. (1999), Swanson and Kelley (2001), Magnini and Karande (2009), and Sabharwal and Soch (2011) who found and confirmed that service failure, implicit or explicit customer request and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions have a causal relationship with service recovery.

Implication and Conclusion

This study has achieved its overall goal in understanding the effect service failure toward service recovery. An empirical contribution is involved in testing theoretical linkages between both constructs which has not previously been tested in Malaysia restaurant setting. Results obtained not only provide empirical evidence but confirm and reinforce of the previous studies findings that there is a causal relationship between service delivery failure and service recovery.

With regard to practical contributions, it is manifestly revealed in this study that service delivery failure in Malay medium restaurants is basically dealing with cleanliness of the food, entertainment and dining environment. In addition, waiting for service, unavailability of the menu card, unfriendly and unhelpful staff is also recognized as contributory factors. Most critical is that

the level of service recovery in Malay medium restaurants is still poor and the employees are not properly trained to deal with customers' complaints. This pessimistic indication undoubtedly had drawn several practical implications to the Malay medium restaurant operators.

In general, it is undeniable that every restaurant is set up to win customers. The customers' visits and repeat patronization are obtained by providing good food and delivering good services. Other determinants also affect their inclinations and it is apparent that the level of sustainability of each restaurant well depends on the ability of the operators to improve or maintain those elements. Failure to maintain them may make customers feel their expectations of the restaurant are unmet, as well as being disappointed with their patronage. This may further affect their dining mood and subsequently diminish their repeat patronage. In addition, a poor overall service provided to customers may result in the inability of restaurant operators to attract new, and most importantly, maintain or keep the regular ones.

In with the above notion, the most important criteria that restaurant operator/ manager should be aware of are the causes that might lead to the service delivery failure, as service failures are tied to customer evaluations of interaction with some aspect of the service organization. Restaurant operators therefore should not overlook the pessimistic perceptions held by the customers, but rather consider concentrating on service and other elements that can avoid service failures from frequently occurring.

Apart from that, the poor functions of service recovery after disastrous service in a restaurant result in customer dissatisfaction and are strongly proved to have various consequences. Restaurant operators in the context of this study the Malay medium class restaurants, besides others, should focus their attention and efforts on designing and implementing better service recovery strategies. Apology and explanation as the simplest to complex ones like free meals, compensation and discounted price are the obvious corrective strategies that could be improvised in combating the service delivery failures. Customers see such corrective action as the most important service recovery strategy that can be adopted by restaurants to cope with service failures. With that, the front line employees such as waiters and waitresses, even though well-trained, should continuously be alerted in handling problems in an efficient way. They have to be polite and be able to quickly decide the best recovery strategy, not only to recover the service failure, but to console the customers. As most customers differ in perception and behaviour on the operations failure the restaurant operators, therefore should consistently improve their food and beverage quality, efficiency of staff and avoid other-customer misbehaviour. Finally, managing customers' needs is becoming an important and critical area as the world economy progressively turns to a service orientation.

Corresponding Author

Mohd Salehuddin Mohd Zahari from Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Malaysia.

salehuddinm@salam.uitm.edu.my

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