

Antecedents and Outcome of Customer Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry of Pakistan, during Service Encounters

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Abstract

This study shows the empirical relationship of impression management of front line employees (FLEs), disconfirmation and perceived value with customer satisfaction. Except it, it has also attempted to investigate the relationship of customer satisfaction and words of mouth (WOM) communication. Several studies in Europe have shown different results but from the Pakistan very few studies have been done like this. Although, there have some work in this area in the Pakistani environment but due to the increasing in interest and demand of people have shown an excellent development in Pakistan economy and especially in the hospitality industry. This is the pioneer study which has positive impact on the given model relationships. Hospitality industry is going to increase quickly in Pakistan which has different impacts on Pakistani customers. This study urges that FLEs is mainly the result of destabilization in the competitive environment for hospitality services, which was brought about by the national reregulation of markets and then adds in new methods of dealing with the customer satisfaction, WOM and management impression. Data has been collected from 131 respondents. Correlation and regression analysis are used to analyze the data. The main results of the study are the impression management activities of FLEs positively impact customer satisfaction which is contribution of knowledge in service marketing literature. Disconfirmation and perceived value were also found positively associated with customer satisfaction. Finally WOM communication was found outcome of customer satisfaction which shows a good relationship among the employees and customers.

Key Words: Hospitality Industry, WOM, Antecedents, Customer Satisfaction.

Introduction

Customer Satisfaction has been an interesting area for researchers in terms of measuring it quantitatively, finding its determinants and its consequences on organization's profitability and success. A number of studies on determinants and consequences of customer satisfaction exist in literature with mixed findings (Szymanski and Henard 2001). Customer satisfaction is defined as "A Judgment based on one or a

series of consumer service interactions”(Yi and Zeithaml 1990). It has positive consequences for the organizations. For example, it leads to the profitability of a firm(Hallowell 1996);(Matzler, Hinterhuber et al. 2005). It enhances customer loyalty(Kandampully and Suhartanto 2000). It creates behavioral intentions (Yu and Ramanathan 2012). Hence customer satisfaction contributes in the firm’s success in various ways. It can be argued that, it is fruitful to study customer satisfaction in management science research literature.

At the same time, the predictors of customer satisfaction have been important concern for researchers. A previous concept used in this regard was the expectations-disconfirmation paradigm. Disconfirmation is widely studied as a strong antecedent of customer satisfaction. Disconfirmation is basically the difference between expectations and observations of service performance, for example service performance can be fall short or exceeds the customer expectations. Exceeding service performance can give pleasure to the customers, but short fall can displease the customer(Ha 2006). (Gupta and Stewart 1996) have found that the brand expectations and category expectations have positive relationship with customer satisfaction through mediating role of brand disconfirmation and category disconfirmation respectively. For example. Keeping in view particular definition of customer satisfaction, the cognitive predictors of customer’s satisfaction or the contribution of information processing mechanism of an individual to be satisfied, could be important considerations to study. In service industry, the customer not only evaluates final outcome received by service provider but also employee’s responses during service provision. For example(SESEN, CETIN et al. 2011) claimed that the morale of employees of an organization is positively related to the customer satisfaction. (Namasivayam and Lin 2006) employee deviance is associated with customer satisfaction. Present study attempts to study overall satisfaction of customer which he drives during his visit. A relatively new concept, recovery satisfaction or complain handling satisfaction seems to be wise to study than overall customer satisfaction of a firm. But looking at the cultural consequences on customers it can be easy to argue that in collectivistic culture, people do not complain to the service provider, or ask him to recover it. For example, people in collectivistic culture hide their negative behavior and always try to exhibit positive behavior. Hence it is find more batter to study overall satisfaction of a hospitality firm.

Main focus of the study is to address the impact of impression management activities used by frontline employees on customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is an uncertain and abstract concept and the actual expression of the state of satisfaction will vary from person to person and product/ service.(Ejikeme, Enemuo et al. 2016). These customers will not only buy the product again later (in case that their expectations relating to the satisfaction with the product are met) but will also counsel other customers to buy it(Psomas and Jaca 2016). This study explains this phenomenon with the help of six dimensions of Impression management (ingratiation, intimidation, self-promotion, exemplification, supplication, and non-verbal behaviors) which are previously defined(Manzur and Jogaratnam 2007). Impression management concept is well studied construct in human resource management but a very small literature in found in marketing discipline. Although impression management involve is certain marketing activities. But at the best knowledge of researcher almost no study has been conducted to find out the relationship between perceived impression management of frontline employees by customer and customers satisfaction.

Another possible explanation in favor of this study is the concern of companies for cost reduction, to avoid loses and to preserve resources. Conceptually impression management in is a performance which an artist presents in front of others to be perceived favorable. Two concepts are discussed in literature in this regard i.e. surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting can be judged by the customer quite easily and can impact negatively but deep acting cannot be judged easily and have positive impact on customers. But when an employee indulges in deep acting for a long time, it can be possible that his emotional resources start to deplete as a result he suffer from emotional exhaustion in turn it can increase turnover of frontline employees. According conservation of resource theory, individuals want preserve and retain their emotional resource. This is deemed necessary to find out what is actual impact of impression management on customers specifically customer satisfaction so that managers can have deep insight into the actual need of impression management of frontline employees. Is it fruitful to consume cognitive resources of employees on such activities or not?

Aim of the study

Main aim of the study is to set achievement of experiential relationship of impression management of front line employees, disconfirmation and perceived value with customer satisfaction.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are covered.

- a. Measurement between customer satisfaction and word of mouth communication.
- b. Impression management activities used by frontline employees on customer satisfaction
- c. Impact of perceived value on CS and WOM; create a good relationship among the people.

Significance of the Study

This study shows the working and communication relationship among the employees, customers and Hospitality industry of Pakistan. It also measures the relationship among the employees and behavior of the organizations. Organizations can arrange training programs to modify the behavior of employees which might be more attractive for new and old customers.

Literature Review

Most of marketing activities are designed to achieve customer satisfaction. It is quite essential to know, how different researches have conceptualized the customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is defined as “a judgment based on one or a series of consumer service interactions” (Yi, 1990). Certain other customers satisfaction definitions are more near to this definition for example “the consumer’s fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over fulfillment” (Jeong, Cha et al. 2016). These two definitions point that customer satisfaction is a cognitive concept. Beyond this cognitive conceptualization there are some definitions of customer satisfaction in favour of overall evaluation i.e. affective and cognitive conceptualization. For example (Peng, Lai et al. 2015) defined customer satisfaction as “An overall evaluation based on the customer’s total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time”. Disconfirmation is strong predictor of customer satisfaction. Disconfirmation shapes customer’s affective response.

In current study the efforts are made to study the constructs which shapes customer cognitive response, it is one of the reasons for studying perceived impression management of employees, perceived value and disconfirmation because perception is the evaluation or Judgment at cognitive level

Impression Management and Customer Satisfaction

Impression management, a basic phenomenon in field of marketing that involves almost all aspects of marketing activities (Fisk & Grove, 1996). Term impression management was first used by Erving Goffman, a sociologist (Chng, Rodgers et al. 2015). Impression management is the process used by individuals, when they seek to manipulate perceptions of others about them. Impression management is widely studied in organizational science especially in human resource management. In marketing, most of phenomenon involves impression management in one way or the other. For example, overall impression of a service organization depends on employee displayed emotions. If positive displayed emotions of service employees are not seen authentic it leads to lessen impression of service provider (Wang, Singh et al. 2015). Moreover employee’s displayed emotions, their physical attractiveness and their helpfulness positively associated with customer satisfaction (Li, Liu et al. 2016). (Schumann, Wunderlich et al. 2012)

argued that customer service representative whatever medium they use, influence customer service satisfaction by displaying preparedness, thoroughness and knowledgeable. Hence we can argued that the frontline employee's actions and communication leads to customer satisfaction. Self theory has been specifically used largely in social psychology as well as organizational science. But being a molar theory of psychology, it views behaviors and thinking in general, not in some particular context (Snyder 2016). This theory argued that "Self concept is a type of attitude; it differs from other attitudes which are perceptual products of external objects because it is an image shaped by the person having it" (Zinkhan*, Haytko et al. 1996). Keeping in view self theory, it can be argued that if a customer think and analyze employee's impression management behavior favorably to himself, if such behavior appeals him, a positive attitude would be developed in his mind, towards the service encounter. Hence it can be argued that Self theory helps to explain the impact of impression management of service employees on consumer attitude like customer satisfaction. Customers evaluate the verbal and nonverbal communication at cognitive and affective level, if the impression management activities of employees please the customer's self he is likely to be satisfied. Hence it can be hypothesized that.

H1: Perceived impression management of front line employees is positively associated with customer satisfaction.

Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction

Perceived value is defined as "customer's evaluation of the net worth of the service based on what is received and what is given" (Kuo, Chang et al. 2013). This shows that perceived value is a cognitive concept. When a customer evaluates service at cognitive level, he is likely to feel negatively or positively and reaches at effective response, and can be satisfied or dissatisfied with service. The judgment or evaluation of value depends on extent to which service provider have reduced the ambiguities related to evaluation of value exchange. More the customer would be clear about value exchange he is more likely to be satisfied. Perceived value is widely studied in hospitality industry and found positively related to customer satisfaction. (Ryu, Han et al. 2008), while studying hospitality industry found customer perceived value as a significant determinant of customer satisfaction. (Tam 2004) argued that in hospitality industry perceived value is significantly related to customer satisfaction. Studying hotel industry, (Hu, Kandampully et al. 2009) found that perceived value is significantly associated with customer satisfaction. Perceived value is positively related to customer satisfaction (Edward and Sahadev 2011). Some literature exists in the support of the relationship between dimensions of perceived value and customer satisfaction. (Gounaris, Tzempelikos et al. 2007) argued that all dimensions of customer perceived value have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Hence we can hypothesis that perceived value has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

H2: Perceived value is positively associated with Customer satisfaction.

Disconfirmation and Customer Satisfaction

Expectancy-disconfirmation model has been widely used to explain the phenomenon of customer satisfaction. According to this model, customer can be satisfied or dissatisfied only when he would be disconfirmed. Disconfirmation is basically a state of consumer's mind that intervenes between the relationship of comparison (comparison between expectations with perceived performance) and customer satisfaction. For example a customer would be positively disconfirmed and satisfied when perceived performance would be more than expectations. A customer would be negatively disconfirmed and dissatisfied when perceived performance would be less than expectations (Tam 2011). Previous studies confirm this relationship empirically like (Yi and La 2003) confirmed that disconfirmation influences the customer satisfaction, but this influence was asymmetric. Disconfirmation is positively related with customer satisfaction. In failure and recovery context there is no significant relationship between positive disconfirmation and customer satisfaction. Present study is focusing on overall satisfaction of customers

with the firm, due to service encounters. Here we found more evidence about positive relationship between disconfirmation and customer satisfaction; however, this relationship has different moderators. For example, (Ko 2001) argued that there is significant relationship between Customer satisfaction and Quick response quality based disconfirmation, but this relationship is moderated by Type of store. At the same time a number of empirical studies provide evidence about the direct relationship. (Churchill Jr and Surprenant 1982) also claimed that positive disconfirmation is positively related with customer satisfaction. Moreover, the expectancy-disconfirmation model argued that positive disconfirmation contributes in customer satisfaction (Law and Ngai 2005). Hence we can hypothesize the positive relationship between positive disconfirmation and customer satisfaction.

H3: Positive disconfirmation is positively associated with Customer satisfaction.

Customer Satisfaction and Words of Mouth Communication

“Informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived noncommercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, a product, an organization, or a service” (Harrison-Walker 2001). Importance of words of mouth is recognized equally by researchers as well as managers; because words of mouth have productive out comes for a business entity. For example (Godes and Mayzlin 2004) argued that product success is positively related to words of mouth. Literature suggests that the relationship between customer satisfaction and words of mouth communication involves certain mediators and moderator. Studying moderating role of positive words of mouth valance, (De Matos and Rossi 2008) found that customer satisfaction has positive relationship with words of mouth communication. Customer satisfaction is associated with positive words of mouth through mediating role of customer commitment (Brown, Barry et al. 2005). Customer satisfaction leads to words of mouth communication through mediating role of brand loyalty (Gounaris, Tzempelikos et al. 2007). The predictors of words of mouth communication are studied in previous research. Customer satisfaction is found a strong direct predictor too. Luo and Hombur (2013) stated that customer’s satisfaction indulges customers in words of mouth communication. Customer satisfaction is positively associated with words of mouth communication (Wangenheim and Bayón 2007). Hence it can be hypothesized that.

H4: Customer satisfaction is positively associated with Words of mouth communication.

Theoretical Framework

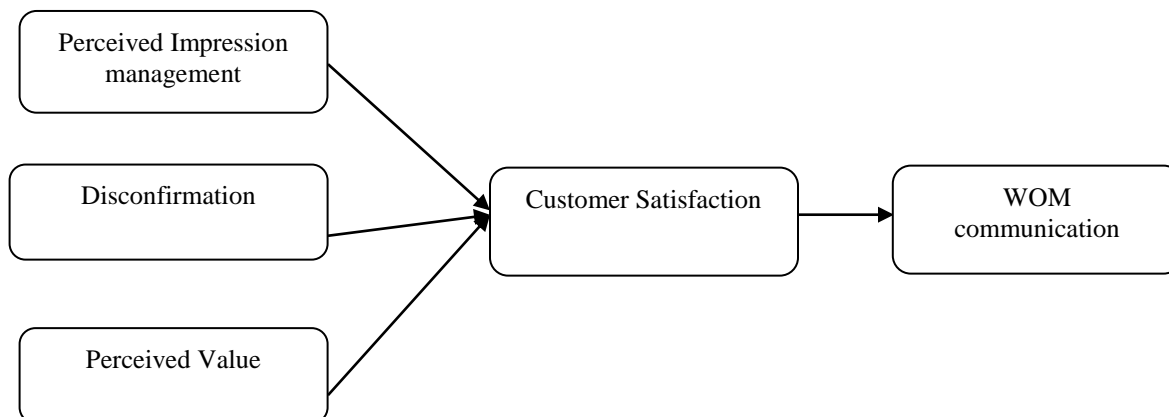


Fig 1. Conceptual Framwork

Methodology

The methodology of this paper is based on the different variables by using the regression model.

$$Y = C + \beta X_1 + \beta X_2 + \beta X_3 + \dots + \beta X_n$$

X= Dimension of independent variable (Achievement, Empowerment, Leadership, Change management, Visioning).

β = Un-standardized coefficient

C= Constant value.

Y= dependent variable, Prediction relationship of types of variables toward organizational Effectiveness.

$$Y = C + \beta X_1 + \beta X_2 + \beta X_3 + \dots + \beta X_n$$

Sample of the study was hotel consumers of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. It has been a common practice in service industry, especially in hotel industry to write script for employees to deal with customers, in the same way service dramas are written by most of practitioners which include whole conversation between an employee and customer.

Analysis and Results

Tables 1 Correlation Analysis

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Impression management	1				
2. Perceived value	.393**	1			
3. Disconfirmation	.304**	.471**	1		
4. Satisfaction	.396**	.578**	.611**	1	
5. Words of mouth	.419**	.562**	.537**	.630**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 Regression Analysis

Independent Variables	R Square	Standardized beta	(t Values)	Significance
Impression management	.499	.142	(2.049)	.043
Perceived value	.499	.328	(4.395)	.000
Disconfirmation	.499	.414	(5.748)	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), DIS, IM, PV

b. Dependent Variable: SAT

Table 3 Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	R Square	Standardized beta	(t Values)	Significance
Satisfaction	.397	.630	(9.219)	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SAT

b. Dependent Variable: WOM

Discussion

Actually managers intentionally indulge employees into impression management in front of customers. In hotel or restaurant industry customer, may be most of time are least concerned about core service, in other words rarely consume service to satisfy his basic need. Most of time he consumes to enjoy outside dinners with family to make them feel good, with business partners to make an important business deal, or to manage their impression in front of friends etc. In these situations hotel industry are more suitable to study for their welcoming attitude and formal behaviors. Data were collected through questionnaire using convenience sampling technique. A total 200 questionnaires were distributed from which only 131 were received in usable form. The response rate was. 65.5%. Only 11 questionnaires were received from female consumers and 120 were male consumers most of unusable questionnaire received from female consumer, they skip a few of impression management questions. Before getting the response respondents were asked about their frequency of consumption. More frequent consumers are requested to fill the questionnaire. Response was acquired by asking the customer to keep recent visit of any hotel in your mind and answer the questions. Questionnaires were only given to only willing respondents.

The study hypothesized the positive impact of impression management, perceived value and disconfirmation on customer satisfaction. All paths found significant as hypothesized. Support of H1 was expected and found. It may because the customers in hospitality industry are more concerned about supplementary services. Because on general discussion with respondents, a very few respondents claimed that their recent visit was to fulfill their basic needs. Most of respondents have visited to enjoy an outside meal with family just to feel good. Some of respondents claimed that their recent visit to a hotel with friends to celebrate a birthday party or an informal meeting with friends. In these situation customers want some degree of welcome and special care from hotel employees to feel their prestige. But there are certain service industries where core service is so much important that a customer may not be much concerned to acquire a big chunk of supplementary service for example when a patient visit a dentist his most concern would be the filling of that whole in his teeth which often remain unpleased during meals.

Another possible argument in favor of this result is the strong bond of impression management activities of employee and culture. In their article, the managers as well as marketers, both should know cultural differences to improve their capability to present hospitality industry products and to manage the impression of their employees in better way. Pakistan being a collectivistic cultured country may have some different behavior patterns. In Asian consumer markets it is very common to behave positively, and to exhibit positive emotions. It also clears that East Asian collectivists are more likely to exhibit positive emotions and hide negative emotions. Peoples express emotions of friendship and appreciate others in society members. Moreover they expect the same from the others. Impression management may work better in such cultures. It might be a possible reason for acceptance of hypothesis. H2 was also supported that was, the perceived value is positively related to customer satisfaction. This finding is same as previous studies. H3 is also supported that disconfirmation leads to customer satisfaction. It confirms the argument of expectancy disconfirmation model. Support for H4, also aligned with the previous studies. The Descriptive analysis based on total 131 respondents total response rate was 65.5%. A majority of respondents in sample were male (91.6%). Majority of respondents were up to the education of masters (52.7%). 79.4% of respondents were from an age group of 18 to 25 years. The Correlation analysis of the variables was also found to be strongly correlated as mentioned in table 1. The Regression Analysis in table 2 and 3 give a picture of these results. Table 2 shows that IM is positively associated with Customer satisfaction (Beta = 0.142, T value 2.049 with p value 0.043), perceived value is positively associated with Customer satisfaction (Beta = 0.328, T value 4.395 with p value 0.000) and disconfirmation is also positively associated with Customer satisfaction (Beta = 0.414, T value 5.748 with p value 0.000). Value of R square was 0.0499. Table 3 shows that customer satisfaction is positively associated with words of mouth communication (Beta = 0.630, T value 9.219 with p value 0.000). Value of R square for this link was 0.397.

Measurements and Scales

Impression management was measured by 20 items, the scale developed by the (Manzur and Jogaratnam 2007) especially for hospitality industry its Cronbach alpha was found to be 0.755. For example “How do I feel when employees use techniques to get others to like, reward and view them favorably?” Impression management scale measured the data on 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = very dissatisfied, 5 = very satisfied).

Disconfirmation was measured by 2 items scale for example “The hotel or restaurant’s reliability was about what I expected” adopted from (McCollough, Berry et al. 2000) and its Cronbach alpha value was found .63. The scale of perceived value was adopted from (McCollough, Berry et al. 2000) the scale was based on four questions for example “Services purchased at hotel were very good value for money”, with Cronbach alpha 0.747. Customer satisfaction scale was consisting of four questions and it was adopted from Ryu, Han and Kim (2008) with Cronbach alpha of 0.795. For example “Overall I felt satisfied with this hotel”. WOM was measured by three items for example “I have recommended this hotel to my friends” adopted from Athanassopoulos, Gounaris and Cronbach alpha was found as 0.741. All of scales measured data on 5-point Likert scale for example (1 = strongly disagreed, 5 = strongly agreed).

Conclusion

The study hypothesized the positive impact of impression management, perceived value and disconfirmation on customer satisfaction. This study indicates basic factors in the relation between customers and behavior of organization’s employees i.e. WOM. This study produced very good results which were obtained from the SPSS statistical analysis. Theoretically, managerial strategies influence the organizations’ environment. Managers and organizational Policies and practices must be reviewed time to time for getting the better results.

Study Implication

Managers of the hospitality industry have few implications in current study; managers, first of all must acquire a certain degree of cultural knowledge. Managers have to formulate proper impression management strategies. They should write scripts of service dramas for their employee. And to give them a formal structure of activities which enhance organizations impression more than individual’s impression. Moreover managers should emphasis on the value exchange phenomenon. Try to enhance the perception of customer about fair value exchange, through advertising direct marketing or using other marketing communication tools.

Limitations of the Study

This research has certain limitations, for example, sample size was small and especially female respondents were too small in number. We have included three perspectives in determining the antecedents of customer satisfaction which were perceived value from an economic perspective, disconfirmation from expectancy-disconfirmation perspective and Impression management from H.R perspective. There may be more areas which literature suggests, from which customer satisfaction can be derived. In future, researcher can conduct the same study on female consumers only.

Moreover moderating role of gender could be important for impression management and customer satisfaction link. Culture is also seemed to be a strong moderator for current study. Current study is also based on an investigation of hospitality industry. Future researchers are required to investigate the impact of impression management on consumer behavior in other industries for example in health care industry, air lines, travelling and tourism industry.

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