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The Role of Subjective Culture on Consumer Perception towards Service Quality Delivery

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this paper is to describe the role of subjective culture in influencing the relationship between service quality and consumer perception. Theoretical framework of this conceptual paper developed based on The Rater Model by relating the model with Subjective culture

Methodology: This research is a conceptual paper. The secondary data research was conducted to support this study. The data were gathered from the valuable resources such as articles, books, and on-line information. This paper is aimed to describe how subjective culture holds the crucial role in shaping consumer perception toward service quality delivery.

Results: Through the empirical research analysis, it was resulted that the subjective culture plays the important role in shaping consumer perception toward the service quality delivery.

Implication: This research contributes to knowledge and increases the understanding of existing literature on Subjective culture, service quality, and consumer perception. This research is expected can be used for additional reference to academicians and practitioners by fully understanding that consumer perception is closely connected with subjective assessment which are influenced by consumers' belief, attitude, norm, roles, task, values (the elements of subjective culture). By having deep understanding about the effect of subjective culture on perception of the consumer toward the quality of service delivery, it will enable the organization to design service quality standard that match with consumers' demand in based on their background and expectation.

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1. Introduction

Satisfaction is closely related to perception. Consumer satisfaction itself in fact is consumer perception (Parasuraman, 1988). Consumer perception hold the critical point when it comes into evaluation of

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service in term of the customer expected and perceived service. Service quality y has been a centre focused for academicians and practices especially when Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985) brought this topic in their research. In service marketing's area, service quality plays central role in the process of understanding customer satisfaction and retention (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry 1988). In service industry, quality is as a variable that has important roles (Yusoff & Ismail, 2008). In the past researched of Sumaedi, Bakti & Metasari (2011), Abousi & Atinga (2011), proved that service quality is as an important factor in determining satisfaction.

Remembering the important of service quality in building customer satisfaction, therefore the service provider is expected to understand this process by looking at the customer generational differences, life stage. Those backgorud of the consumers can influence their preferences for service as well as culture, sub culture, and subjective culture (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gramler, 2009). Accordingly, it will be valuable for the organizations to have strong knowledge on patients' cultural background, especially subjective culture in order to meet consumers' service standard.

Culture plays important part in developing perception process itself. The main reason behind a person's desire or determination is culture (Kotler, 2000). Those statements indicate that culture plays the important role in shaping consumers behavior. People from different culture have different behaviour toward their expectation, perception and lifestyle that make differences in their consumption and judgement of a product or service.

Shavitt & Torelli, (2009) mentioned that culture consists of combining factors that generate perception, evaluation, communication, and action among people who share knowledge, geographic location, and language. Accordingly, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gramler (2002) mentioned that there is a connection between consumers' perceptions of service and culture. Therefore, People who come from different culture have their own way in interpreting, selecting, and organizing the stimuli that they received. So it is happened commonly that culture often lead to misunderstanding. For example, in China, white colour represents the unhappiness, bad luck and mourning (Kegan, 2015) while in Indonesia, white colour is as the representation of purity and holiness.

Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) had established SERVQUAL as a framework of service quality measurement. Here, cultural factor had not been included as the factor that influences consumer perception. However, Winsted (1999) believed that it was important to include culture as one of the factors that influence service quality. The reason why Winsted insisted to include culture as one of the important factors that determine consumer's perception it was because Winsted had conducted studied on two cultures such as: Japan and U.S. The purpose of Winsted study was to examine how cultural differences had effect on customers' service quality evaluation. Winsted proposed the dimensions of service quality such as; authenticity, caring, perceived control, courtesy, formality, friendliness, personalization, and promptness. Through the study, Winsted found that there were some similarities and differences between Japanese and American cultures in shaping perception. Accordingly Winsted conclude that it was important to adapt and utilize culture as one of important factor in designing appropriate service. In highlighting the crucial contribution of service quality toward customer satisfaction, therefore, service provider is expected to understand this process by looking at the customer generational differences, life stage that can influence their preferences for service as well as culture, sub culture, and subjective culture (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gramler, 2009).

Many previous studies had been done related to the influence of culture on customer perception. Many scholars had shared the same viewed that perception were actually varies depend on the culture (Ramez, 2008), Bhang, Beatty, Walsh (2008), Triandis (2002), Furrer, Liu, Sudharsan (2000), Mattila (2000)). Voyer

and kastanakis (2013) in their research on the effect of culture on perception and cognition, the authors had addressed the gap in cross-cultural consumer behaviour by providing a depth review and analysis regarding to the effects of culture on pre-behavioural processes . The pre-behavioural process is known as perception and cognition.

Zhang and Walsh (2008) had gave future direction and suggestion to go beyond Hofstede in doing consumer service research. Both authors believed that it was critical to think about the other cultural value dimension in conducting cultural research for instance, the cultural work of Triandis, Schwartz and Hall. By applying the other aspect of cultural approach it could be used to understand customer deeply. The authors also believed that by using these different components of culture (value and belief systems, communication systems, and material culture) the essence of culture and its impact on consumer service experienced would be captured.

Bond (2002) mentioned that Hofstede nation-level of culture dimension such as individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, long-term orientation, were conceptually, empirically, were quite different from individual culture value. The conceptual and measures of nation-level culture of all the citizens of a country may not share similar cultural characteristic. Bond suggestion had also supported by Voyer and kastanakis (2013). Both authors believed that the researchers should be more focused on examining the effect of culture at the individual level rather than broad cross-cultural difference such collectivism/individualism (Voyer&Kastanakis, 2013).

Accordingly, in this paper, the writer brings the Subjective Culture as the variable that can give the effect on relationship between service quality and consumers' perception to involving of Subjective culture in socio-psychological factor is still rare in research (Genkova, 2009). The important in adopting subjective culture for understanding consumer perception in service context is because subjective culture has the ability to influence consumer's perception. Subjective culture itself, describes as the way, how people experience their culture and how this affects their behavioural pattern (Triandis, 1994).

2. Literature review

2.1 Consumer Perception

The crucial part of consumer's perception is in the part of perception itself. Perception is tightly related to satisfaction. Consumer's satisfaction is actually as the result from consumer's perception. On the other words, consumer perception is actually consumer satisfaction (Parasuraman, 1988)

In Service quality, consumer's perception can be defined as subjective assessments of actual service experience (Zeithmal, Bitner, Gramler, 2009). Accordingly, perceived quality of service quality is as the consumer's judgment toward overall excellence service (zeithmal 1987: Parasuraman, Zethmal, Berry 1988).

Consumer perception, according to Schiffman and kanuk (2009) is as the process which individuals select, organize, and interpret stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. Perception became a strategy for marketers because consumers make decision based on their perception.

As it shown in figure 2.3, perceived quality is a part of customer satisfaction since service quality is concentrated on dimension of service. Whereas, satisfaction is influenced by perception of service quality, product quality, and price, as well as with situational factors and personal factors (Parasuraman et al, 1988).

Figure 2.3 Customer Perceptions Of Quality And Customer Satisfaction

Source: Parasuraman et al (1988)

In relation to Figure 2.3, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) explained that service quality concerns an evaluation of service that gives the impact on customer's perception. The five dimensions of service quality that become the critical points of evaluation are reliability, assurance, responsiveness, empathy, and tangibles. While satisfaction is influenced by perceptions of service quality, product quality, and price, as well as situational factors and personal factors.

2.2 Service Quality

The research on service quality has been an interesting subject of discussion for more than the last two decades. The interesting part of service quality is the abstract concept of service which makes service quality a complex subject. It is not easy to measure service quality. The difficulties of measuring service quality are due to the changes of individual preferences. The changing of individual preferences is as the result of time changing (Saurina & Coenders, 2002).

Service quality is a key to success for a firm in differentiating itself from competitors (Jamal & Anastasiadou, 2009). Several studies have proved that good service quality leads to customer retention and attraction, reduced costs, build corporate image, positive word-of-mouth recommendation, and profitability (Cronin, Brady & Hult, 2000; Kang & James, 2004; Yoon & Suh, 2004).

Service quality is defined as customer's perception of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectation

(Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). Service quality is also a critical element of customer perceptions that link customer satisfaction and become the significant elements in customer's evaluation of service (Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2009). The importance of service quality is when it comes in measuring customer satisfaction by matching their perception with expectation of service quality. SERVQUAL measurement became a tool that remains the most complete attempt to conceptualize and measure service quality (Zeithaml et al., 2009).

The purpose of designing SERVQUAL scale as Schiffman & Kanuk (2010) explained that the SERVQUAL scale was to measure the gap between customer's expectations and perceptions of the actual service delivery by referring to five dimensions of SERVQUAL. In addition, SERVQUAL is an

efficient model in helping an organization in bridging the gap between perceived and expected service.

In 1985, Parasuraman had identified 97 items with spread all over the 10 dimensions on service quality. However, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1988) had conducted data collection and scale purification on the 97 items attributes. It resulted that the 97 items were reduced to 22 items located among five dimensions of service quality. These five dimensions of service quality are: tangible, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and reliability. The SERVQUAL model then transformed into five dimensions. The five dimensions of SERVQUAL as the representation of the important dimensions in customers' eyes. The five dimensions of service quality are as reference point of customers' perception. (Please see Table 2.2)

SERVQUAL's Five Dimension

SERVQUAL DIMENSION	Description
Reliability	The ability of service provider to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
Assurance	The employees' Knowledge and courtesy; their ability inspire trust and confidence.
Tangibles	appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and written materials.
Empathy	Caring, individualized attention given to customers.
Responsiveness	The employees have willingness to help customer and provide prompt service.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988).

The five dimension of Service Quality are composed by two groups: the first group is the outcome dimension. Outcome dimension is focused on the reliable delivery of the core service. The second group is the process dimension. The process dimension focuses on how core service is delivered (employees' responsiveness, assurance, and empathy in handling customers) and the service tangible aspects (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2010)

Figure 2.3 captured RATER model. The five dimensions of service quality are believed to be the core criteria of customers' evaluation of service quality. Customers' evaluation of service is based on their expectations and the customers' perception of service quality. Accordingly, Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman (1985) added that the connection between customer's expected service and attributes that directly affect customer's expectations. The attributes of customer expectations are word of mouth advertising, personal needs, past experiences, and external communications

Figure 2. 1Rater Model

Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985

The Service quality model pictures a comprehensive conceptualization of service quality with an instrument to measure perceived service quality (Amin & Isa, 2008). Afterward, SERVQUAL is a well-known model for academics and practices to assess the customer perception of service quality for a variety of service industries. The applications of SERVQUAL have been tested and used to measure quality of service in different service sector, such as in banking sector (Poolthong & Mandhachitara, 2009), hospitality sectors (Nadir & Hussain, 2005), airline service (Sultan & Simpson, 2000), health care services (Baker, Akgun & Assaf, 2008; Aagja & Garg, 2010; Untachai (2013).

2.3 Subjective Culture

Subjective culture is a physiological construct (Petia, 2009), it describes the way, and how the culture affects behavioural patterns of the people who share and experiences the same culture (Triandis, 1994). Triandis developed a model of subjective culture that related with social behavior. He believed that this model was potential to be adapted with consumer behavior concept. This model brings the psychology as the process that intervene the links between cultures and social behavior. Subjective culture itself, represent the categorizations, associations, norms, roles, and values in a culture (Triandis, 1994). Subjective culture is reflected by the individual's perception of the elements of the culture system (Dorfman and Howell, 1988). Straub, Evaristo, Karahanna, & Srite (2002) stated that culture can reveal itself at different perceived or Subjective culture.

Triandis (1994) constructed a model of subjective culture which he related with social behaviour concept. He believed that this model was a good model to be adapted in consumer behaviour domain. This model highlighted the psychology as the process that intervene the links between cultures to social behaviour. Subjective culture represents the categorizations, associations, norms, roles, and values in a culture (Triandis, 1994). Subjective culture is reflected by the individual's perception of the elements of the culture system (Dorfman and Howell, 1988). Straub, Evaristo, Karahanna, & Srite (2002) stated that culture can reveal itself at different perceived or Subjective culture. Subjective culture itself composed by the elements that link the pattern of action and values. The element of Subjective culture is: categories, association, beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, tasks, values, and value orientation (Triandis, 2002).

3. Hypotheses

Service quality is as one of the determinant factor for success of every organization, including for organization that deal in service sector. The important aspect of service quality is service quality has direct influence on customer satisfaction and perception (Alrubaiee & Alkaa'ida, 2011). Furthermore, perceived service quality is also had the great ability in impacting customer loyalty and word-of-mouth (Andaleeb, 2001). Because of that, to improve the service quality of an organization, the perception on service quality must always be considered.

Service quality is grounded on the idea that the quality is consumers' subjective assessment toward service delivery. Consumers' perception of service quality are closely relied on the size and direction of the distance that lies between customers expectation to receive and perceived service (Kumar et al., 2009).

Hypothesis 1: Service Quality has direct impact on Consumer's Perception.

There were some studies that investigated the connection between the service quality and culture. Many past researchers found that the consumers perceptions of service quality are vary between one country and another. Service providers need to be culturally aware toward the consumers wants and need of service encounter (Bang,Taylor& Moon2005; Donthu&Yoo, 1998; Malhotra, Ulgado, Agarwal, Shainesh& Wu, 2005). Culture play the important role in understanding why people's behaviour can be difference across cultures (Kanastakis&Voyer, 2014) Since service quality is also can be defined as consumer perception (Zeithmal et al.,1990). In connection between subjective culture and perception, Zeithmal et al (2009) mentioned that perception is as subjective assessment which influence by the subjective side of the customers.

Throughout the study on the relationship between culture and service quality perception, Furrer, et all (2000) found that consumers' perception of service quality are varies depend on a cultural group. Culture is attached into person's lives and culture also influences the decisions making process. In addition, culture is not only influences people' behaviour, but it also give the effects on the rationalization process (Patterson &Mattila, 2008). It can be said that, culture shapes people's perception of service quality (Seo, 2012)

Subjective Culture is became the background of subjective assessment consumer perception. As was cited by Schiffman and kanuk (2010) in the relationship between culture and consumer perception, "Consumer both view themselves in the context of culture and react to their environment based upon the cultural framework that they bring to that experience. Based on the explanation before came up the reason why people perceive the world through their own cultural point a view" (Ueltschy and Krampf (2001). The subjective side of the consumer is what as the element of subjective culture such as; belief, norms, roles, tasks, values, and value orientation. (Triandis, 2002).

Hypothesis 2: Subjective Culture influences the relationship between service quality and consumer's perception.

4. Methodology

This paper is a conceptual paper that aimed to analyze the influence of subjective culture on service quality perception. In this study the writer conducting the secondary data research as the based for analyzing the links between variables. The objective of this conceptual paper is to examine the effect of Subjective culture on the relationship between service quality and consumer's perception. In this research, secondary data such as journals, articles, books were gathered thorough library research and on line service.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

In this highly competitive business environment, quality has become one of important aspect for all business sectors, including service sector.Providing high service quality to customers, enable a firm to differentiate it and gain a competitive advantage in the market (Wang, Lo & Hui, 2003). Now a day service quality becomes the differentiator in the marketplace. Service quality among the most critical aspects for the strategic management of firms (Ekinici et al. 2003)

Subjective culture is one of the refference pointfactor that can influence the customer in accepting or rejectingto use a service. The limitation of understanding the segmentation Culture of where the organization operates will also lead to the failure of the organizations to deliver the service that match with consumer inquiries. This statement of the problem derived from one of the service gaps from Parasuraman (1988), Parasuramanet all.(1985) develop the Service Quality Gap Model to identify and

analyze gaps between expected and perceived service of service performance.

In retaliation with this paper, one of the reasons of the occurrence of customer dissatisfaction is because of the lack knowledge of consumer cultural back ground such as demographic, psychographic, gender, and culture and subjective culture. The limitation of understanding of those factors lead to the failure of the organization management to deliver the service that match Consumers demand, referring to the variations of consumer perception of service quality in cultural differences, as well as remembering the important connection between subjective culture and Consumer Perception on service Quality.

In conclusion, it is important for the organization to learn about its consumer's interm of their subjective culture such as belief, values, custom, religion, roles, tasks, and values. that shape the behaviour on consumption and evaluation of service. In this research, subjective culture is proposed has the ability to influence the relationship between consumer's perceptions and service quality.

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