Service climate and service behaviour to customer satisfaction:
A multilevel study of Muslim-friendly hotel

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Abstract: Literature has emphasised on the importance of internal integration and external environment towards the quality of services. As Muslim-friendly hotels (MFH) are service organisations, this research aims to integrate the organisation, employee and customers who are involved in the service encounters. This research is purposely conducted to test the proposition that an employee's service climate determines the employee's service behaviour and consequently customer satisfaction. This cross-sectional multilevel study involved 25 MFH (n=25) with 5 employees and 5 customers for each organisation, employees (n=125) and employees (n=125). The finding revealed the organisational service climate hada positive and significant impact on individual employee's service behaviour. In short, the employees at MFH acknowledge the conducive working environment which can motivate them in delivering quality service (γ_{10} = 0.77, SE = 0.09, p-value<0.001). The result shows that MFH has provided a motivational environment to support service delivery. However, it is insufficient to lead to customer satisfaction in relation to the inconsistencyof the other hypotheses.l.

Keywords: Muslim-friendly hotel; multilevel;employee; customer; satisfaction

Introduction

MFH is a Muslim-friendly hotel offering various facilities to support theduty as a Muslim (Alserhan, 2010; Stephenson, 2014). Interestingly, even though MFH is established to merely target Muslims, it also attractsnon-Muslim travellers (Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009). As Muslims are the MFH's target market, many academicians and practitioners come out with a variety of master plans in designing the appropriate concept of MFH to satisfy Muslims. Most of them include physical facilities such as bedroom, lobby, bathroom and Muslim employees (Crescent Rating, 2019; Salaamgateway, 2017; Sallehet al., 2014; SIRIM, 2015). Notwithstanding, most of the plansdonot include the practicality of MFH's working environment and employees' behaviour towards customer satisfaction.

A synthesis study conducted by Oktadianaet al. (2016) reported that most of the MFH-related discussions emphasised on characterising the ideal features of MFH products, while the other topics remained overlooked. The concept of customer satisfaction is among the most powerful concept as it provesto lead to several positive organisational performances such as increase sales, profit and cost savings (Eid & Abdelkader, 2017; Gayatri & Chew, 2013). However, it is also proven that physical appearance is not the only factor that leads to satisfaction(Bettencourt & Brown, 1997a; Wall & Berry, 2007).

Islam has shown a good example in the al-Quran to satisfy guests or customers. Referring to a host-guest relationship; this relationship encourages the host to kindly treat his/her guest. In the surah adh-Dhariyat (verses 24–27), the hospitable treatment is shown by Prophet Ibrahim in welcoming strangers or guests who came to his home by serving a roasted calf, Allah says:

"Has there reached you the story of honoured guests of Abraham? When they entered upon him and said, "(We greet you with) peace." He answered, "(And upon you) peace, (you are) a people unknown. Then he went to his family and came with a fat (roasted) calf " (al-Quran 51:21–24).

This host-guest relationship expresses that Islam places great importance on the kind treatment and hospitality of guests and neighbours. While the host-guest relationship is familiar in Islam, a similar concept called social interaction is used by Western scholars. In a service organisation, services are relying upon human interactions via the organisation to the employee to the customer and explained through the Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964). This theory is amongst the influential theories in the work behaviour organisation. It has emerged in the literature since six decades ago. Although it may be considered as an old theory, the fundamental of this theory represents the working organisation. Theoretically, the organisation is accountable in setting up an ideal working environment that facilitates employees' behaviour and motivation (Schneider et al., 1998) and a service-oriented environment that must be aligned with customers' desires(Wall & Berry, 2007). In return, employees are responsible for delivering excellent services on behalf of the organisation (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997). Therefore, allthree entities (companies, employees and customers) contribute to the sustainability of the service sector.

Since we propose to test the model of the internal and external environment in MFH, we adopt the service climate concept to represent the internal working environment in MFH. This concept is widely used to correlate between employees and customers in service settings(Schneider et al., 1980; Solnet, 2006). Specifically, the study aimsto test the four-proposition that employees' service climate determines employees' service behaviour and consequently customer satisfaction, particularly in MFH. This study employs multilevel research design which includes organisational level (Level 2) and individual level (Level 1) to imi-

tate the complex organisation of MFH. Therefore, the Hypotheses proposedare:

Hypothesis 1: Service climate at the organisational level is positively related to customer satisfaction at the individual level.

Hypothesis 2: Service climate at the organisational level is positively related to service behaviour at the individual level.

Hypothesis 3: Service behaviour at the individual level is positively related to customer satisfaction at the individual level.

Hypothesis 4: Service behaviour at the individual level mediates the relationship between service climate at the organisational level and customer satisfaction at the individual level.

Literature Review

Service climate and customer satisfaction

All service organisations desire a higher level of customer satisfaction. Many benefits will be gained if they are able to produce satisfied customers such as leading in the intense competition and also sustaining in the industry.

Service climate is defined as "the shared perceptions of employees concerning the practices, procedures, and kinds of behaviours that get rewarded and supported in a particular setting" (Schneider *et al.*, 1998). It also refers to the extent employees perceive that they will be rewarded for delivering quality services by the organisation (Schneider *et al.*, 1998). This variable is observed as shared perceptions, therefore, it is often measured as organisational level or Level 2 (cf. de Jong*et al.*, 2004; Schneider*et al.*, 2002; Schneider *et al.*, 1998; Tung *et al.*, 2012)this study examined the mediating effect of service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior on the relationship between service climate and customer satisfaction, and the moderating effects of three potential factors for service core attributes (customer contact frequency, service intangibility, and service employee interdependence.

There is a strong theoretical and empirical rationale for linking service climate to generate better customer satisfaction. It was first observed three decades ago where employees who were satisfied with organisational service policies and practices were the same organisation where the customers described positive reactions(Schneider *et al.*, 1980; Schneider & Bowen, 1985). The conducive working environment fosters employees to facilitate the service excellently, thus, leading to satisfied customers. Since then, a plethora of research has been conducted in various service organisationsand similar findings have been found(Auh *et al.*, 2011; He *et al.*, 2011; Martinez-Tur *et al.*, 2011; Schneider *et al.*, 2009; Towler *et al.*, 2011; Yagil & Gal, 2002). Similarly, we also expect the positive effect of service climate on customer satisfaction in MFH, therefore, this study offers the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Service climate at the organisational level is positively related to customer satisfaction at the individual level.

Service climate and service behaviour

To what extent the employees perceived the organisational service climate wouldbe shown by their behaviours (Auh *et al.*, 2011). SET postulated that employees who consider their work roles are valued by the organisation tend to respond with a greater performance as an exchange (Shaw *et al.*, 2009). As such, positive service behaviour is the reaction of employees towards a positive service climate established in the service organisation. While negative behaviour is the contradicting reaction from the unfavourable service climate.

The findings were found in various studies. A study

conducted by Borucki and Burke (1999) revealed that the service climate is predictive of sales personnel's service behaviour in large US retail companies. In addition, the replicative findings were also found at two service organisations in China. Zhang*et al.* (2011) assessed in the context of Chinese banks in China, while Jiang*et al.* (2016) tested in various movie theatres in China.

From this discussion, it evidenced that the service climate leads to service behaviour, yielding the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Service climate at the organisational level is positively related to service behaviour at the individual level.

Service behaviour and customer satisfaction

Employees react on behalf of the organisation. Their behaviour mirrors the organisation's behaviour in satisfying customers, therefore, it affects the quality service delivery and satisfaction of the customers they serve (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Schneider & Bowen, 1993). As the one who directly deals with the customers, the employee's service behaviour has a significant impact on service performance which also affects customer satisfaction level. Previous studies found a positive and significant relationship between employee service behaviour and customer satisfaction. For instance, Liao and Chuang (2004) found service behaviour to be positively associated with customer satisfaction in the context of restaurants in the US. An article by Stock*et al.* (2017) also discovered a similar finding, but in various business organisations in Germany. Therefore, this study offers the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Service behaviour at the individual level is positively related to customer satisfaction at the individual level

Service climate, service behaviour, and customer satisfaction

Previous studies suggest the mediation effect between climate, service behaviour and customer satisfaction. With X represents service climate, M represents service behaviour and Y represents customer satisfaction, the precondition of mediation testing is simplest form represents the addition of addition of third variable (M, mediator) to the relationship between X and Y (cf. James*et al.*, 2006; Mathieu & Taylor, 2007; Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

The previous studies posited the positive and significant relationship between service climate and customer satisfaction (Auh *et al.*, 2011; Martinez-Tur *et al.*, 2011; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Schneider *et al.*, 2009, 1980, 1998), between service climate and service behaviour (Borucki & Burke, 1999; Zhang *et al.*, 2011a) and between service behaviour and customer satisfaction (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Schneider *et al.*, 2005). These findings fulfil the preconditions listed by the methodologist as above. Particularly, Liao and Chuang (2004) found service behaviour as a mediator in the relationship between service climate and customer satisfaction. So, this study assumes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4: Service behaviour at the individual level mediates the relationship between service climate at the organisational level and customer satisfaction at the individual level.

Materials and Methods

Design and participants

This study employed a cross-sectional design with 125 employees and 125 customers from 25 MFH in Malaysia (with organisational response rate = 8%). Across-sectional study refers to a study by which data arecollected at a particular time only

(Creswell, 2011) due to the reason that the researcher may not able to reach the same customers for the second or third time.

The data collection has been conducted from September 2018 to December 2018.Muslim-friendly hotels that recognised by the Salam Standard certification body were recognized. At that moment, there were 447 MFH recognized by Salam Standard. After that, the researcher approached the managers of the MFH for the permission warrant. For the purpose of this study, the researcher had requested five employees and five customers' information that give voluntary consent to participate.

In terms of the organisations involved, the number 25 was adequate to conduct a multilevel study even though some scholars argued that 25 organisations are inadequate (Maas & Hox, 2005; Snijders, 2005). However, a recent study conducted by Mathieu*et al.*, (2012) argued theorganisation level (indicating Level 2) is adequate with as small as 25 organisations. As such, 25 MFH were indicating an adequate sample to test those four propositions. For employees, work roles included those directly dealing with customers. While the customers who involved in this study were chosen from those who have stayed or visited the MFH.

In terms of the employees, most of the participants were female (61.7%), with more than half were Malays (84.2%), Muslims (87.5%) and Malaysians (95.8%). The marital status showed almost a similar percentage between being single (51.7%) and married (45.8%) as well as the educational background between tertiary (52.5% and secondary (46.7%). In addition, most of the participants were permanently employed (85.5%) with an income of less than RM4000 (92.5%).

For customers, both male and female respondents showed almost a similar percentage with males (45.8%) and females (54.5%). Similar to employees' results, most of the respondents were Malays (85.8%), Muslims (86.7%) and Malaysians (91.7%). The marital status was also reported to be almost similar between being single (45%) and married (55%). In terms of occupation, self-employed reported the most with 31.7% followed by government (20%) and private (17.5%). In addition, more than half of the respondents were having a monthly income of RM4000 and above (71.7%).

Measures

In this study, most of the items were adapted from Western literature.As Malaysia is a multicultural society and Malay is the national language, the translation of the instrument was necessary. The instrument was translated into the Malay language using the back-to-back translation (Brislin, 1970).

Service climate

This variable was measured using the 6-itemGlobal Service Climate introduced by Benjamin Schneider and his colleagues (Schneider *et al.*, 1998). The referent for the scale was "climate for service in the organisation". An example item is "I think this hotel has good leadership which supports the service quality effort". Responses on a 5-point scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) were used, with a mid-point, neither agree nor disagree. These items were asked to the employees of the MFH. The Cronbach's Alpha (α) score was 0.894 indicating that the score was beyond the acceptable alpha scores.

Service behaviour

This was measured using two domains, each with five items. We examined in-role using 5-item role-prescribed customer service (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997b), α = 0.930. Meanwhile, OCBs was examined using 5-item from extra-role customer service (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997b), α = 0.924. Similar to

the service climate scale, responses were on a 5-point scale, with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) were used, with a mid-point, neither agree nor disagree. All of these items were treated as level 1, asking an individual employee's behaviour.

Customer satisfaction

We used customer satisfaction using nine items that were adapted from Oliver, (1980); Susskind et al., (2003), e.g., " I feel satisfied with this employee performance". Responses were on a 5-point scale, 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), α = 0.973.

Aggregation procedures

Prior to data aggregation, few data examinationswere needed to justify the needs of data to aggregate to a higher level. This was assessed within-group agreement ($r_{(wg)(j)}$) (James *et al.*, 1984), intraclass correlation (ICC(1)) and F value from analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007). The results confirmed strong level $r_{(wg)(j)}$ = 0.893, (SD =0.65) (Biemann *et al.*, 2012). In addition, ICC (1) = 0.93 and the F value >1 justify aggregating the service climate measure to the organisational level.

Hypothesis testing

As the study employed the multilevel nature of the data, the data were thenanalysed using hierarchical linear modelling (HLM); HLM 7.03 software (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This study involved two levels, Level 2 represents organisational data and Level 1 represents individual data.

This study used multilevel data that involve data from organisational and individual levels. The general concept that individuals (in this case; employees) interact with the social contexts (i.e., unit, department, organisation) to "which they belong, meaning that individuals are influenced by the social contexts to which they belong and the properties of those groups are in turn influenced by the individuals who make up that group"(Hox & Maas, 2002, p. 2). Multilevel scholars explicitly recognised this situation that lower-level entities are nested/dependent within higher-level collectives such as teams (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007; Aguiniset al., 2013).

In this study, multilevel data assist the researcher to seek shared perceptions among employees regarding the service climate and to capture the nested complexity of real organisation life (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007). In fact, the definition of service climate which is "shared perceptions of employees concerning the practices, procedures and kinds of behaviours that get rewarded and supported in a particular setting" (Schneider *et al.*, 1998) shows that this variable is measured by employees' perceptions. This relationship is then linked to the individual perception of customers, particularly on their evaluation of customer satisfaction.

Results

Table 1 indicates theintercorrelations of variables at both the organisational and individual levels. The result suggests thatthey are different constructs.

This study found a significant χ^2 for each lower-level variable, indicating that the percentage of between-team variance is sufficient to justify the examination of between-group predictors of the dependent measure customer satisfaction, 10%, χ^2 (25) 310.87, *p*< .001; and the mediators, service behaviour, 4%, χ^2 (25) 242.60, *p*< .001. These results signify that there is potential for cross-level influences on all three individual-level variances, and

the service behaviour and service quality are potential mediators of cross-level effects.

Hypothesis 1, that service climate is positively related to customer satisfaction, = 0.003, SE = 0.08, *p*-value= 0.964 (see random intercept fixed slopes; Table 2) showing the Hypothesis 1 was not supported.

Hypothesis 2, that service climate is positively related to service behaviour, = 0.77, SE = 0.09, *p*-value<0.001 (see random intercept model; Table 3, Model E) confirming Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3, that service behaviour is positively related to customer satisfaction, = -0.03, SE = 0.10, *p*-value= 0.724 (refer to random intercept model, Table 2, Model B), indicating the Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4, that service behaviour mediates the relationship between service climate and customer satisfaction. It is noted that if the direct path is not significant, there is no mediating effect (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014). Therefore, it failed to support H4.

Discussion

Surprisingly, the resultsweredifferent from the previous literature except for Hypothesis 2, organisational service climate and individual employee service behaviour. Otherwise, the results indicated a negative relationship.

In Hypothesis 2, it was proven that employees were satisfied with the working environment which MFH facilitates. This result was expected as it aligned with an abundance of research previously (Borucki& Burke, 1999; Jiang *et al.*, 2016; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Mechinda & Patterson, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2011b). While most of the previous research have been conducted in various service organisations in different countries, this study also found a replicative finding. Here, the findings show the employees valued MFH as a conducive working environment in which their work roles are valued (positive service climate); it also leads to motivation forthe employees to behave appropriately in serving the customers.

However, the findings for the other hypotheses were found to be contradictory with the assumptions based on most of the previous studies. Hypothesis 1 showedemployees' shared perceptions of service climate towards customer satisfaction, and Hypothesis 3 showedemployees' perception of service behaviour towards customer satisfaction werefound to be insignificant. In addition, the mediation proposed in Hypothesis 4 was found to be insignificant. As mentioned in the introduction section, this kind of study has not got enough attention to Malaysia's tourism industry. Therefore, the assumption of propositions was made based on the studies which were mostly conducted in the West. In astudy conducted by Razalli *et al.* (2013) in a Malaysian hotel context, management responsibility was also found insignificant towards hotel performance. This study also shows that the internal working environment of MFH (i.e. service climate) does not havesuch an influential impact on a hotel's service performance.

These contradictory results can be assumed by several possible explanations. This study specifically focuses on the MFH which implements the concept called Muslim-friendly. This implementation may arise the expectations of the customers as compared to the conventional hotel(Battour *et al.*, 2012). Due to the reason that the hotel's sector involves labour-intensive, customer satisfaction may be evaluated and highly dependent on the behaviour of employees (Zailani *et al.*, 2011). In addition, due to the fact that MFH is still at its early stage (Yusof & Muhammad, 2013), MFH is assumed to be at the position of finding the accurate way of entertaining employees and customers. As noticed, most Halal-related articles are emphasizing too much on appropriate facilities, but the customer satisfaction issue is also equally important is received inadequate attention.

These findings bring the new angle of thinking towards Muslim-friendly services in hotels. This study offers a different angle of view on how the relationship of employee-customer may affect the performance of MFH.

Conclusion

This research introduces a new paradigm to help the MFH industry develop. This research provides strong evidence that the working environment is able to motivate their service behaviours towards delivering services. This kind of environment facilitates employees to becoming more committed to the assigned task. Once employees are happy, they will perform the best in their career and this also may benefit the hotel providers. Good organisational management and harmonic environment may be very important in maintaining a sustainable working condition for employees. Notwithstanding, this behaviour is recorded to be inadequate to satisfy customers' needs and wants for Muslim-friendly services in relation to the inconsistent findings of the other hypotheses.

Overall, this research contributes to the current body of knowledge in the exploration into employees' and customers' perceptions of MFH service encounters in Malaysia. In relation to some findings were inconsistent with those in the literature, therefore, this research suggested several future suggestions. First is by using other methods such as interviews. Secondly, using a larger sample size especially for the upper level. Thirdly, consider using climate strength. Fourthly, differentiate categories in the MFH.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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