

The Impacts of Perceived Service Quality on Attendees' Satisfaction

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Abstract

Background: customer's satisfaction for the success of an exhibition. It is crucial for exhibitors to recognize the attendee's perspectives towards the service quality to improve the deliverance of an exhibition performance. **Objective:** The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between attendees' perceptions and the satisfaction in attending exhibitions in Malaysia. **Results:** The results show that there is a significant relationship between service quality and attendee's satisfaction. **Conclusion:** The results indicate that two of the five service quality dimensions have positive impact on attendees' satisfaction. This finding therefore will help event organizers in improving the service quality and performance of an exhibition.

Keywords: Exhibition, Attendees' perception, Event Management

Introduction

The meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) industry has been identified as potential sector for the growth of Malaysia's economy. Under Malaysia's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), the business event is projected to generate RM3.9 billion (USD 6) increment GNI and provide 16,700 jobs in various fields (PEMANDU, 2010). Recognizing the importance of the MICE industry in Malaysia especially exhibition industry; it is essential to know the requirements for the industry to remain competitive and successful. Attendees' satisfaction is one of the important aspects which affected the success of an exhibition. In today's competitive environment, improving service quality has become one of the conditions for success and a crucial aspect of business and industry development (Shemwell, Yavas and Bilgin, 1998). Exhibition allows exhibitors to reach target market with a diverse interest in the products exhibited (Lee, Lee and Joo, 2015). Appropriate planning and execution of exhibition will ensure the exhibitors' message will be effectively delivered to potential customers and improve business image in relatively short time (Rainbolt, Benfield and Loomis, 2012). Consequently, for the continued growth of exhibition industry in Malaysia,

it is crucial for event organizer to identify the expectations and perception of attendees on the service quality. Therefore, this study is conducted to identify the perception of service quality of attendees at Café Malaysia 2017, and to identify the relationship of the service quality of an exhibition and attendees satisfaction to ensure the exhibition industry to remain competitive and successful.

Service quality as in the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) can be defined as the overall judgment or attitude toward the superiority of service relative to competing offerings. This SERVQUAL model is widely used to measure perceived service quality. However, SERVQUAL model discrepancy measure has been broadly criticized as it may not be sufficient for measuring service quality across different industries and circumstances (Chen and Mo, 2012; Jung, 2005; Lee et al., 2015). There are numerous researches that investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction (Ayob and Said, 2010; Sureshchandar, Rajendran and Anantharaman, 2002; Zhang, Lee, Judge and Johnson, 2014). Gronross (1984) defined service quality as the difference between the expected service and perceived service from the customer perspectives. Perceived service quality depicts overall judgment of service that could arise at many aspects of the organization including main service, the interaction with service providers, and the environments etc. (Sureshchandar et al., 2002). In addition, Brady and Cronin (2001) discovered that perception of service quality is determined by three aspects; outcome quality, interaction quality and physical environment quality. Outcome quality refers to the end product that customer received, interaction quality measures the interaction during the delivery of services while physical environment quality refers to the surroundings and environments where the service is delivered.

Customer satisfaction in service marketing relates with future behavioral intention to repeat purchase and positive word of mouth (Choi and Chu, 2001; Oliver, 1980). Customer satisfaction is described as an evaluation of pleasant consumption-related fulfillment that a product or service feature, or the product or service offered (Oliver, 1997). High quality services that can satisfy customer requirements are the key to achieve sustainable advantage (Shemwell et al., 1998). As the satisfactions of visitors become the key for the success of exhibitions, the service quality is determined through the perceptions of the attendees (Chen and Mo, 2012). However there is a lack of studies that identify the attendees' perspective on service quality and how it affects the satisfaction in exhibition industry. Several studies found that poor overall ratings on exhibition and attendees' dissatisfaction stem from interaction with booth personnel, booth design, promotion and booth staffing (Chonko, Tanner and Mckee, 1994) and unknowledgeable and incompetent booth personnel (Gopalakrishna and Williams, 1992).

Study by Jung (2005) identified six dimensions of service quality from the perception of the attendees: booth management, registration, content of activities, booth and exhibition attractiveness, booth layout and function and access. The content of activities was found as the important dimension of service quality that determines the attendees' satisfaction. The attendees were interested with the numbers of exhibitors, the products and services offered, sufficient information materials, and exhibition related events including conference, and seminars. Other study by Blythe (1999) found that most attendees are concerned in new products and collecting information and emphasize more on information supplying role rather than intensive selling activities. Exhibition allowed attendees to scrutinize products, to check how products work, search something new and innovation, enjoy entertainment at the exhibition and to observe the market (Rittichainuwat and Mair, 2012). Likewise, Kozak

and Kayr (2009) found that the most important motivation for exhibition attendance are learning about the product displayed, gathering information about new products and seeing particular new products and companies. Attending exhibition creates an opportunity for attendees to collect information from various vendors in a one-stop shopping occasion (Dwyer and Tanner, 2002). Attendees' decisions to attend an exhibition are depending on their perceptions of essential exhibitions aspects and exhibition information (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008). Therefore, it is essential for exhibitors to provide sufficient information concerning their products and services in order to satisfy customers need.

Nevertheless, booth content (signage, product display, skill set of booth personnel) also play an important role to reflect attendee's objectives and characteristics in order to satisfy the attendees requirements (Bello and Lohtia, 1993). This is because most exhibition attendees are motivated to view particular products and more satisfied with effective booth design with proper signage and convenience booth layout (Blythe, 1999; Whitfield and Webber, 2011). Design of the exhibition booths can be viewed from spatial or ergonomic layouts and booth contents that can attract more attendees (Whitfield and Webber, 2011). Furthermore, visitors are more encouraged to interact with exhibitors in sufficient interaction spaces (Wan and Siu, 2012). Lin and Lin (2013) suggested that booth design and layout are intensely related to attendees' satisfaction. Additionally, the quality and the number of exhibition booths are essential as the floor space is the fundamental for exhibitor and attendees interaction (Bitner, 1992; Whitfield and Webber, 2011). Meanwhile, Smith, Hama and Smith (2003) point out that understanding of international attendees' perceptions of trade shows and exhibitions will assist in show selection, at-show message development, booth design and staffing decision.

Attendees are the root of convention or exhibition (Jung, 2005). They play important roles in the success of an event. Achieving customer's satisfaction definitely become the aims of event organizers. Moreover, knowledge of the drivers of successful attendance and repeat attendance will improve the customer relationship management tool in trades shows and exhibition's business environment where sales opportunities have gradually become difficult (Smith et al. 2003).

Methodology

A survey method was used in this study. A total set of 300 questionnaires were distributed to the attendees of Café Malaysia Exhibition 2017 at MATRADE Exhibition and Convention Centre. Café Malaysia series, first launched in 2015, is the largest gathering of the tea and coffee industries in Malaysia and one of the largest in Southeast Asia. This exhibition hosted 138 exhibitors from 18 countries. Out of the 300 questionnaires, 232 were valid and used for analysis, representing a response rate of 77%. In determining the sample, the convenience sampling has been used. The questionnaire items were adapted from Chen and Mo (2012) and Jung (2005). All items for service quality and attendees' satisfaction were assessed with 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree (1) to "strongly agree (5). Descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were conducted to analyze the data. Reliability analysis was performed to measure the consistency of the item by using Cronbach's Alpha. According to Malholtra (2004), a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.60 and above is considered acceptable. The Cronbach's alpha value for attendee's satisfaction items is 0.792 indicating that the items used is acceptable. Meanwhile, the Cronbach's alpha for all five independent variables show the values of 0.690 (content activities), 0.683 (exhibition attractiveness), 0.784 (registration), 0.697 (booth management)

and 0.526 (booth layout). The findings indicate that all the variables obtained the acceptable value with the exception of booth layout's variable. Correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis were performed to examine the relationship between perceived service quality and attendees' satisfaction.

Results

Profile of Respondents

Out of the 232 of respondents, 97(41.8%) were males, 135 (58.2%) were females. Most of the respondents aged between 21-30 years old representing 82 (35.3%) of respondents. With regards to education level, 70 (30.2%) have SPM, 66 (28.4%) have diploma, 69 (29.7%) have bachelor degree, 13(5.6%) obtained master level of education and 14 (6%) others. Pertaining to occupation level, 120 (51.7%) were employed, 19 (8.2%) were unemployed and 83 (35.8%) were students. Examining the frequency of attending exhibition, 126 (54.3%) have visited between 1-3 times, 87 (37.5%) have visited between 4-6 times, 17 (7.3) have visited between 7-10 times and 2 (9%) have visited more than 10 times.

Table 1:
Correlation analysis and Cronbach's alpha results

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Content Activities	3.81	.533	(0.690)					
Exhibition Attractiveness	3.71	.559	.546**	(0.683)				
Registration	3.73	.653	.347**	.326**	(0.784)			
Booth Management	3.72	.611	.445**	.542**	.359**	(0.697)		
Booth Layout	3.61	.556	.421**	.332**	.491**	3.72**	(0.526)	
Attendees Satisfaction	3.83	.636	.343**	.321**	.525**	.358**	.431**	(0.792)

The Pearson correlation has been conducted to confirm the linear relationship and result found that content activities ($r=0.343$ $p<0.01$), exhibition attractiveness ($r=0.321$ $p<0.01$), registration ($r=0.525$ $p<0.01$), booth management ($r=0.358$ $p<0.01$), and booth layout ($r=0.431$ $p<0.01$) have positive and moderately significant with attendees' satisfaction towards Café Malaysia Exhibition 2017.

Table 2:
Multiple Regression Analysis results

Variables	Beta Value	Sig (p<0.05)
Content Activities	0.072	0.295
Exhibition Attractiveness	0.051	0.473
Registration	0.364	0.000
Booth Management	0.107	0.115
Booth Layout	0.165	0.013
R	0.584	
R ²	0.341	
Adjusted R ²	0.327	
F	23.420	

Since there are positive correlations between all the dimensions, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to further examine whether there is influence of service quality on attendees' satisfaction. Based on Table 2, the adjusted R² of this study is 0.327 with the R² = .341 interpret that the linear regression explains 34.1 percent of the variances in the attendees' satisfaction explained by content activities, exhibition attractiveness, registration, booth management and booth layout. Results shown that only two dimensions of service quality namely; registration ($\beta = .000$, $p < 0.05$) and booth layout ($\beta = .013$, $p < 0.05$) are statistically significant influences on attendees' satisfaction. On the other hand, content activities ($\beta = .295$, $p < 0.05$), exhibition attractiveness ($\beta = .473$, $p < 0.05$) and booth management ($\beta = .115$, $p < 0.05$) show no significant values which indicate that the dimensions do not influence the attendees' satisfaction.

Discussion

The correlations analysis revealed that all the perceive service quality dimensions have positive and significant relationship with attendees' satisfaction. These results imply that increase in each quality service dimensions is likely to lead to the increase in attendees' satisfaction. This finding is consistent with the prevailing position in the previous studies that service quality is a major predictor of customer satisfaction (Ayob and Said, 2010; Sureshchandar et al., 2002; Zhang et al., 2014). Multiple regression analysis indicates that only registration and booth layout have a significant impact on attendees' satisfaction. These findings are contradict with studies conducted by Chen and Mo (2012) and Jung (2005) that indicated content activities was found as the most important dimensions of service quality of an exhibition. The difference research result may be due to the fact that the study was conducted under different service contexts. Attendees at Café Malaysia 2017 are most satisfied with the efficient registration that optimizes the use of technology in the registration process. On the other hand, Jung (2005) found that booth layout was the second most important dimension of service quality thus supported the findings of this study. The importance of booth layout in determining the satisfaction of attendees may vary depending on the design of the booths in term of spatial and ergonomic layouts that can attract more attendees (Whitfield and Webber, 2011).

Conclusion

The study aim was to examine the impact of perceived serviced quality towards attendees' satisfaction at Café Malaysia 2017 Exhibition. The service qualities of registration and booth layout are found to be the most priority for the attendee's at Café Malaysia 2017. The implications of this study for exhibitor and exhibition organizer are mostly concerned with designing the layout and space of booths that can enhance the attendees satisfaction. Besides, the use of the efficient technology in the exhibition especially for the registration process can be considered as a potential aspect to attract the attendees and enhance their satisfaction.

However, the study includes limitations that need to be taken into considerations. Each of the dimensions have different attribution and quality that satisfies the attendees. The relative importance of specific dimensions of service quality may vary across different exhibition and even across different industries. Nonetheless, the basic finding of this research should be able to add to the study about the relationships of service quality and customer satisfaction. Moreover, this study should support event organizer in continuing providing and improving service quality in exhibition industry.

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