

Customer Satisfaction is not Enough - The Role of Gratitude in Increasing Positive Word of Mouth Intentions from Customers

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Abstract Previous scholars have frequently studied the impact of service quality on the willingness to spread a positive Word of Mouth (WoM). However, it is considered necessary to conduct further research that discusses how emotional factors from customers affect the relationship between service quality and positive WoM. This study found that not all customers who are satisfied with the delivered services have a high desire to recommend the tourism services to others. Specifically, it was found that only customers who were satisfied and grateful for the service wished to spread positive WoM. Given the importance of positive WoM for the development of tourism service businesses, this research is considered to have significant practical and theoretical contributions.

Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Gratitude, Positive WoM, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Word of Mouth (WoM) is one of the oldest forms of communication among human beings. In marketing, WoM is defined as communication among consumers regarding a product, service, or company where the source of information is considered independent and does not come from any commercial companies (Litvin et al., 2008). WoM is crucial since tourism services (e.g., hotels, tourist destinations, and travel agents) do not have a physical form, making it difficult for potential consumers to assess the service quality (Yang et al., 2018). In this case, potential consumers frequently depend on information from other parties who have prior experience before making service purchase decisions (Allsop et al., 2007). Coupled with electronic means (i.e., the internet) for disseminating WoM, this type of communication is becoming increasingly important in the tourism service industry.

Previous research on WoM investigated how and when WoM was formed among consumers (Anderson, 1998). For instance, in a meta-analysis study, de Matos and Rossi (2008) revealed

that WoM is determined by several important factors: service quality, customer satisfaction, trustworthiness, commitment, belief, and customer perceived value. According to de Matos and Rossi (2008), customer satisfaction is one of the most crucial factors influencing the intention to spread positive WoM. In general, WoM is triggered by customer satisfaction with the services provided. The common hypothesis is that WoM can be positive for service providers if the services satisfy customers. Conversely, if customers are dissatisfied with the existing services, they tend to spread negative WoM, harming the service providers (Anderson, 1998).

Service quality is accepted as a determining factor of customer satisfaction (Shi et al., 2014), which leads to positive WoM. Researchers have often discussed the association between customer satisfaction and positive WoM in marketing and tourism areas (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014; Anderson, 1998; Samadara & Fanggidae, 2020; San-Martín et al., 2015). According to de Matos and Rossi (2008), several moderators can strengthen or weaken the relationship between customer satisfaction and positive WoM, such as incident WoM or the characteristics of the

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study in question. However, of the moderators, emotional factors of customers that may influence the strength of the relationship have rarely been studied. This is surprising since the emotional condition of the customer often determines positive responses, such as decisions to purchase goods and services (Fanggidae et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2020). This study argues that gratitude can moderate the relationship between customer satisfaction and positive WoM, which affects the indirect effect of service quality on positive WoM.

Based on the aforementioned gap, the goal of this study is to investigate the connection between service quality and positive WoM. Specifically, the present study aims to reveal: (1) how service quality directly or indirectly affects positive WoM; and (2) how the interaction of customer satisfaction and gratitude affects positive WoM. To achieve the research objectives, we review the literature concerning variables in this study and the relationship between the variables, analyze the quantitative data, and discuss the theoretical and practical contributions resulting from this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

To survive, a service provider must always strive to have competitive advantages and provide the best service for customers. Customer service quality is considered as a top priority that creates satisfaction and, eventually revenue in the increasingly intense competition in the service industry (Prentice & Kadan, 2019; Yuan & Jang, 2008). Service literature shows that service quality frequently refers to perceived quality by customers, which is customers' evaluation of the product's overall merit based on experience (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Service quality is commonly measured with five quality dimensions: tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Bhat, 2012; Parasuraman et al., 1985). High perceived service quality leads to many positive outcomes, including customer satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is a fundamental concept in investigating business effectiveness (Tjiptono & Chandra, 2011). This is because customer satisfaction can affect perceptions and further shape the company's products in customers' perspectives. In general, satisfaction is the feeling of being happy or disappointed by customers that comes from comparing the impression of a product and their expectations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Consumer's satisfaction is defined as the general feeling or emotion that comes from confirmed expectations. Suhartanto et al. (2020) argue that tourist satisfaction is gained when their expectations are met during their travel experience. This

is in line with previous research, which states that tourist satisfaction is determined by how they perceive their travel experience (Chen & Chen, 2010).

According to Wijono (2010), customer satisfaction can create loyal customers and an excellent organizational image. Rapid changes in the business environment may contribute to the changes in customer behaviors. Therefore, organizations must respond to the changes by continually improving customer service performance. Parasuraman et al. (1993) stated that service quality is a multidimensional driver of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, they developed the Servqual concept, which is the most widely used by business people involved in customer service. Service quality is a state of understanding customers' needs, which positively influences customer satisfaction (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). Therefore, the first hypothesis developed in this study is:

H1: Service quality has a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

Gratitude

Gratitude consists of three gears: gratefulness for an individual or an object, goodwill towards a person, and a propensity to act on something due to thankfulness (Fitzgerald, 1998). Gratitude can be divided into two aspects, affective and behavioral. The affective aspect is the feeling of gratitude created when an individual positions themselves as a beneficiary. The behavioral aspect includes the psychological power to repay good deeds that have been received by the individual (Emmons & McCullough, 2004).

Many cultures have considered experiences and expressions of gratitude throughout history to benefit individuals and society, including various religious thought (Carman, 1989). Gratitude is widely regarded as a moral obligation after receiving benefits or material from other people. Gratitude may also signify a broader attitude and an inclination to be thankful for being alive. Thus, gratitude has different meanings and can be theorized at several levels of analysis ranging from momentary effects to long-term dispositions (Emmons & McCullough, 2004). Bono et al. (2004) argue that gratitude is critical in triggering a positive change in one's social life.

Positive Word of Mouth (WoM)

The literature in marketing communications commonly advocates the claim that WoM has more influence on purchasing behavior than any other market-controlled sources. WoM has been shown to influence various conditions such as knowledge, expectations, observations, attitudes, objectives, and behaviour (Buttle, 1998). Samadara

and Fanggidae (2020) argue that WoM is more important than advertising in increasing product awareness because it comes from a source that fellow consumers can trust.

Word of Mouth can have positive, neutral, or negative content. Examples of positive WoM are expressing pleasant experiences, making recommendations to others, and or even engaging in conspicuous consumption to be seen by others. Negative WoM includes behaviors such as stigmatizing products with unpleasant experiences, rumors, and personal complaints (Anderson, 1998). One of a company's successes in carrying out marketing communications is establishing good relationships with stakeholders. These individual stakeholders will ultimately influence each other by exercising WoM to either weaken or strengthen the relationship between the company and them. Therefore, companies need to monitor, maximize positive WoM and minimize negative WoM (Allsop et al., 2007).

Interaction between Customer Satisfaction and Gratitude in Influencing Positive WoM

Customer satisfaction positively increases the desire to provide a positive assessment of the service provider. For example, tourists are keen to disseminate positive WoM if they find the service enjoyable. Conversely, tourists will spread negative WoM if they experience unpleasant experiences related to the services provided by tourism institutions (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014; Samadara & Fanggidae, 2020). However, not all customers are grateful for the services offered probably because they think that the service is obligatory for the institutions to provide to all customers (Morales, 2005). Therefore, in the tourism industry, it is assumed that only tourists who have high levels of gratitude have a greater desire to spread positive WoM to others than those who have a lower level of gratitude. Thus, the second hypothesis in this study is:

H2: Gratitude moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and positive WoM.

METHODS

This is cross-sectional research, where the data was collected from hotel occupants in Indonesia. Data collection was carried out using a list of questionnaires. The respondents were informed that this was an anonymous study, and they were encouraged to give honest answers. Three hundred and fifty-two respondents agreed to participate in this study. Most of the respondents were males under 35 and held a bachelor's degree. This finding is consistent with previous research on tourism conducted in Indonesia (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Demographic data from respondents can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic of Respondents

Description		Total	Percentage
Gender	Male	202	57.4
	Female	150	42.6
Age	17 - 25	47	13.4
	26 – 35	189	53.7
	36 – 45	71	20.2
	> 45	45	12.8
Education	< High school	3	1.0
	High school	144	41.0
	University	205	58.0
Employment	Public servant	152	43.2
	Private employee	138	39.2
	Entrepreneurs	62	17.6

Measures

Service Quality: The service quality scale was adapted from Bhat (2012), consisting of 12 questions on a Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A sample question is: "Tourists are being served by the appropriate personnel."

Customer Satisfaction: The scale for customer satisfaction was adapted from prior studies (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000; Suhartanto et al., 2020), which comprises of 5-items Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). A sample question is: "In general, I am very satisfied with the service provided in this hotel."

Gratitude: The scale for gratitude was adapted from a prior study (Palmatier et al., 2009). Measured with Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), the measure consists of 3 questions. A sample question is: "I am very grateful for the service provided in this hotel."

Positive WoM: The intention to spread positive WoM is measured with a scale that has been developed by Abubakar and Mavondo (2014). Measured with Likert scale, (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), the measure consists of 4 questions. A sample question is: "I want to share my pleasant experience in this hotel with my family and friends."

Data Analysis

Measurement Model

We tested the validity and reliability of the study instruments of each construct. Cronbach Alpha and Composite Reliability were inspected to measure reliability of the instruments (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 1 demonstrated that both the Cronbach Alpha (α) and Composite Reliability (CR) values are higher than 0.70 as recommended by Field (2013). We concluded that the variables contained in this study are reliable.

Table 2: Measurement Model

Variable	VIF	Loading	α	CR	AVE
Service Quality (KL)			0.93	0.94	0.55
KL1	1.94	0.71			
KL2	1.74	0.70			
KL3	2.24	0.82			
KL4	2.25	0.72			
KL5	2.62	0.75			
KL6	2.32	0.74			
KL7	2.18	0.69			
KL8	1.89	0.76			
KL9	2.19	0.77			
KL10	2.15	0.78			
KL11	2.25	0.78			
KL12	2.29	0.74			
Customer Satisfaction (KP)			0.82	0.87	0.58
KP1	1.70	0.78			
KP2	1.62	0.70			
KP3	1.89	0.80			
KP4	1.77	0.76			
KP5	1.62	0.76			
Gratitude (TK)			0.84	0.87	0.75
TK1	1.98	0.88			
TK2	1.96	0.86			
TK3	1.90	0.85			
WoM			0.88	0.91	0.73
WoM1	2.05	0.85			
WoM2	2.09	0.84			
WoM3	2.43	0.84			
WoM4	2.67	0.88			

Convergent validity was evaluated by testing the loading item and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) index. All items produced outer loading values that are equal to or greater than 0.7, and the AVE value of each variable is greater than 0.50 as recommended by Chin (1998). Outer loading and AVE values can be seen in Table 2.

To test discriminant validity, two testing procedures were carried out. First, the square root of the AVE for each construct must be greater than the correlation between that construct and other constructs in the research model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this study, these requirements have been met. Second, we used an approach using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT), where the HTMT ratio must not exceed 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). As seen in Table 3, this requirement has been met because no HTMT value exceeds 0.90.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity

Variables	KL	KP	TK	WoM
KL	(0.74)	0.29	0.12	0.22
KP	0.25**	(0.76)	0.49	0.38
TK	0.10	0.41**	(0.87)	0.61
WoM	0.19**	0.33**	0.52**	(0.85)

Note: Square root of AVE are in the diagonal line, correlations are below the diagonal line, HTMT ratios are overhead the diagonal line.

Moderated Mediation Model

This study investigates the relationship between service quality and positive WoM, as well as the mediating role of customer satisfaction which is moderated by gratitude. To achieve the aim, we analyze the moderated mediation model (Process Model 14; 10,000 samples; Hayes, 2013).

First, the direct effect of service quality on positive WoM ($b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.01$) was positive and significant, as well as the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction ($b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$). Second, the interplay between customer satisfaction and gratitude in influencing positive WoM was examined in the moderation analysis. The results demonstrated that the influence of customer satisfaction on WoM was statistically significant ($b = 0.49$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = 0.04$). However, the effect of gratitude on positive WoM was not significant ($b = -0.18$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = 0.44$). More importantly, we found a significant interaction between customer satisfaction and gratitude in influencing WoM ($b = 0.16$, $SE = .06$, $p = .01$).

Third, the analysis results showed that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality and positive WoM. The moderated mediation index was significant ($b = 0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.07]). However, the indirect effect was conditional. That is, the indirect effect was only significant if the respondents were grateful for the service ($b = 0.07$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.12]), while the indirect effect was not significant when the respondent were not grateful for the services provided ($b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [-0.01, 0.05]).

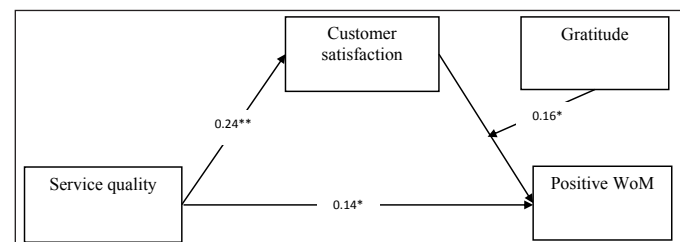


Fig. 1: Research Model

DISCUSSION

This study confirms that service quality, directly and indirectly, affects the desire to spread positive WoM. Directly, service quality increases positive WoM from customers because customers want to disclose their experiences about the excellent service quality with others (Samadara & Fanggidae, 2020). Indirectly, the influence of service quality on positive WoM is mediated by customer satisfaction and moderated by gratitude. The results of the moderated mediation analysis revealed that the desire to spread positive WoM is higher if the customer is satisfied with the service provided and is grateful for the service. Nevertheless, even for those satisfied with the service but had a low level of gratitude, the desire to spread positive WoM remained low.

Given the importance of positive WoM, recommendations are presented based on the results of this study to managers in the tourism industry. In addition to focusing on the quality of service in the tourism sector, it is recommended that institutions stimulate the feeling of gratitude from customers in various ways, for instance, by thanking customers more frequently. Previous research has shown that conveying gratitude is reciprocal so that customers will be grateful for the service provided (Morales, 2005). In addition, providing efforts that can demonstrate the good ethics of the company can also increase the gratitude of customers. For example, customers appreciate companies that practice Corporate Social Responsibility more than those that do not (Romani et al., 2013).

Despite the theoretical and practical contributions, several weaknesses of the present study can be addressed by further research. First, the nature of this study was cross-sectional, which can only reflect the current condition when the data was taken (Levin, 2006). This issue may be resolved by conducting a more comprehensive longitudinal study describing the relationship between variables. Second is the possibility of sampling bias due to an imbalance in the characteristics of the existing samples. As previously mentioned, the number of male respondents aged below 35 is the majority age group. Therefore, it is possible that the results do not represent the population (Suhartanto et al., 2020). Further research should pay more attention to the proportion of sex and age to obtain a more representative sample to address this issue.

CONCLUSION

This research focuses on people's willingness to share positive WoM regarding their travel experiences with others. WoM is a critical factor for the service industry, including in the tourism industry. Previous findings have demonstrated that WoM is influenced by customer satisfaction (Anderson, 1998). However, the factors that moderate the relationship

between the two still needs to be explored, especially those related to customer emotions.

This study provides a theoretical contribution to the existing literature in the tourism sector regarding the direct and indirect effects of service quality on the intention to spread positive WoM. In particular, the contribution of this theory focuses on the moderating role of gratitude as a form of individual emotion in the link between customer satisfaction and positive WoM. It is expected that recommendations will benefit the development of the tourism industry, both locally and globally.

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