

CUSTOMER SERVICE PERSONNEL'S PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMERS: THE CASE OF A TELECOMMUNICATIONS FIRM

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to extend current knowledge on perception of customer service personnel (CSP) towards customers. It examines these perceptions by employing the CAB Paradigm, utilizing an interview followed by questionnaires based on the interview findings for CSPs in a telecommunications firm in Malaysia. Data collected from the interview was analyzed using frequency distribution and data from the questionnaire was analyzed using factor analysis. Findings indicated the most identified variable was "Interested" and the least was "Gross/Unpleasant". Factor analysis indicated 9 views of customers termed as Mr. Hot, Mr. Mix Up, Mr. Pushy, Mr. Slow, Mr. Serious, Mr. Professional, Mr. Simple and Mr. Cheerful. The number of respondents and the subsequent weak KMO limit the study. Nevertheless, it provides a basis for the CAB Paradigm to explain why customer service in Sarawak is weak. The implications of the study to management and HRM department are strong as they indicate that CSP's views of customers are negative, and such personnel thus require further training and supervision on how to treat customers. It is rare to find articles that look at CSP's view of customers, as the literature is chock-a-block with the views of customers. This study allows for a preview into the mind of CSPs.

Keywords: Customer service personnel; Customer; Perception; Telecommunication; Malaysia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Customers are seen as demanding, with a variety of expectations and needs that are to be met by organizations (Woodruffe, 1995). They have different types of attitudes, characters and behaviours (Payne, 1999). It is neither possible to change or influence customers nor to fulfill all their expectations and needs. These factors are beyond management's control. It would be easier for management to improve quality service by effectively managing customer service personnel (CSP) rather than managing customers (Heskett et al., 1990).

Nevertheless, the literature is focused on customers' perception towards sales persons; addressing various issues such as the nature of consumer expectations, relationship quality, as well as customer satisfaction and loyalty (Bebko, 2000; Holmlund & Strandvik, 1999; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Research on CSP's perceptions of customers is limited yet essential because both parties are actively interacting (Bitner et al., 1994; Holmlund & Strandvik, 1999). Studies have noted that this interaction will affect the perceived quality of the service delivered (Woodruffe, 1995). Furthermore, CSPs are the ones who have to deal with the emotional expression of customers (Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002). Thus, it is essential for the organization to be aware of how CSPs perceive customers, as it will then affect the way they feel about and treat customers.

It is obvious that what an organization espouses may not be what the CSPs believe. Organizations state that they treat customers as kings and claim that the customer is always right (DeVrye, 1994). Nevertheless, CSPs are emotional entities who have to deal with customers' emotions yet management has been shown to ignore CSPs (Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002; Schneider & Bowen, 1995; Shapiro et al., 1992). Thus, CSPs differentiate

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customers and do not treat them equally. They usually categorize customers into two groups - the good or friendly type and the nasty or ungrateful type (Guttek, 1995).

This categorization of customers should affect how CSPs serve their customers. Nevertheless, studies have shown that how CSPs treat customers is based on their perception and professionalism (Payne, 1999; Schneider & Bowen, 1995). When customer service personnel have a positive perception towards customers, they will certainly react positively by providing good service (Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002). On the other hand, when they perceive customers negatively, there are two possible reactions to their customer service delivery. Firstly, they may not treat the customer nicely (aware or not). Secondly, they must still treat the customer positively as they should be professional in their job (Payne, 1999).

This description is in line with the CAB Paradigm that is explained as a causal flow from experience in encounters that create perceptions, to affect, to evaluation, to decision making on behavioural matters. This paradigm has been espoused in various studies (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Martínez-Lopez et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 1986). The CAB Paradigm is a theoretical framework that endeavours to explain the way consumer behaviour is affected by cognition and affect processes and is similar to the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Holbrooke, 1986). This theoretical framework is applied in this study.

This research explores the issue of perception of CSPs toward customers by assessing the perceptions of CSPs in a major telecommunications company in a multicultural Asian country, namely Malaysia. It utilizes interviews of CSPs that are translated into a questionnaire format and further analyzed. The results have important implications for management and customer service strategies. The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first, discussion of the relevant literature is presented; followed by a discussion of the methodology used, thirdly, the findings are presented and then discussed, followed by the conclusions that look at academic and managerial implications, limitations, and areas for future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the twentieth century, the need for marketing orientation is gaining momentum and the focus is on the needs of customers (Woodruffe, 1995). Businesses are keen on keeping customers in order to remain profitable over time (Shapiro et al., 1992). Customer satisfaction is viewed as one of the crucial element in gaining competitive advantage (Kim & Kim, 2001).

Among the many factors in keeping customers, service delivery is one of the main concerns. Customer service is considered as an important business activity (Rotfeld, 2001). Considerable research has focused on customer satisfaction from the aspect of customer behaviour or perception (Athanasopoulos et al., 2001; Davis & Heineke, 1998; Holmlund & Strandvik, 1999; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Equal attention is not given to customer service personnel's perceptions of relationship quality (Holmlund & Strandvik, 1999). Previous studies look only at the customer's point of view in a service encounter (Bitner et al., 1994; Bitner et al., 1990).

In service management, perception is studied from two distinct aspects - customer's perception and CSP's perception. Research done on customer's point of view is basically focused on perceived service quality (Bebko, 2000; Davis & Heineke, 1998) and perceived value (Groth & Dye, 1999; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). On the other hand, study on customer service personnel's perception is on business relationships quality (Holmlund & Strandvik, 1999; Yu & Dean, 2001) and service personnel attitudes or behaviour (Adsit et al., 1996; Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002). Nonetheless, research on customer service personnel's perception is still in its infancy (Holmlund & Strandvik, 1999). There are also studies that have begun to link the perceptions of both parties (Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002).

There are various studies on CSPs with terms that are used interchangeably to describe CSPs. CSPs are known as customer service representatives (Shapiro et al., 1992), front liners (Payne, 1999), frontline personnel (Woodruffe, 1995), service employees (Chervonnaya, 2003) or even sales persons (Darian et al., 2001). Whatever terms used, CSPs are employees who are involved in direct interactions with customers in person, by telecommunication or by mail, with varying roles depending on the situation and level of interaction (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004; Shapiro et al., 1992; Woodruffe, 1995).

Studies on CSPs tend to be more on what they are and on what characteristics CSPs should have. There is general agreement that CSPs must be able and willing to respond effectively to customers yet they have little clout in the organization (Freemantle, 1994; Shapiro et al., 1992). CSPs must have basic characteristics such as being courteous, positive, honest and genuine (Freemantle, 1994). As such, they must practise discretion in making decisions in the favour of customers, which unfortunately is limited.

Customers on the other hand are those who come to the organization with expectations and needs to be fulfilled who perceive that they have some control over the transaction with the right to complain and make decisions (Guttek, 1995; Schneider & Bowen, 1995). The normal idea of who a customer is, sees the person as one who purchases or is the current or potential receiver of a commodity or service (Brown, 1995; Guttek, 1995).

Customers come in all shapes and sizes, all temperaments and moods (Chervonnaya, 2003; Payne, 1999). Thus, it is neither possible to monitor, change or influence customers nor to fulfill all their expectations and needs (Heskett et al., 1990). As such, it is always easier for the organization to improve the quality of service by effectively managing the staff. Studies have shown that CSPs are essential for successful service delivery (Eccles & Durand, 1997). It is also widely accepted that the service encounter is a dyadic interaction where both parties (CSPs and customers) play specific yet important roles (Bitner et al., 1994; Bitner et al., 1990; Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002). As such, it is important to note the perception of CSPs toward customers so that specific training can be provided to CSPs and management can develop specific strategies.

A major function of research in consumer behaviour is to understand and predict behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). The CAB Paradigm is a theoretical framework that endeavours to explain the way consumer behaviour is affected by cognition and affect processes and is similar to the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Holbrooke, 1986). Many consumer researchers have borrowed and extended this basic theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Martínez-Lopez et al., 2005; Peterson et al., 1986). This theoretical framework is applied in this study.

This paradigm explains the causal flow of CSP's behaviour from cognition to affect to behaviour. What they think or believe about customers should affect how they feel about customers and have an impact on how they behave. Of course the moderating impact of management / company rules and regulations / training will hinder most direct confrontation. Nevertheless, the CAB Paradigm allows for an insight into what CSPs think of customers.

The response by CSPs can be termed as their attitude toward customers. In psychology texts, attitude contains three classes of response: cognitive (C), affective (A) and behavioural (B) to a stimulus object, a person or phenomenon with various forms of sequencing (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004; Solomon, 2004). In the CAB paradigm, CSPs initially form beliefs about certain objects (customers) by accumulating knowledge with regard to several attributes that define said objects (Hawkins et al., 1998). The cognitive component of an attitude represents the mental process of a person's beliefs, perceptions and knowledge about a specified object and its attributes (Blythe, 1997; Peter & Olson, 1996). CSPs may form their perceptual belief or gain knowledge of customers through personal experience or learn from others if they are without any prior exposure.

An attitude's affective component represents a psychological response that involve a person's emotional feelings toward the given object (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). It is either a positive or negative feeling and may result in evaluation of a particular product (Hawkins et al., 1998; Solomon et al., 2002). The behaviour component of an attitude relates to the person's intended or actual behavioural response to the given object (Hawkins et al., 1998). This part of an attitude tends to be an observable outcome driven by the interaction of a person's cognitive component (beliefs) and affective component (emotional strength of those beliefs) as they relate to the given object (Hanna & Wozniak, 2001). This study sets out to identify what are CSP's beliefs of customers.

III. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The population of this study consists of all CSP's in a major telecommunications company in Malaysia, amounting to 300 personnel based in Kuala Lumpur and Kuching, Sarawak. In order to develop descriptive terms for perception of customers, in-depth interviews were conducted. Fifteen CSPs were interviewed. Previous research has suggested that the widest accepted range for sample size for in-depth interview to be 4 to 15 (Perry, 1998). Respondents were selected on the basis of availability and convenience. The interview utilized a modified word association technique, where respondents were asked questions and asked to respond with their initial

thoughts, which are often considered to be the most salient and valid (Friedmann & Fox, 1989; Stafford & Stafford, 2003; Weeks & Muehling, 1987).

During the interview session, the authors began with light conversation to break the ice and create a relaxed atmosphere. The authors reiterated the purpose of the research and explained how the interview was to proceed. The average length of the interviews was about 15 minutes. Respondents were asked for their perception of customers in general. Respondents were required to provide their demographic details. Data collected was analyzed in the form of frequency and cross-tabulation.

Data obtained from the interview was then transmitted into a questionnaire format. Minimum sample size was calculated at 55 respondents (Luck et al., 1987). The authors obtained 60 respondents based on convenience sampling of CSP's in Kuala Lumpur and Kuching. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, namely Demographics and Perceptions of CSPs towards Customers. A Likert Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was used. There was also an option of "don't know" for those unsure whether the terms used were relevant to describe customers.

Data collected was analyzed in the form of factor analysis. The programme used for analyzing was Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 12.0. Factor analysis was used, as its objective was to reduce to a manageable number many variables that belonged together and had overlapping measurement characteristics (Schindler, 1998). Factor analysis is a set of techniques serving the purpose of this research, that is to reduce a large set of variables, determine the interrelationships among variables and to discover the underlying constructs or latent dimensions linked to CSP's perception of customers (Aaker et al., 1995).

IV. FINDINGS

In the interview session, a total of 15 respondents were selected to share their perceptions toward customers. The majority of them are female (53.3%), in their 20s and married. Most of the respondents are Chinese (46.7%) and Malay (40.0%) who have served for 1 to 2 years (26.7%). The respondents profile has been summarized in Table 1. Table 2 provides an exhaustive listing of the terms used by the CSPs in describing their perception of customers.

Table 1: Respondent Profile of 15 Respondents Interviewed

Demographic Factor		%
Gender	Male	46.7
	Female	53.3
Age	≤ 25 years	40
	26 – 30 years	46.6
	> 30 years	13.4
Marital status	Married	53.3
	Single	46.7
Race	Malay	40.0
	Chinese	46.7
	Indian	13.3
Period of service	1 year	26.7
	2 years	26.7
	3 years	6.7
	4 years	20.0
	6 years	6.7
	8 years	13.3

Table 2: List of Terms Associated with Perceptions of CSPs toward Customers

Good, Miserable, Nasty, Talkative, Cooperative, Cheerful, Understanding, Easy going, Rude, Funny/ Wild, Demanding, Kind, Unreasonable, Aggressive, Innocent, Angry, Simple, Abusive, Interested, Gentleman, Shy, Hot tempered, Bad, Impatient, Courteous/ Polite, Pushy, Friendly, Rushing, Thoughtful, Inconsiderate, Fussy/ Nuisance, Show off, Stubborn, Bragging, Nagging, Dishonest/ Tricky, Professional, Moody/ Emotional, Knowledgeable, Gross/ Unpleasant, Confused, Negotiable, Can't be bothered, Passive, Indecisive, Serious, Dependent, Trustworthy, Lazy, Slow.

Questions for the questionnaire were based on the findings from the interviews as detailed in Table 2. A total of 60 sets of questionnaires were answered by CSPs. Of these, 44.3% of the respondents are male equally in the early 20 and older and single (58.6%). Malay staff makes up 44.3%, while 34.3% are Chinese and who have mostly served for less than 2 years (51.4%). The respondents' profile is detailed in Table 3. The means for each variable are detailed in Table 4.

Table 3: Respondent Profile

Demographic Factor		%
Gender	Male	44.3
	Female	55.7
Age	=< 25 years	50
	=> 26 years	50
Marital status	Married	37.1
	Single	58.6
	Divorced	2.9
	Widower	1.4
Race	Malay	44.3
	Chinese	34.3
	Indian	11.4
	Others	10
Period of service	=< 2 years	51.4
	=> 3 years	48.6

Table 4: Means of Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gross Unpleasant	2.89	1.82	Lazy	4.53	1.60
Negotiable	3.23	1.84	Miserable	4.54	1.52
Fussy nuisance	3.40	2.02	Slow	4.57	1.45
Nasty	3.41	1.93	Bragging	4.59	1.59
Good	3.45	2.19	Bad	4.62	1.49
Funny weird	3.49	1.97	Thoughtful	4.63	1.45
Passive	3.53	1.39	Easy going	4.63	1.60
Cooperative	3.87	1.62	Gentleman	4.66	1.31
Stubborn	3.94	1.88	Indecisive	4.66	1.17
Kind	3.99	1.77	Simple	4.70	1.19
Nagging	4.00	1.56	Demanding	4.71	1.67
Serious	4.01	1.82	Dishonest	4.76	1.50
Understanding	4.03	1.37	Dependent	4.77	1.45
Aggressive	4.07	1.78	Talkative	4.81	1.57
Trustworthy	4.12	1.46	Hot tempered	4.83	1.40
Professional	4.24	1.31	Courteous	4.86	1.39
Cannot be bothered	4.26	1.45	Cheerful	4.89	1.43
Knowledgeable	4.28	1.24	Showoff	4.89	1.45
Confused	4.33	1.34	Moody emotional	4.91	1.58
Shy	4.37	1.55	Inconsiderate	5.01	1.44
Rude	4.39	1.42	Pushy	5.07	1.40
Angry	4.42	1.58	Friendly	5.10	1.31
Unreasonable	4.43	1.52	Impatient	5.12	1.48
Abusive	4.49	1.55	Rushing	5.13	1.59
Innocent	4.53	1.34	Interested	5.21	1.17

Principle components extraction through SPSS on 50 items for a sample of 60 CSPs was used in an initial run to estimate the number of factors with forced eigen values that exceed one. The initial KMO was 0.369, indicating that the sampling adequacy which should be greater than 0.5 for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed was unacceptable (Anonymous, 2006a, 2006b). Bartlett's Test showed a ChiSquare of 2768.75 with a significance level of 0.00. This may be due to the small size of the sample. Total variance explained was 82.64% out of 12 components where only two components had a variance value of more than 10%. However, eigen values for the first six factors were all larger than two and, after the sixth factor, changes in successive eigen values were small. This was taken as evidence that there were probably six factors. Please refer to Appendix 1.

As such, some modification was required. The first was to check if any of the communalities scored low, but the lowest was 0.707 and the highest was 0.905. After consultation, it was decided to remove variables that scored lower than 0.8 (Easy going - .707, Shy - .712, Show off - .715, Moody emotional - .718, Fussy nuisance - .73, Knowledgeable - .74, Gentleman - .761, Passive - .788, Confused - .795, Dependent - .795, Innocent - .798, Impatient - .798, Bragging - .798) (Niven, Brian. *Personal communication*, May 4 and 5, 2006). Next was to determine if any factors had variables with loadings spread across other factors. Only two variables met this requirement – Impatient and Easy Going. This was then removed from the dataset. A second factor analysis was run based on the remaining variables.

Table 5: Factor Analysis Findings

Component	Variable	Loading	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cumulative % of variance	Alpha
1. Mr. Hot	Funny weird	.843	9.556	25.828	25.828	.898
	Aggressive	.840				
	Angry	.802				
	Kind	.777				
	Hot tempered	.632				
2. Mr. Mix Up	Abusive	.613	4.695	12.688	38.516	.885
	Rude	.870				
	Nasty	.828				
	Understand	.709				
	Demanding	.696				
	Good	.695				
3. Mr. Pushy	Cooperative	.664	3.901	10.542	49.058	.851
	Unreasonable	.613				
	Rushing	.885				
	Pushy	.853				
4. Mr. Slow	Inconsiderate	.718	3.092	8.356	57.415	.801
	Talkative	.608				
	Miserable	.861				
	Lazy	.828				
5. Mr. Serious	Slow	.820	2.310	6.244	63.658	.820
	Indecisive	.513				
	Serious	.849				
	Trustworthy	.829				
6. Mr. Courteous	Gross unpleasant	.663	1.889	5.105	68.763	.860
	Negotiable	.663				
	Courteous	.830				
7. Mr. Professional	Friendly	.817	1.583	4.279	73.042	.848
	Thoughtful	.796				
	Professional	.793				
8. Mr. Simple	Nagging	.735	1.397	3.774	76.816	.793
	Stubborn	.699				
9. Mr. Cheerful	Simple	.809	1.114	3.010	79.826	-
	Interest	.762				
	Cheerful	.792				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 11 iterations.

The KMO was 0.603, indicating that the sampling adequacy was greater than 0.5 and therefore satisfactory (Anonymous, 2006a, 2006b). Bartlett's Test showed a ChiSquare of 1892.22 with a significance level of 0.00. Total variance explained was 79.83% out of 9 components. Please refer to Table 5. It is apparent that CSP's have as mostly negative perception of the customer with only three positive depictions of customers as Cheery, Simple, and Easy. The other 8 depictions of customers place them in a bad light.

Further analysis was carried out by obtaining the means of the nine factor components by selected demographics (Refer to Table 6). A One-way ANOVA was carried out to determine if there was any variation between the demographics (refer to Table 7). There was no significant difference by most demographic variables except by ethnicity.

Table 6: Means of Factor by Demographics

Factor	Overall		Male		Female		Age =< 25		Age => 26	
	M	S. D.	M	S. D.	M	S. D.	M	S. D.	M	S. D.
Mr. Hot	4.26	1.43	4.43	1.64	4.14	1.25	3.97	1.51	4.55	1.30
Mr. MixUp	4.03	1.28	3.87	1.38	4.15	1.20	3.71	1.36	4.34	1.14
Mr. Pushy	5.18	1.27	5.34	1.32	5.05	1.23	4.94	1.56	5.40	0.88
Mr. Slow	4.72	1.10	4.86	1.11	4.62	1.09	4.63	1.29	4.82	0.88
Mr. Serious	3.74	1.36	3.55	1.38	3.89	1.35	3.61	1.37	3.88	1.36
Mr. Courteous	4.87	1.25	5.13	1.26	4.66	1.21	4.76	1.39	4.97	1.10
Mr. Professional	4.04	1.44	3.77	1.55	4.26	1.33	4.09	1.52	4.00	1.37
Mr. Simple	5.22	1.11	5.27	1.08	5.18	1.14	5.18	1.19	5.26	1.04
Mr. Cheerful	4.89	1.43	5.10	1.35	4.72	1.49	4.71	1.34	5.06	1.51

Table 6: Means of Factor by Demographics (Continued)

Factor	Malay		Chinese		P Serve <2		P Serve =>3	
	M	S. D.	M	S. D.	M	S. D.	M	S. D.
Mr. Hot	3.76	1.41	4.48	1.47	4.27	1.42	4.25	1.46
Mr. MixUp	3.60	1.19	4.38	1.35	3.89	1.43	4.18	1.10
Mr. Pushy	4.77	1.45	5.57	0.99	5.15	1.16	5.21	1.39
Mr. Slow	4.73	1.14	4.71	1.12	4.94	0.97	4.50	1.19
Mr. Serious	3.19	1.25	4.17	1.27	3.65	1.43	3.84	1.30
Mr. Courteous	4.90	1.45	4.65	1.11	4.94	1.16	4.79	1.34
Mr. Professional	3.81	1.35	4.43	1.59	4.00	1.51	4.09	1.38
Mr. Simple	5.13	1.31	5.26	0.86	5.26	1.12	5.18	1.11
Mr. Cheerful	4.48	1.63	5.21	1.18	4.64	1.36	5.15	1.48

Table 7: One Way Anova of Factor by Demographics

Factor	Gender		Age		Ethnicity		Period of Service	
	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Mr. Hot	0.67	0.42	2.72	0.10	3.22	0.08	0.00	0.95
Mr. MixUp	0.85	0.36	4.47	0.04	5.03	0.03	0.90	0.35
Mr. Pushy	0.89	0.35	2.28	0.14	5.05	0.03	0.04	0.85
Mr. Slow	0.73	0.40	0.50	0.48	0.01	0.94	2.68	0.11
Mr. Serious	1.01	0.32	0.66	0.42	8.03	0.01	0.34	0.56
Mr. Courteous	2.49	0.12	0.47	0.50	0.48	0.49	0.24	0.62
Mr. Professional	2.02	0.16	0.06	0.80	2.45	0.12	0.07	0.80
Mr. Simple	0.10	0.75	0.09	0.77	0.18	0.68	0.09	0.77
Mr. Cheerful	1.22	0.27	1.01	0.32	3.37	0.07	2.25	0.14

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest that CSPs view customers primarily in a negative manner. This may suggest and support previous studies on why there is poor customer service in Sarawak (de Run, 2002). De Run (2002) discusses internal and external factors to a company that dictates customer service. These include training, staff management and empowerment as well as company orientation. Nevertheless, there were some positive traits mentioned. This mixture of how customers were perceived may be because customers behave in an unpredictable manner, resulting in some being viewed positively while others negatively (Chervonnaya, 2003; Hawkins et al., 1998; Peter & Olson, 1996).

There have been arguments that all customers are alike with changes only occurring systematically (Limehouse, 1999; Peter & Olson, 1996). The findings here disagree. The 9 types of customers indicate not too subtle differences. The differences in how the customers were perceived by CSPs may have occurred due to personal,

psychological or social factors during interaction (Blythe, 1997; Hoffman et al., 2003). The findings here suggest that ethnicity of the CSP may have played a part in how customers are perceived.

The findings indicate that Human Resource Departments cannot run from the responsibility of the phenomenon that customers are perceived negatively. The critical roles played by the human resource department include recruiting the right personnel, providing effective training, and rewarding excellence (Berry, 1995; Desatnick, 1987; Goodman, 2000). The findings here indicate further training and strategic planning are required.

Competing solely on the basis of product or price is claimed to be insufficient because service is the key that makes the difference (Desatnick, 1987). Quality services are very much related to how CSPs act towards customers. In line with the CAB paradigm, it has been shown that CSPs have a negative view of customers. Nevertheless, there is no indication of how CSPs may act upon such perceptions but based on theory, it will be lacking unless CSPs are professional enough (DeVrye, 1994; Payne, 1999; Schneider & Bowen, 1995).

The personality of CSPs can affect the way they perceive customers as well. If a CSP emanates negativity, it will reflect right back to that person (Goodman, 2000). A majority of dissatisfactory service incidents are the result of inadequate human responses (Halliday, 2004). This indicates that an unpleasant personality may lead to customer dissatisfaction. As such, organizations could carry out a continuous employee attitude survey to note and provide customer-focused value (Desatnick, 1987).

Customer service centres are claimed to be very moody organisms (Goodman, 2000). CSPs experience mood swings when they are stressed because they are just another emotional entity like other people (Schneider & Bowen, 1995). Another source of stress among customer service is from the company, where sales figures are more of a concern. As such, CSPs react by perceiving customers negatively.

At the same time, negative perceptions toward customers might reflect the fact. Customers may behave negatively in reality. Intentional misbehaviour of customers is common. Customers always respond in an unanticipated and dysfunctional way, especially if they are unaware of their role in the interaction (Harris & Reynolds, 2004).

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This research creates awareness of the importance of CSP's perception. It has been claimed that perceptions are equally important, if not more important, than actual communication (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Factor analysis indicated 9 views of customers termed as Mr. Hot, Mr. Mix Up, Mr. Pushy, Mr. Slow, Mr. Serious, Mr. Professional, Mr. Simple and Mr. Cheerful. There are also significant differences in how Malay and Chinese CSP's view their customers. The negative perception of CSPs is not a good indicator of service quality and offers much to think about.

Although the sample of this research exceeded the minimum level, a higher response rate would have further strengthened the research and allowed for a better KMO. Nevertheless, based on the limitations of scale and time, the response rate was good.

Biases from experience of respondents could have affected the reliability of the findings. The majority of the respondents in this research are CSPs who have working tenure of 1 to 5 years. They may lack experience and have limited views of customers. Thus, they may not have sufficient experience in a wide variety of situations and this could lead to biases in providing feedback.

Another limitation is that some respondents had doubts about the confidentiality of the research even after assurance. They felt uncomfortable to respond honestly about their perceptions. This posed difficulties in getting their full co-operation and involvement.

Future research may study perceptions of CSPs in accordance with different sectors and employing a larger set of respondents. Perceptions of CSPs from a varied sector can be studied separately and then compared. This would allow researchers to note if the perceptions are similar or different. A generic CSP reaction could also be looked at. Other studies can be done to note if this difference in perception translates towards a significant difference in behaviour and the moderating impact of management rules and regulations.

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Appendix 1: Factor Analysis Findings

Component	Variable	Loading	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cumulative % of variance	Alpha
1. Mr. Hot	Angry	.803	11.895	23.790	23.790	.891
	Aggressive	.796				
	Funny weird	.750				
	Gentleman	.704				
	Kind	.697				
	Abusive	.687				
	Hot tempered	.685				
	Impatient	.512				
	Easygoing	.511				
2. Mr. Fussy	Negotiable	.812	6.007	12.015	35.805	.879
	Passive	.798				
	Gross unpleasant	.758				
	Trustworthy	.711				
	Serious	.698				
	Fussy nuisance	.684				
3. Mr. Rude	Rude	.871	4.991	9.981	45.786	.885
	Nasty	.819				
	Good	.693				
	Understanding	.691				
	Demanding	.681				
	Cooperative	.665				
	Unreasonable	.582				
4. Mr. Pushy	Pushy	.870	4.278	8.556	54.342	.872
	Rushing	.842				
	Impatient	.624				
	Inconsiderate	.622				
	Talkative	.550				
5. Mr. Badmouth	Dishonest	.869	2.994	5.987	60.330	.834
	Bragging	.834				
	Showoff	.698				
6. Mr. Easy	Courteous	.831	2.445	4.890	65.220	.786
	Thoughtful	.790				
	Friendly	.775				
	Bad	.549				
	Easygoing	.533				
7. Mr. Lazy	Slow	.885	1.846	3.693	68.913	.874
	Miserable	.865				
	Lazy	.808				
8. Mr. Professional	Professional	.891	1.657	3.314	72.227	.820
	Knowledgeable	.789				
	Stubborn	.659				
	Nagging	.653				
9. Mr. Simple	Simple	.838	1.486	2.971	75.198	.824
	Interest	.819				
	Innocent	.589				
	Shy	.514				
10. Mr. Blur	Confused	.787	1.398	2.796	77.994	.789
	Cannot be bothered	.725				
	Indecisive	.603				
11. Mr. Cheery	Cheerful	.781	1.206	2.411	80.405	.448
	Dependent	.613				
12. None significant	-	-	-	-	-	-

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 19 iterations.

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