THE INFLUENCE OF SERVICE QUALITY AND SERVICE RECOVERY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF MRT USERS IN KLANG VALLEY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the significant influence of service quality and service recovery towards customer satisfaction among the users of Klang Valley's Mass Rapid Transit (MRT). A total of 396 online questionnaires were distributed, with 392 cases used in the final analysis. A series of statistical tests – descriptive analysis, reliability test, correlation analysis and regression analysis were carried out based on the proposed research objectives. Results also indicated that both service quality and service recovery have a significant influence towards customer satisfaction in the MRT. Between the two variables, service recovery is found to have a higher positive influence towards customer satisfaction. The results provide important insights into the impact of service quality and service recovery towards customer satisfaction in the MRT service provider compared to other previous researches.

Keywords: *Service quality, service recovery, customer satisfaction, public transport, Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), Klang Valley, Malaysia.*

INTRODUCTION

This research analyses customer satisfaction with public transportation. Today, public transportation is used to fulfil the public's needs due to continuous urban growth, environmental issues, competition for limited space, longer commuting distances as well as the need to promote equity and equality in society.

Public transportation is the base of trade and is an important element of economic performance. Businesses also rely heavily on efficient public transportation in order to integrate their production processes and deliver finished products to market. A well-developed and efficient transport industry is a key factor for any nation's supply chain and logistics sector.

Without a well-developed transportation system, logistics could not bring its benefits into the industries. In other words, a well-developed transportation system in logistics could provide better logistics efficiency in order to reduce operation cost and promote service quality. A well-developed logistic system needs the cooperation of government and private sectors in order to increase both the competitiveness of the government and enterprises (Tseng, 2005).

However, every passenger has different needs and priorities. Therefore, there is a need to understand how expectations and satisfaction with quality of service attributes as well as the service recovery when service failure occurs. In addition, factors such as urban form, transport accessibility and climate also impact individual travel needs (Liu, Susili and Karlström, 2014). Thus, it is of utmost importance to make sure the users are satisfied with the services with regard to specific service indicators.

Significant of Research

The role of public transportation in the logistics system is more than delivering goods to the customer. In order to provide high quality services to the customer, high quality management is necessary under a well-handled transport system; goods is delivered to the right place at the right time to satisfy customers' demands. It brings efficacy to the firms and at the same time, it also builds a connection between manufacturers and consumers. Transportation is the foundation of efficiency and economy in business logistics and expands other functions of logistics system. In addition, a well-developed transportation system in logistics activities brings benefits not only to service quality but also to company competitiveness.

The aim of this research is to identify the relationship of service quality and service recovery between the customer satisfactions of the user of public transport services in the Klang Valley area. Klang Valley Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) would be used as a measurement in this research to identify the relationship of service quality and its service recovery on the customer satisfaction through the survey to the MRT users in Klang Valley. Such relationships have not been fully examined in the service recovery context. Thus in this research, service recovery would be another variable to identify the relationship between it and customer satisfaction.

This study contributes to closing these gaps in the literature as part of a larger examination of the service quality, which includes reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness along with the influence of service recovery towards customer satisfaction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality

Gronroos (1984) conceptualised service quality as the comparative result of the customer expectations from a service provider and what he has actually received. Therefore, it can be referred to as a result of an estimation process between the expectations and the actual performance. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) identified 10 determinants of Service Quality (SQ) but in 1988 these 10 determinants of service quality were further improved and reduced to 5 dimensions of service quality which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), the service quality estimation is made based on consumer feels about the service experiences compared to their expectations.

Tangible in Service Quality

The tangibles involve the firms' representatives, physical facilities, materials, and equipment as well as communication materials. This dimension is about the actual feelings of services, including visual appearance of facilities, use of modern looking equipment and pleasant looking staff. More specifically, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) define the tangibility appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel, and written materials. In this research, tangibles refer to the services provided by MRT as perceived by the MRT users.

Reliability in Service Quality

In service quality, reliability is about the accuracy and technical functionality of the service (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra, 2000). Reliability deals with customer service issues, performs the services right the first time, offers services on time, as well as minimises the error. Moreover, they define reliability as the most significant factor in conventional service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). Reliability also consists of the right order fulfilment, accurate records and quote. In this research, reliability is the ability of the MRT services to execute the promised service as perceived by the users.

Assurance in Service Quality

Among the five SERVQUAL-dimensions, assurance was defined as the confidence and trust of the customer with the service provider. In previous research literature, assurance has been considered as the main factor for the confidence and trust and to be the reputation of the service provider, same as the truthfulness and clarity of information provided by it (Hamari, Hanner, and Koivisto, 2017). Furthermore, the products or services being sold also have an effect on the perceptions of assurance (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2000).

Empathy in Service Quality

In previous service quality research, empathy consists of the customised services to the customer (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2000). The adaptation ability of the experience to one's preferences increases the relatedness of the customer with the service, so it could strengthen the service to be continuous use (Zeithaml, Leonard, Berry and Parasuraman, 1996). The personalisation and customisation of services have become common nowadays, for example, by using recommender systems allow personalised advice for the users or give their customers a personalised experience by aggregated social media content. Therefore, improve the customisability is expected from services to solve the different customer habits. (Franke, Keinz, and Steger, 2009).

Responsiveness in Service Quality

The dimensions of responsiveness discuss the provision of assistance in case of problems or questions and the reactivity of the service provider (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra, 2000; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). For example in an online service context, many channels could be used as assistance to the customers such as websites, social media channels, forums, helpdesks and FAQ. Therefore, in problem situations in online service, personal human contacts does not often take place but responsiveness may rather be shown in the form of upgrades in accordance to problems identified by users and constant service patches.

Service Recovery

Maxham (2001) identified a service failure as a mistake or problem that consumers experience while shopping or communicating with companies. Bell and Zemke (1987) also defined service failures as "situations in which customers are dissatisfied because their perception of the service they have received is worse than their expectation." Bitner (1990) divided service failures into three groups which are service delivery failures, failure to fulfil customer needs and wants, and failure to unprompted and unsolicited employee actions. Thus, service recovery has been described as the actions of a firm to resolve problems, change the negative attitudes of the dissatisfied customers and to eventually retain these customers afterward (Miller, Craighead, and Karwan, 2000). Service recovery strategies have been identified and categorised by many researchers in traditional brick and mortar situations (Smith, Bolton and Wagner, 1999) and in the social media context (Sparks, 2016).Because of the criticality of service quality and customer satisfaction, service recovery has held an important role in the public transport services.

According to Miller, Craighead, and Karwan (2000), service recovery is typically classified into psychological and tangible recovery. Apology, empathy, and explanation are typically used as psychological recovery applied to rectify the problem caused by the service failure in order to enhance customer satisfaction. Tangible recovery refers to tangible compensation such as free services, refunds, gifts, discounts, and coupons provided to customers to reduce real damages (Kuo and Wu, 2012).

Service environments that have been previously examined include hotels (Zehrer and Raich, 2016), transportation (Nikbin and Hyun, 2015), and retail (Kuo and Wu, 2012). Service recovery is important because it may be a firm's "last defence" against customer defections. Previous research has found that service recovery is depending on the perceived quality of the attempt. It can have a powerful influence on the relationship between customers and service providers (Kim, Yoo, and Lee, 2012), as post recovery customer satisfaction has been found to be a critical foregoing of positive word-of-mouth advertising and customer loyalty (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault, 1990; Chang and Hung, 2013; Wen and Chi, 2013).

Service failure occurs when something goes wrong during the process of a service being rendered (Mueller, Palmer, Mack and McMullan, 2003). Hence, every service provider, especially in the hotel industry, should have a plan to execute a proper service recovery system in order to minimise customer dissatisfaction. Service recovery in this article refers to "the actions of a service provider to mitigate and/or repair the damage to a customer that results from the provider's failure to deliver a service a designed" (Johnston and Hewa, 1997, p. 476).

According to Vazquez, Iglesias, and Varela (2012), service recovery illustrates a company's reaction to a service failure. Organisations take actions to amend, rectify, or restore service failures (Grönroos, 1988) by recompense customers or issue a sincere apology (Tax and Brown, 1998).

Alternatively, "making things right" can affect a firm in fortuitous ways. Successful service recoveries have been found to increase customer satisfaction (Chang and Hung, 2013), retention or loyalty (Miller, Craighead, and Karwan, 2000), and promulgation of positive word-of-mouth advertising (Kim, Ok, and Canter, 2012). It has been further suggested that exceptionally strong recovery attempts can lead to customer evaluations higher than transactions with no perceived service failure whatsoever, resulting in a phenomenon Etzel and Silverman (1981) identified as the service recovery paradox (Ding, Ho and Lii, 2015).

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be assumed as transaction-specific or cumulative (Daugherty, Theodore and Ellinger, 1998; Rust and Zahorik, 1993). Prabhakaran and Satya (2003) have mentioned that the customer is the most important person in any form of business.

The transaction-specific view relates to a customer's post-purchase evaluation of a product. The cumulative view involves an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience over time (Daugherty, Theodore and Ellinger, 1998). Satisfaction is the consumer's response to and evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption (Tse and Wilton, 1988). It is also said that customer satisfaction is the result when the customer perceiving the products and services that they consume are commensurate with the price they pay.

According to Diab, Badami and El-Geneidy (2015), customer satisfaction with public transportation derives from a range of factors, from objective performance characteristics to personal characteristics including socio-demographics, personal preferences and habits. Understanding passengers' perception of service and what makes a satisfied public transport user has been the subject of a considerable amount of research. In order to achieve high customer satisfaction, build positive reputations, and have loyal customers; firms need to consistently provide high value to customers (Daugherty, Theodore and Ellinger, 1998).

Generally speaking, if the customers are satisfied with the provided goods or services, the probability that they will use the services again increases (East, 1997). Also, satisfied customers will most probably talk enthusiastically about their buying or the use of a particular service. This will lead to positive word-of-mouth (File and Prince, 1992; Richens, 1983). On the other hand, dissatisfied customers will most probably switch to a different brand. This will lead to negative word-of-mouth (Nasserzadeh, 2008).

Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Past researchers have proved that service quality has significant relationships with the customer satisfaction. Most of the researches demonstrate that higher levels of service quality results in higher level of customer satisfaction, it was largely been viewed as the nature of service quality and customer satisfaction (Pollack, 2008). Shin and Kim (2008) identified customer's overall impression depends on the relative efficiency service quality of the service provider. They found that service quality is significantly related and positively influences to customer satisfaction.

In their effort to identify shortcomings, hoteliers usually welcome feedback on the quality of their services so that they can improve in specific areas. Researchers have proposed the SERVQUAL model to measure the service performance of a provider. SERVQUAL can be used to assess the quality of services offered by businesses. This model has met with heavy criticism. However, it is still widely cited in service marketing. Relationships between service quality and customer satisfaction are well-accepted in the service literature (Athanassopoulos, Gounaris, and Stathakopoulos, 2001; Duygun, 2015; Gautam, 2013; Mansori, Vaz, and Ismail, 2014; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, 1988). Lee and Jeong (2017) in their research done based on the hotel industry suggested that service quality is a strong predictor of relationship quality which will lead to higher customer satisfaction.

Service quality is an important factor of customer satisfaction. Wan Normila Mohamad, (2013) found that tangibility; reliability and assurance, the determinants of service quality, are important predictors of customer satisfaction. Bitner (1990) have suggested that customer satisfaction is an antecedent of service quality. It is found that service quality is an important dimension of customer satisfaction.

Moreover, Linier (2013) in a study also found that the service quality had influences on customer satisfaction. Similarly, in their studies Nathan and Elsaghi (2012) ensured that service quality has a positive impact on customer satisfaction which means that higher quality of service attracts more customers who have brought back the desire and intention to recommend.

Service Recovery and Customer Satisfaction

Most importantly, service failure caused collapsing relationships with customers as it affects the customer satisfaction negatively. Therefore, service recovery is an important effective business strategy to maintain relationships with the customer as well as to win back those dissatisfied customers (Maxham, 2001).

An effective service recovery program is essential to the service provider, as it will enhance customer satisfaction and strengthen loyalty to the company (Duygun, 2015; Kaura, 2013; Mansori, Tyng, and Ismail, 2014; Tax and Brown, 1998). According to Zemke (1999), a customer who has experienced a service failure that is not followed by an appropriate response by the management will spread the word around. Hence, simply by word-of-mouth, the company's image will be tarnished.

According to McColl-Kenney, Daus and Sparks (2003), N'Goala (2007) and Hibbert, Piacentini and Hogg (2012) there is a positive influence with customer satisfaction if companies have proper service recovery efforts and toward their switching resistance. This is similar to the findings of Levesque and McDougall (1996) where service recovery is found to have a weak positive influence towards customer satisfaction. In their studies conducted in the banking industry, Levesque and McDougall (1996) found that service recovery helps maintain customer satisfaction but does not directly increase customer satisfaction.

In line with past research, a successful service recovery would increase the level of customer satisfaction (Baron, Harris, Elliott, Reynolds, and Harris, 2005; Mansori, Tygg and Ismail, 2014). The service provider needs to eliminate not only the cause of the customer's dissatisfaction, but also to handle the irate customer tactfully (Lewis and Spyrakopoulos, 2001). At the same time, based on Luo et al. (2017) in their research found that every business should improve its service recovery in order to have good customer satisfaction.
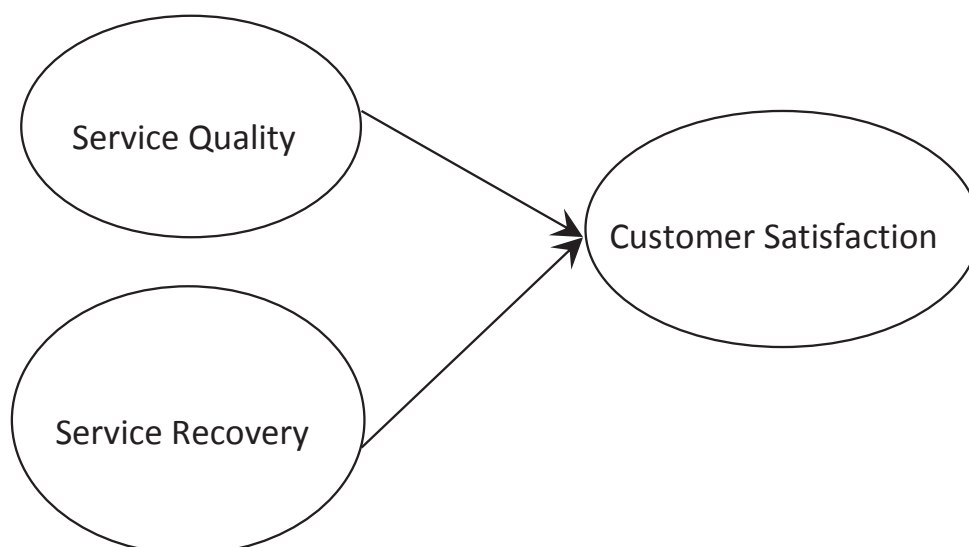
Theoretical Framework

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Quantitative research method was used for data collection to investigate the influence of service quality and service recovery towards customer satisfaction. It was a cross sectional study where the data was collected once at a particular time.

Sampling

The sampling method used in this study was convenience sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling.

Data collection was done through online survey whereby online questionnaires were distributed to 392 online respondents who have experience using the MRT in Klang Valley to collect primary data. Participants were asked to answer the questions related to service quality, service recovery and their satisfaction of the MRT services. By using the Google Survey Forms design, the survey had been distributed through online method. Valid respondents of this research were those MRT users in Klang Valley. Individuals had been asked to answer all questions based on their most recently experience taking the MRT. There are no regional restrictions on the distribution of questionnaires on Internet, and more surveyed areas can be reached, which is conducive to the comprehensiveness of the data.

Instrumentation

Data for the study were obtained by distributing the set of questionnaires to the target sample group. Self-administered online questionnaire was used to conduct the study. It consists of four sections. A 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) was used to measure Section A, Section B and Section C of the questionnaire. Section A consists of 6 questions related to service quality. Section B covers 7 items to measure service recovery. Section C contains 6 questions to measure customer satisfaction of the respondents. Section D comprises 4 questions to obtain the demographic information and general information from the respondents.

The result revealed that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all the variables tested were relatively high: service quality (0.793), service recovery (0.897) and customer satisfaction (0.857).

Assumptions of Parametric

Before choosing a statistical test to apply to the data collected, the researcher addressed the issue of whether the data are parametric or not. Statistical tests are used to analyse some aspect of a sample. The assumptions of parametric were met when: sample data are continuous and measurements met the minimum sample size requirement (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016), the ratio of cases/samples (N) to variables (IV) exceeded 5:1 (Osborne and Costello, 2002), more than 70 percent of the questionnaire can be measured using scale,

there was a linear relationship between the two variables and data collected were normally distributed based on the results obtained from the normality test conducted.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires were analysed through a series of statistical tests using the SPSS statistical analysis software for Windows. The statistical procedures for quantitative research include reliability analysis, normality test, descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship between Antecedents of Relationship Quality and Consumer-Company Relationship Quality

Table 1: Correlations between the Three Variables

Variable	SQ	SR	CS
Service Quality (SQ)	-		
Service Recovery (SR)	$.673^{**}$	-	
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	$.649^{**}$	$.681^{**}$	-

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation was run to determine the relationship between service quality (SQ), service recovery (SR) and customer satisfaction (CS). The data in Table 1 showed no violation of normality and linearity. There are significant relationships between both service quality and service recovery towards customer satisfaction.

Regression Analysis

Table 2: Regression Analysis: Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	$.728^{a}$	.530	.528	.34803	1.988

a. Predictors: (Constant), Service Recovery, Service Quality
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

The R^2 value as shown in Table 2 is 0.530. With this, it can be deduced that 53.0 percent of the variance in the dependent variable – customer satisfaction (CS), can be explained by the variance of the independent variables, which are service quality (SQ) and service recovery (SR). The Durbin-Watson statistics is recorded at 1.988 which indicates a positive autocorrelation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

Table 3: Regression Analysis: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	53.160	2	26.580	219.439	.000[b]
1	Residual	47.118	389	.121		
	Total	100.278	391			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), Service Recovery, Service Quality

The F-ratio in Table 3 tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The F-test result was 219.439 with significance ('Sig.') of .001. This meant that the probability of these results occurring by chance was less than 0.001. The table shows that the independent variables (corporate social responsibility, promotion, service provider attributes, customer orientation) statistically significantly predict the dependent variable (relationship quality), $F(2, 389) = 219.439$, $p < 0.001$. Thus it can be deduced that the regression model is a good fit for the data.

Table 4: Regression Analysis: Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.751	.134		5.592	.000
Service Quality	.395	.053	.348	7.405	.000
Service Recovery	.402	.042	.447	9.521	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

To test the effect of service quality and service recovery towards customer satisfaction, regression analysis is used to test the direct effect between dependent and the independent variable. The dependent variable of this study is Customer Satisfaction (CS) while the independent variables of this study are Service Quality (SQ) and Service Recovery (SR).

Results in Table 4 show that service quality has a moderate and weak influence towards customer satisfaction (β=.395, n=392, P<0.01). This shows that service quality has a significant influence towards customer satisfaction. The results are similar to the previous researches done in the past where service quality is found to influence customer satisfaction (Nathan and Elsaghi, 2012; Linier, 2013; Wan Normila Mohamad, 2013).

Next, as illustrated in Table 4, service recovery is found to have a moderate and positive influence towards customer satisfaction (β=.402, n=392, P<0.01). This shows that service recovery has a significant influence towards customer satisfaction. The results are similar to the researches done in the past where service recovery is found to influence customer satisfaction (Kaura, 2013; Mansori, Tygg and Ismail, 2014).

By comparing the coefficient values (β) of each variable in Table 4, it is indicated that service recovery (SR) has the higher level of influence towards customer satisfaction (CS). At 0.446, the coefficient value (β) of service recovery (SR) is higher compared to service quality (SR).

CONCLUSION

The research has two main objectives. The first objective was to determine whether service quality has a significant influence towards customer satisfaction. It is found that service quality has a weak and positive influence towards relationship quality. The findings are in line with the past research findings, which suggested that service quality does influence the level of customer satisfaction.

The second objective was to determine whether service recovery has a significant influence towards customer satisfaction. It is found that service recovery has a moderate and positive influence towards relationship quality. The findings are in line with past research findings, which suggested that service recovery does influence customer satisfaction in various different industries.

From the MRT service users' perspective, their satisfactions are highly depended on the service quality performance such as staff attitude and updated information as well as the ability of their service recovery when it service failure occurs.

Recommendations

Result of the study suggested that service quality has a moderate relationship and a weak influence towards customer satisfaction. The weak influence of service quality towards customer satisfaction can be justified as not all dimensions of service quality may lead to customer satisfaction. Wan Normila Mohamad (2013) found that only tangibility; reliability and assurance may have a significant influence toward customer satisfaction.

The weak influence of service quality towards customer satisfaction may also reflect the current trend of consumers that more service providers are moving towards customer centric product and services. This is evident as Baker (2013) mentioned that customers are getting less tolerant and complaining more when service quality is below expectations, causing transportation service provider to be more customer oriented in their service delivery and product offerings.

Recommendations are made to the Klang Valley MRT service provider to maintain and constantly uphold their good service quality as it will influence the evaluation of the customer satisfaction. As the public transportation service provider can be considered as one of the most people oriented and service-intensive businesses, companies such as MRT must invest in constant training of their employees to be more competent in service delivery as well as the attitude of keeping the customer's best interest in mind and help to fulfil customers' needs and wants in a helpful and supportive manner.

Results show that service recovery has a moderate relationship and moderate positive influence towards customer satisfaction. This supports the assumption that service recovery in times of service failure or service error is very important to the customers. In line with this, MRT should pay more attention into their service recovery practices and policies. Standards, practices and policies of the company should be able to reflect their desire to provide customer centric solutions in times of a service failure and should also allow their employees to perform effective service recovery when needed.

Service recovery should be planned and included as part of the service blueprint of the MRT companies as it has a positive influence towards customer satisfaction. Service recovery should not however be seen as just mere after sale services or additional services that can be neglected. Based on the findings of this study and many multiple studies before this, a well-managed service recovery will maintain and possibly enhance customer satisfaction. However, when it is not well-managed or wrongly managed, service recovery will also affect and lower customer satisfaction.

Limitations and Further Research

Beyond the findings, there are some limitations associated with this study. Firstly, the study is based on a single train service provider and such findings may not be generalizable to other context or other train service providing companies. Future research based on service quality and service recovery may include the comparison of other train service providing companies or train transit lines as well.

Another limitation would be the possible weakness in data distribution method. The online questionnaire was distributed through online websites, social-media and university network. Therefore, MRT users who are not frequent users of internet services might not have the opportunity to participate in this research.

Besides that, the R^2 value obtained from the regression model is recorded at 0.530, indicating that only 53.0 percent of the dependent variable – customer satisfaction; can be explained using the individual variables tested. Suggestions for future studies are additional variables such as mutual disclosure, relationship quality and brand loyalty can be included as antecedents of customer satisfaction to explain the dependent variable better.

The results of this research allow the researcher to identify service quality and service recovery have an influence towards customer satisfaction. Future research may also consider to investigate each component of service quality – reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness; individually and identify the influence of each antecedent of service quality towards customer satisfaction separately. Future researchers many also use service quality as a mediating variable to investigate its influence towards the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the study still provides useful insights into service quality, service recovery, and their influence towards customer satisfaction in the MRT services.

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