CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IS AN ATTAINABLE GOAL?

(APAKAH KEPUASAN PELANGGAN MERUPAKAN SUATU TUJUAN YANG DAPAT DIRAIH?)

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ABSTRAK

Kepuasan pelanggan merupakan salah satu konsep yang sangat populer dalam dunia pemasaran. Telah banyak artikel maupun publikasi yang mengupas topik ini. Konsep pemasaran pada dasarnya berorientasi kepada pemuasan kebutuhan dan keinginan konsumen sehingga tercapai keuntungan yang maksimal. Namun, seiring berjalannya waktu, para peneliti dan pebisnis mulai berpandangan bahwa kepuasan pelanggan merupakan suatu tujuan yang sulit untuk diraih atau bahkan tujuan yang tidak dapat dicapai. Oleh karena itu, telaah pustaka ini akan mengkaji berbagai konsep, teori maupun hasil-hasil penelitian mengenai kepuasan pelanggan dan berusaha membuat suatu kesimpulan apakah kepuasan pelanggan merupakan suatu tujuan yang dapat diraih atau tidak.

Kata kunci: konsumen, kepuasan pelanggan, konsep pemasaran, perbedaan harapan, persaingan pasar.

ABSTRACT

Customer satisfaction is one of the very popular concept in the world of marketing. It has been a lot of articles and publications that explore this topic. The marketing concept is basically oriented to satisfying the needs and desires of consumers in order to reach the maximum profit. But over time, researchers and business people began to view that customer satisfaction is a goal that is difficult to achieve or even goals can not be achieved. Therefore, this literature review will <u>examine various concepts, theories and research findings</u> on customer satisfaction and strive to make a conclusion whether customer satisfaction is a goal that can be achieved or not.

Keywords: *consumer, consumer satisfaction, marketing concept, different expectations, competitive market.*

INTRODUCTION

It is commonly believed that by satisfying customers, firms could increase their profits (Hoffman and Bateson, 2002; Solomon, *et al*.2000; Hill, *et al*.1999; Engel *et al.*, 1990). One of the reasons is because consumer satisfaction can provide the basis for the marketing concept, which is called "customer oriented". In addition customer satisfaction has been shown to be a good predictor of future purchase behavior (Bradley, 2003; Solomon, *et al*. 2000; Engel *et al.*, 1990). Therefore, customer satisfaction becomes a popular topic in marketing. According to Hoffman and Bateson (2002, p: 295) "over the past 20 years more than 15000 academic and trade articles have been published on the topic".

Recently, researchers and companies are investigating whether or not customer satisfaction able to retain the customer as well (Little and Marandi 2003, p:43). With this in mind it no surprise there marketing researchers and companies view customer satisfaction as an unattainable goal. The purpose of this literature review is to examine theoretical concepts of customer satisfaction and research that has been conducted in the fields of customer satisfaction and attempt to determine whether or not customer satisfaction can be achieved.

What is Customer Satisfaction?

Most early efforts to study customer satisfaction concerned with how to measure customer satisfaction, rather than concern with definitional issue. As a reflection of this condition, there still does not appear to a consensus regarding its definition (Hoffman and Bateson, 2002; Rogers, *et al*.1992). The most possible reason is because "it is not an absolute concept; it is a relative one"(Hill, *et al*.1999, p:7). Pizam and Ellis (1999, p: 328) argued that customers might have a different satisfaction to the same product or services because they have different expectations. As a result of no consensus definition in customer satisfaction, many definitions given to this and Oliver (1980a cited Rogers et al. 1992,p:14) noted that "(..) satisfaction does not mean the same thing to everyone".

Hoffman and Bateson (2002, p:298) define "customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a comparison of customer expectations with perceptions regarding the actual service encounter". In addition, these writers explained that satisfied customers occur when customer perception is equal to customer expectation and dissatisfied customers occur when customer perception is less then customer expectation. A different definition given by Pizam and Ellis (1999,p:327) who identify customer satisfaction as a psychological concept. Zeithaml and Bitner(2003, p:85) and Rogers *et al*. (1992, p:12) agree with Pizam and Ellis (1999) and note that customer's emotional state can influence customer. However, these writers acknowledge customer satisfaction as pleasure/displeasure, cognitive state, attribute or benefit evaluation, and subjective evaluation of experience as well as an emotional response to a product experience (Rogers et al. 1992, p:12).

Recently, researchers offer the easiest way to understand customer

satisfaction. Zeithaml and Bitner (2005) expressed the view that customer satisfaction is perceptual in nature. It means, the customer satisfaction is defined by how customers think and feel about your product or service. Understanding customer satisfaction is to think of it is the difference between what the customer expects from a product or service and what the customer perceives he/she received. As a result, product performance are important as a basis for influencing customer perceptions about how a product actually performs.

To summarise, although there is no consensus regarding a definition of customer satisfaction, the writers acknowledge customer satisfaction as a subjective evaluation of experience as well as an emotional response to a product experience, underpinned by a cognitive state, as well as an evaluation of certain attributes and benefits (Rogers *et al*. 1992). Adopting this understanding of customer satisfaction, consideration may then be focused on measurement of customer satisfaction.

How to achieve customer satisfaction?

Moving from the reality which is no consensus regarding the definition of customer satisfaction, discuss about customer satisfaction has now continued to whether or not customer satisfaction can be attained as the markets increasingly competitive and the customer expectations rise (Daffy, 1996). In the opinion of Little and Marandi (2003, p:45) "satisfies customer today may not, will not, satisfy them in them in the future". Pizam *et al.*(1999, p:327) agree with Little and Marandi (2003) and recognise the fact

that in today's competitive markets, one firm are satisfying customers with products or services as well as another firms. Furthermore, Iglesias and Guillen (2004) suggest that marketers should compete in offering a great value of product or services in order to retain the customers.

Undoubtedly, customer expectation will change as well as the change of market environment. According to Gilmore (2003, p:187) "sometimes customer can be unreasonable or do not know what to expect in specific situation". However, Hoffman and Bateson (2002,p:299) expressed the view that "although some may argue that customers are unreasonable at time, little evidence can be found of overstated customer expectations." These statements indicate that the change market environment could effect the customer expectations as well as level of customer satisfaction. In addition, different customer may have different expectations because they have different needs, objective and past experiences (Pizam and Ellis 1999, p:328).

Another writers explain that in facing today competitive market, company requires to retain and satisfying current and past customers (Daffy 1996; Pizam and Ellis 1999;Little and Marandi 2003). On the other hand, Hoffman and Bateson (2002, p:310) is questioning: "why firms with high satisfaction rating way potentially lose customers?". It indicates that customer satisfaction does not always accomplish the objective of company or researcher. The survey conducted by Weiser (1995, cited Little and Marandi 2003,p.:49) found that "13 % of its

completely satisfied customers did not intend to fly British Airways again". Hoffman and Bateson (2002, p:311) argued there is no guarantee for the company with high level of customer can retain the customer.

One of ideas comes from Pizam and Ellis (1999, p:327) who recognize some problems in the measurement of customer satisfaction. In measuring customer satisfaction according to these writers, researcher or companies should be able to determine attributes of customer satisfaction properly. Varva (1997, cited Pizam and Ellis 1999, p:326) suggests that in order to achieve customer satisfaction the companies have to focus on customers' needs and requirements. This statement indicates the survey should be well prepared, using valid and reliable scale and analyze the data properly (Miller, 2000, www.aicpa.org). However, customer satisfaction measurement is useless when there is no feedback from the company to the results obtained (Pizam and Ellis 1999, p:327)

On the other hand, Little and Marandi (2003, p:47) assert in achieving the "greatest satisfaction" the company should measure customer satisfaction and offer value to customers. Caruana *et al*. (2000, p:1349) explained the concept of value as high level quality products with a competitive price. It means customer satisfaction depend on product quality and the value because improve quality means greater customer satisfaction (Gronroos 2000, p:257). Nevertheless, offering value means exceeding the customers' expectation and according to Gilmore (2003, p:187) "sometimes customers can be unreasonable and do not know what to expect in specific situation". Consequently, this writer suggests that company should go beyond basic satisfaction without provide them with everything what they want. Reichheld et al. (cited Little and Marandi 2003, p.44) agree with Gilmore (2003) and note that a great customer satisfaction increase competition as well as customer expectations and retaining customers will be an unattainable goal.

Latest research

Previous research contributions indicate that service quality dimensions affect customer satisfaction in specific circumstances. Researchers have found different dimensions of service quality influencing customer satisfaction (June *et al.* 2004).

The recent research conducted by Marta Pedraja Iglesias and M. Jesus Yague Guillen (2004, p:377) recognized that in achieving satisfaction for their customers "firms must know the elements that effect it and must study what the effect is". It means the firms must know and investigate what factors can make customer satisfy. The result indicated that perceived quality determine the level satisfaction of restaurant customers and if the restaurant does not generate the satisfaction, customers will switch to competitor.

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) assert that perceived service quality is a component of customer satisfaction. Moreover, these researchers highlight that customer satisfaction results from five factors, namely service quality, product quality, price, personal factors (customer's emotional state) and

uncontrollable situational factors (for instance weather conditions). Similarly, Caruana *et al.* (2000) point out that while the original five dimensions of SERVQUAL are fairly specific, those for satisfaction are broader and can result from a wider set of factors.

Conclusion

The literature review indicates that customer satisfaction can be achieved. However, in facing the growing market competition the companies should firstly, determine specific attributes of customer satisfaction, secondly measure customer satisfaction properly to get accurate data and finally give action base on the results obtained. In addition, the companies should go beyond the basic customer satisfaction by monitoring product quality and making product innovation and improvements.

The Future Research

Since the factors that could determine customer satisfaction differ from one company to another company, in the future research the companies should find the specific factors that are appropriate to the company. An appropriate customer satisfaction measurement will guide the company to achieve customer satisfaction. Additionally, research on customer satisfaction has focused on the individual satisfaction and ignoring group satisfaction**.** Consumer as individual in making a decision to satisfaction /dissatisfaction on products could influence by family, friends, or other people. Therefore the marketer needs consider the group satisfaction

such as family. Therefore, it would be useful and interesting to examine the influence of family decision-making to satisfaction/ dissatisfaction process.

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