ENHANCING CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCE THROUGH CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT AND FAMILIARITY IN MALAYSIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Mazlina Mamat, Farahiyah Akmal Mat Nawi & Hatinah Abu Bakar
Faculty of Business and Management
University Technology MARA
Kelantan Branch
mzlina@kelantan.uitm.edu.my

Nik Kamaruzaman Abdulatiff
Faculty of Accountancy
University Technology MARA
Kelantan Branch

ABSTRACT

Growing competition among Malaysian public universities makes it imperative to understand the important role of customer service experience in today's higher education service environment. As a pillar of the university, Academic Affairs Department (AAD) is entrusted to meet the needs and demands of its customers especially the academic staff of the university. In service organizations, like public universities, employee (academic staff) service experience directly correlates with student satisfaction and university performance. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence academic staff's service experience. Hence, the primary focus of this study is to examine the relationship of involvement and familiarity in influencing customer service experience among academic staff in Malaysian public universities. The research model hypothesized that customer involvement and familiarity have significant impact on customer service experience. The study employed a quantitative research. The survey method was utilized and for data collection, a self-administered questionnaire was constructed to gather data from 454 Malaysian public universities' academic staff. Proportionate stratified random sampling was utilized in this study. Correlation analysis and hierarchical regression analysis were used to analyse the data. All research questions and objectives were answered by performing hierarchical regression analysis. The findings revealed significant relationships between customer involvement and familiarity and customer service experience. Overall, this study provided support the importance of highlighting customer involvement and familiarity in managing academic staff's customer service experience. The results offer several theoretical and practical implications to Malaysian public universities' administrators, particularly the AAD and also to policy makers and other practitioners especially in designing effective customer service experience strategies.

Keywords: *Customer involvement, familiarity, customer service experience, public universities.*

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, Malaysia has emerged as an unexpected contender in the world market for international students in higher education. Recognizing this sector as potential new source of growth and export revenue, Malaysia aims to become a regional center for higher education. Malaysian public

universities are committed towards becoming world class universities by the year 2015 in line with requirements of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) introduced by the Ministry of Education. The major concerns and attribute that cannot be compromised are the issues of service experience, quality, and satisfaction. One of the major components highlighted in both standards International Organisation for Standardization of (ISO) and Quality Assurance (QA) are meeting customer requirements and creating satisfying service experience. Marketing studies which concentrated on customer service experience in Malaysian public universities are very limited. This research, therefore, attempts to reveal the influence of familiarity and customer involvement towards customer service experience in Malaysian public universities.

To make Malaysia a successful education hub, Malaysian public universities which act as the backbone of the higher education industry, should be more responsible in developing the industry further in an effort to gain a larger share of the international market (Amatz & Idris, 2011;Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006). It is widely assumed that in the context of increasing competition, higher education institutions need to market themselves more explicitly. To achieve this objective, public universities have to start providing excellent customer service experience to its stakeholders (Awang & Ahmed, 2010).

The success of a university is dependent on the efficiency of its functioning departments such as the Academic Affairs Department (AAD), Student Affairs Department, Research and Industry Linkages Department, Finance Department, Administrative and Human Resources Department and others. It is undeniable that the AAD is the most crucial department in mobilizing a university. This is because the AAD is accountable in fulfilling the mission and vision of the university (UiTM Academic Management Manual for Administrators, 2013). The AAD is being trusted to meet current needs and standards of professionalism in the world of academia. Being entrusted with a key role in the university, the AAD is also responsible in overseeing the management and development of the university. This is important in order for the university to be in line with the objectives of higher education established by the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Services provided by the AAD in various public universities or faculties in Malaysia have slight differences (Amatz & Idris, 2011). However, generally, the main responsibilities of the AAD include developing academic policies and system of the university, ensuring and monitoring quality standards and to meet the current needs in the country as well as internationally. In addition, the department is also managing the processes, procedures and reviews of academic curriculum. The AAD also provides academic development planning for the university and is also responsible in establishing and exploring academic relationships with other local universities and leading universities abroad.

Since the AAD is entrusted to meet the needs of the mission and vision of the university, the department is required to perform these responsibilities under full commitment. As a pillar of the university, it is expected to deliver its services to various stakeholders whether the stakeholders outside of the university or the internal stakeholders. Among outside stakeholders dealing with this department are parents of the students, the public, government departments, private institutions, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others. The AAD also deals with internal parties such as students, lecturers, university administrators and other staff of the university. Even though the students are its main stakeholders, the academic staff is also an important group that is being served by the AAD (Alhawary & Aborumman, 2011).

Although customer involvement, familiarity and customer service experience have been researched separately in a number of studies, these variables have not been examined simultaneously in public service context. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationships between customer involvement and familiarity with customer service experience in the context of Malaysian public universities. By looking at the issues discussed above, the objectives of the study are formulated as follows:

1. To examine the influence of customer involvement on service experience among academic staff.
2. To study the influence of familiarity and service experience among academic staff.

The following sections are organized as follows: section two is the literature review, section three discusses methodology, section four shows empirical results and section five concludes and gives recommendation based on the findings of the study.

2.0 Customer Service Experience

Experiences, of all kinds, are usually personal because each experience is derived from an interaction between the staged activity and the individual's prior state of mind and being. However, although the experience itself lacks tangibility, yet participants revere its effect because the value of experience lies within them, where it remains long afterwards (Verhoef, et al., 2009).

Based on the literature review, there are a number of common themes that have surfaced together with certain areas of conflict. Firstly, "experiences" are events or occurrences that take place outside of the daily routine experience and that "climax" is at the peak or a transformative experience. Most of the researchers agree that "experiences", are uniquely diverse from the daily routines of everyday lives (Arnould & Price, 1993; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Secondly, it is assumed that experiences are positive encounters, but negative experiences are also possible. It is interesting to note that when experiences are described and defined, researchers generally imply positive or pleasant events or feelings (Lashley, 2008; Oh et al., 2007; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Ray, 2008). For instance, experiences are often described as memorable, emotionally intense, and difficult to understand and they are often initiated by environmental dimensions and emotive and internal responses. In contrast, Walls et al. (2009) pointed out that negative consumer experience is due to physical incongruence and unprofessional employees' behaviour. The concept of the nadir, (i.e., negative or doubtful) experience was treated as a legitimate construct in the 1970s, but modern society has paid little heed to it. Interestingly, some researchers have recommended that "nadir experiences" may be equally or more successful in forming lasting after effects (Mathes, Zevon, Roter, & Joerger, 1982). Therefore, it is possible that experience can be both positive and negative encounters.

Service experience is noted for having inherent features that are different from the consumption experience of traditional consumer goods, especially in the service industry. According to Shaw et al. (2010), using the same marketing principles for physical goods and service experiences is inconsistent given the inherent differences between these two. The major difference is that the core service offering is more complex and mainly consists of processes, people, and physical facilities (McDaniel et al., 2013). This is because in the service industry, production and consumption often occur simultaneously, and the service experience leads to the active construction of meanings associated with the behaviour, thoughts, and feelings that occur during the process of consumption (Sandstrom et al., 2008). The significance of experience is evident in service evaluations, which make clear that experiences can affect the consumer's perception of the service. Thus, consumer evaluation and perception of service differ from their evaluation and perception of consumer goods because of the experiential elements involved.

Consequently, brand managers in the service sector face somewhat different problems from the challenges dealt with managers of goods (Verhoef et al., 2009). Service experience involves unique characteristics on specific associations at both the spiritual and symbolic levels. Marketing managers of services need to deal with consumer needs on three levels in order to offer solutions and satisfaction which include functional solutions (providing solutions to consumer problems), emotional solutions (providing sensory pleasure, variety, and cognitive stimulation) and symbolic solutions (providing the satisfaction of psychological desires). Consequently, O'Cass and Grace (2004) propose 4Ps as experiential factors to achieve the goals of satisfying consumer needs on these three levels.

These two authors suggest that by looking at the service experience from the perspective of awareness and image, the importance of facilities, past experiences, word-of-mouth communications and employee input can be included in the design of experiential service. Very few of these factors would appear in a similar assessment of service process. In contrast to the traditional marketing of consumer goods, they design service experience to take account of the 4Ps which are place

("servicescape"), people (employees and customers), process and past experience (personal and word-of-mouth). These four factors of the service research conducted by O'Cass and Grace signify a very different approach to consumer goods creation, development and promotion. They emphasize the "people" element in consumption experience and argue that service delivery and experience staging engage real people and are not an impersonal process. Unique customer experience is achieved through people's participation and absorption in the activities during a service encounter.

Generally, academic staff goes to the AAD to acquire two types of services. The first type is related to the services support facilitates in teaching. These include the management of schedules, classroom arrangement, teaching and learning equipment in classrooms, lecture essentials (computer, files, stationery, etc.), report for lecturers, special leave applications, students activities, students status, activation of online account (scoring purposes) and others. The second type of services offered by the AAD is related to the management of examinations. These services include preparing examination schedules, managing examination scripts, reviewing student's appeal for final examination remarking (lecturer support required) and other services.

Customer service experience among academic staff is important to improve the universities' performance. Academic staff as internal customers of the AADusually involve in service encounters at the department. These encounters create customer communities in "co-production" or "co-creation" to enhance academic staff's service experience (Lu, Geng, & Wang, 2015; Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010). Through the process of learning and knowledge accumulation about the services and the service provider, customers can contribute to the process of creating favourable service experience (Jaakkola & Alexander, 2014). The service provider should create a service environment which provides support for the process of learning and dissemination of service information to their customers in order to enhance the academic staff knowledge and understanding of the AAD service delivery process (Lu, Geng, & Wang, 2015).

Customer service experience is deemed important to fill a primarily strategic role, which is highly needed in current service marketing environment. The organizations that implement customer service experience are clearly reaping the benefits of the activity. Thus, not surprisingly customer service experience is seen as forming the core activity in many successful organizations around the world, nowadays.

3.0 Customer Involvement

Customer involvement is a psychological state that occurs by virtue of the interaction of customer experiences with a focal agent/object such as a firm or brand (Brodie et al. 2011). Involvement has also been related to psychological presence ("to be fully there"; Kahn, 1992), which is "an experiential state that accompanies personally engaging behaviors that involves channeling of personal energies into physical, cognitive, and emotional labors" (Schaufeli et al. 2002, p. 73). However, involvement differs from psychological presence because it is not object-specific or moment-specific in the way that psychological presence refers to a specific moment.

It is important to understand connections surrounding the experience which contributes to the framing of a psychological state or disposition (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). For example, customer involvement can emerge from a positive service encounter with a rental car service agent. However, a car rental service encounter may occur via a telephone call, during face-to-face service with an actual person or self-service kiosk, or in an online internet chat application.

Many studies discuss the reasons why customers are involved in behaviors beyond those of a buyer or a user. Van Doorn et al. (2010) propose customer-based drivers for customer involvement, including attitudinal factors such as satisfaction, brand commitment and trust, as well as customer goals, resources and value perceptions. Empirical studies conducted in online contexts have shown that customers are motivated to be involved in nontransactional behaviors because they expect benefits such as enhanced knowledge and reputation, social benefits and economic benefits such as cost savings (Füller, 2010; Nambisan & Baron, 2009). Firms can facilitate customer involvement by providing effective platforms for information exchange and interaction (Baron & Warnaby, 2011;

Dholakia et al., 2009) and rewarding customers for their contributions (Füller, 2010; Kumar et al., 2010). The outcomes arising from customer involvement may include customer loyalty and satisfaction with the brand and community, empowerment, trust and commitment toward service firms (Brodie et al., 2013).

In this context of study, academic staff of Malaysian public universities is experiencing a different level of involvement with different types of services offered by the AAD. Thus, customer involvement in this research is conceptualized as a psychological process (Brodie et al., 2013) in which customer service experience is one of the important marketing outcomes that is being influenced by it.This research emphasizes customer involvement as a psychological state which emerge from specific interactive experiences. Firstly, customer involvement reflects a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships. Moreover, the varying states of customer involvementoccur within a dynamic, iterative process of service relationships that cocreate value. Given this, customer involvement thus plays a central role within a nomological network of service relationships and is a multidimensional concept subject to a context-and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Finally, this reserch also proposed that customer involvementoccurs within a specific set of situational conditions generating differing customer involvement levels.

4.0 Familiarity

Consumer familiarity with a product or service has received attention from various marketing researchers because familiarity can play a vital role in consumers' decision-making processes (Desai & Hoyer, 2000). Familiarity usually depends on the number of experiences related to a product that have been accumulated by consumers. As consumers use a product more frequently, they are more familiar with it, which reduces uncertainty in future purchase situations (Flavian et al., 2005). Familiarity via repeated exposure to a stimulus tends to increase people's affective reactions, thus, leading to a favorable attitude (Patterson & Mattila, 2008). Familiarity also provides the customer with a different frame of reference for evaluations in consumption decision situations (Söderlund, 2002).

Ecker et al. (2007) defined familiarity as a general feeling of having encountered a person or specific object before without conscious access to contextual details, such as the time or place of the encounter. At this point, familiarity can be regarded as an emotional term because using the term "feeling" suggests a relation to emotion (Lee & Kwon, 2011). Ramachandran (1998) and Ratcliffe (2002) use the phrase "feeling of familiarity" to describe familiarity as an affective concept. They explain it as an emotional sense associated with a known subject. Familiarity has been defined as both a cognitive concept and an emotional (affective) concept at the same time. However, this study adopted Ecker et al.'s (2007) definition which considers familiarity as an affective concept and propose familiarity as a new affective factor influencing customers' behavioral intention.

In this research, a consumer's familiarity consists of service familiarity. Theoretically, consumers who become more familiar with services are likely to undergo several cognition-related changes. Alba and Hutchinson (1987) state that consumer knowledge has two components: that is familiarity and expertise. According to them, increasing familiarity leads to more elaborated cognitive structure due to increased knowledge. In this phenomenon, familiarity is explained as the more often people are exposed to a certain stimulus, the more positively they evaluate it, and therefore, feel less psychologically distant towards the stimulus.

Thus, according to Patterson and Mattila (2008), it is also expected that when the outcome of the evaluation of the additional encounter is positive, the consumers who have spent relatively more time thinking about the service tend to be more positive than the consumers who have spent relatively less time thinking about the service. On the other hand, when the outcome of the evaluation of the additional encounter is negative, the consumers who have spent relatively more time thinking about

the service tend to be more negative than the consumers who have spent relatively less time thinking about the service.

According to some researchers, when a stimulus is unfamiliar, it elicits only a few associations. With repeated exposures, subjects generate increased associations to the stimulus. Thus, the final evaluation of the stimulus is believed to be a function of the accumulated evaluations of its associations. As exposure increases, the summed evaluations of positive stimuli become more positive, and the summed evaluation of negative stimuli become more negative The rationale behind this explanation is that consumers are inclined to avoid risks by preferring the familiar to the unknown (Sorebo & Eikebrokk, 2008). Therefore, consumers who have positive impressions of companies will continuously accumulate positive evaluations as the amount of interactions increase.

Most organizations which are consumer-oriented, try to consistently convey positive images of their companies. In other words, none of the service organizations hope to build negative attitudes of consumers that will lead to a decrease in their sales and profits in the future. Thus, the more familiar consumers are, the more likely they are to accumulate positive evaluation of organizations and services (Lee & Kwon, 2011).

Consumers with lower familiarity are more likely to use extrinsic cues in product quality assessment because they do not have enough intrinsic cues based on real experiences (Idoko, Nkamnebe, Ireneus, & Okoye, 2013). However, as consumers become more familiar with a service, they accumulate knowledge about it, which enables them to evaluate service quality based on previous experiences. This study applied familiarity to the AAD in Malaysian public university service setting. The main purpose of visiting the AAD is usually pursuing services cater to the academic staff. However, as the number of service experiences increase and the academic staff become more familiar with the AAD, the purpose of getting services from the department would be somewhat different from the main visit. For example, an academic staff visits her friend at the AAD. In other words, under the AAD service context, familiarity can be an important factor to differentiate customers' perceptions of value regarding the service experience and their respective future behavioural intentions (Ha & Jang, 2010).

5.0 Methodology

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of customer involvement and familiarity on customer service experience. Hypothesis testing is implemented to explain the variance to the research outcomes. This study employed a correlation study by using a cross-sectional survey design where data were gathered once by means of a structured questionnaire in order to answer the research question of the study. Self-administered questionnaires were used in data collection. Given the fact that the researcher had no direct access to the respondents, helps from the head of the department were sought. The research instruments were hand delivered to the head of the department of the participating universities. The head of the department was requested to randomly distribute the questionnaires to academic staff in their faculty. Each set of the questionnaires was accompanied with a cover letter stating the purpose of the study, confidentiality of the gathered data and instructions on how to answer the questionnaires. Participants were given an assurance of confidentiality and were told that there was no right and wrong answer to the questionnaire items.

To explain the purpose of the study and seeking the university's permission, an introduction letter was sent to the head of the department of all targeted public universities. The introduction letter was accompanied with a sample of the questionnaire. This approach was taken in order to give the head of the department enough information on the objectives of the study. All the public universities involved in this research were willing to allow their academic staff to participate in this study. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire within one week and returned them to their respective head of departments. The completed questionnaires were then collected from all of the involved head of the departments. This method was believed to produce higher response rates and a lower cost compared to mailing them directly to each individual respondent (Litt & Turk, 1985).

Measurement for familiarity was adapted from Johnson and Russo (1984).The ten-item instrument Revised Personal Involvement Inventory (RPII) – developed by Zaichkowsky (1987) was used to

measure customer involvement, while customer service experience was measured by adapting a CEI scale which was tested for validity and reliability by Kim et al. (2011). Each of the five scales had Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.70; alpha = 0.95 for benefits, alpha = 0.81 for convenience, alpha = 0.87 for accessibility, alpha = 0.70 for utiliy, and alpha = 0.84 for trust. All items used seven-point Likert-type scales with anchors of "strongly disagree" as 1 and "strongly agree" as 7.

A total of 472 questionnaires were completed for data collection. Upon input of the data into the SPSS, it was determined that 18 of the questionnaires were eliminated due to insufficient data. Thus, the total number of usable questionnaires was 454 instead of 472.Next, data was coded before loading into the SPSS version 18.0 to see if errors occurred and to ensure that the scores are not missing or out of range. Consequently, additional procedures were also taken to verify that collected data did not violate any of the assumptions of statistical procedures such as normal distribution and homogeneity of variance.

The next step involved a necessity to check the reliability of every construct. These constructs have not been previously explored in a public university setting so the main concern is the constructs internal consistency or the degree to which the items that comprise each other are joined together. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to check the internal consistency. The ideal Cronbach alpha for internal consistency should be above 0.7 (Pallant, 2011) so items that rate below the recommended alpha level of 0.7 can be removed so that the construct's reliability can improve.

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was then carried out. The most commonly used factor analyses are exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). CFA is a more complex technique used later in the research process to test or to confirm specific hypotheses or theories concerning the structure underlying a set of variables (Pallant, 2011). In this research, only EFA was utilized because it serves the purpose to explore the underlying structure or the relationship of the current set of variables and it also searched for ways to reduce or summarize the data into a smaller set of factors (Hair et al., 2010; Pallant, 2011).

6.0 Research Analysis and Findings

The Pearson Coefficient of Correlation and multiple regression analyses were utilized to test the hypotheses. Table 1 shows the correlation matrix among the variables. Correlation matrix is required to show the association between two variables at a time. Sig. (2-tailed) in the table indicates the probability level from a null hypothesis test and all of them are significant ($p < 0.01$). The Pearson correlation between customer service experience (CSE) and familiarity (F) is 0.682 (significant at 1%). There is a medium positive relationship between these two variables. The Pearson correlation between customer service experience (CSE) and customer involvement (CI) is 0.675 (significant at 1%) and it means that there is also a medium positive relationship between them. These two correlation results indicate that customer involvement and familiarity have significant positive effect on customer service experience if other independent variables are absent.

Table 1: Correlation on Customer Service Experience, Customer Involvement and Familiarity

Variables	CSE	CI	F
Customer Service Experience (CSE)	1	0.675**	0.682**
Customer Involvement (CI)		1	0.560**
Familiarity (F)			1

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

Multiple regression was conducted in multivariate analysis to predict the values on a quantative outcome variable (customer service experience), using two other predictor variables (customer involvement and familiarity).

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis

Model Summaryᵇ										
Model					Change Statistics					
		R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
	R									
1	.817ᵃ	.667	.665	.41227	.667	300.215	3	450	.000	1.960
a. Predictors: (Constant), CIc, Fc										
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Service Experience										

Coefficientsᵃ										
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	5.008	.019		258.805	.000	4.970	5.046		
	CIc	.255	.040	.245	6.421	.000	.177	.334	.509	1.966
	Fc	.223	.028	.285	7.973	.000	.168	.278	.580	1.723
a. Dependent Variable: Customer Service Experience										

According to model summary, Table 2, the multiple regression model with two predictors produced $R^2 = 0.667$, $F(3, 450) = 300.215$, $p > 0.05$. These two predictors have significant positive regression weights, indicating that academic staff with higher customer involvement and familiarity were expected to have higher customer service experience, after controlling all the other variables in the model. Adjusted R square takes into consideration the number of observations and the number of predictor variables to make sure that things are not too inflated. If R square is at 0.667, it means that all independent variables explained the dependent variable for 66.7%. The other 33.3% remaining explain the dependent variable which comes from other variables that is not included in this study. For the model coefficients, constant (5.008) indicate the value of customer service experience when all independent variables equal to zero. For customer involvement, the Beta is 0.255, which means that 1% increase in customer involvement, there will be an increase in customer service experience by 25.5% (significance at 5%, $p < 0.05$). While for familiarity, the Beta is 0.223. Therefore, 1% increase in familiarity will help to improve customer service experience by 22.3%.

In conclusion, the research hypotheses for this study are supported. There are significant influences between familiarity and customer involvement on customer service experience among academic staff when adopting services at the AAD.

7.0 Discussion

This study found that familiarity significantly and positively influences customer service experience. The regression result presented in Table 2 supported this hypothesis (beta = 0.255, $p < 0.05$). Thus, the result implied that academic staff who have a higher level of familiarity would more likely to have higher customer service experience.

This result is consistent with the study done by Tam (2008). He found that understanding is highly related to experience. The correlation between experience and familiarity was 0.78 ($p < 0.00$). This supports the contention that familiarity is highly related to experience, which is consistent with the literature. The finding is also consistent with the research done by Churchill and Iacobucci (2002). The result is also supported by social learning theory. According to this theory, academic staff will eventually repeat certain behaviours in the future if it results in positive outcomes. To put it another way, the more familiar they are with the service environments or service encounters, the more positive outcomes would likely to occur. This is also consistent with the research conducted by Rodrigues (2012). He found that familiarity has a great impact on cognitive processing and, consequently, it will

influence customer behaviour. In addition, Söderlund (2002) found that consumers with high familiarity tend to repurchase more and spread positive word-of-mouth. Consumers with a higher level of familiarity in services will have more complex perceptive structures in terms of evaluative categories that they possess and this leads to repeat purchases.

This finding is congruent with prior work on the impact of familiarity in service encounter evaluations (Petterson & Mattila, 2008). Being constantly aware of a stimulus tends to increase people's affective reactions, thus, leading to a favourable attitude. Moreover, positive (i.e. lessening) impact of familiarity will spill over to negative behavioural responses following a service failure. People tend to be more concerned about any negative consequences of their decisions than consequences with a positive tone. Consequently, switching intent and badmouthing the service provider should be less likely to happen with familiar service providers as opposed to those who lack understanding of customers.

Many service providers develop long-term relationships with clients where both parties accumulate experience with each other and resulted in higher familiarity. Other researchers also found positive relationship between familiarity and other marketing outcomes. Söderlund (2002) revealed a relationship between familiarity and positive effects on evaluations of a service or object. When challenged with a familiar service/brand, consumers may feel a glimmer of warmth and intimacy. Accordingly, Patterson and Mattila (2008) also found that an individual develops stronger associations to a stimulus as his/her exposure increases. If previous encounters are positive, one additional encounter is likely to produce an increased liking. Besides, if previous encounters are negative, one additional encounter is likely to produce an increase in dislike.

The quality of AAD services is very crucial in creating favourable customer service experience among academic staff. The AAD management should focus on creating excellent service environment where the quality of interpersonal interaction between academic staff and the AAD service employees can increase the level of familiarity among academic staff. The implications are very clear, frontline employees should be encouraged to engage academic staff at every opportunity and remember their names. For example, the information about the academic staff could be used to customize any greeting (e.g. use customer's first name) to make the academic staff feel familiar with the service provider. Consequently, when the academic staff are satisfied with the services provided by the service employees, they would be more engaged in the service delivery process and this would increase their familiarity with the services (Ha & Jang, 2010).

These results have important implications for recruitment and training. The adage "hire for attitude and train for skill" is highly relevant in these findings. Recruiting service employees with a "service mind" and an attitude to be adaptable when serving customers from diverse background is critical (Patterson & Mattila, 2008). Then, it is a matter of train and regularly re-train for skills, attitude and behavior. This is the approach used by customer service icons such as Starbucks and Singapore Airlines.

Thus, this result implies that academic staff of Malaysian public universities who have higher level of familiarity tend to have higher level of customer service experience with the AAD. Therefore, the AAD management should formulate a mechanism to encourage the participation of academic staff with services provided.

This study also found that customer involvement significantly and positively influence customer service experience (beta = 0.223, $p < 0.05$). The results implied that academic staff who have a higher level of involvement would more likely to have better customer service experience.

The positive relationship between customer involvement and customer service experience revealed by this study is consistent with recent research on experience value model by Lin (2010) who agreed that there is a positive correlation between customers' involvement levels and experience value. The stress shall be on how the information recipients' capabilities, motives and involvement levels affect their attitudes and approaches to information processing (Lin, 2010). The important factor in successfully managing customer service experience in AAD is by focusing on customers' thinking experiences, in addition to facilities provided to academic staff. Additionally, the result is also consistent with a research done by Tu and Zhang (2013) in non-trading virtual community. They

found that customer involvement has a significant positive effect on word-of-mouth and repeated use intentions. Accordingly, they suggested that organizations should pay attention to customer involvement because it will influence customers through gaining their value and spur customer loyalty intention.

Furthermore, by strengthening the relationship between the AAD and academic staff, it would lead to attitude towards higher involvement. In order to create higher customer involvement, customer satisfaction can be an important consideration. This is supported by Lagrosen (2005) and Ritter and Achim (2003) who found that customer satisfaction is an antecedent of attitude towards involvement. Therefore, it is crucial for the AAD to observe more effectively the service system and for the academic staff to share their knowledge and to get services that are more consistent with their own requirements, thus, a win-win situation. The more knowledge about the services acquired by the academic staff can assist the AAD to achieve higher new service rate of success and an increased customer satisfaction (Lamberti & Noci, 2009).

AAD offers high personal interaction between customers and servers and involves more customized services compared to other types of services in the marketplace. Therefore, customer involvement plays a crucial role in influencing favourable customer service experience. According to Olsen (2007), high involvement and customized services such as restaurants, haircuts, and dental treatments require a lot more personal interactions between service providers and customers. Special attention is needed in delivering satisfactory services. Gentile, Spiller, and Noci (2007) highlight that services nowadays involve more contact points between a company and its customers than before. Since the number of contact points increased, such attention to customers exposed the fundamental importance of monitoring the many experiences that are derived from those contact points. They also suggest the expansion of transaction-based concept of customer relationship to the "continuous" concept of customer service experience.

In this research, academic staff who visited the AAD have to take part in the service delivery process itself in order to receive good quality services from the department. For example, an academic staff need to provide some information about a student's personal details such as metric number, courses, semester, etc. in order for the AAD employee to check on the student's status. The AAD can no longer be a mere supplier of the service. It needs to emphasize the importance of co-creation value in the process of delivering favourable customer service experience to academic staff. A service offered at the AAD is a service system which involves value-creation configuration comprising the exchange parties (the AAD and academic staff) and its system that indirectly influences value co-creation (Edvardsson et al., 2011; Vargo et al., 2008).

Besides that, academic staff who are highly involved with the AAD services and have favourable service experience could be engaged as customer references. These academic staff could make contributions of resources such as knowledge, experience and time, to affect other academic staffs' perceptions, preferences, or knowledge regarding the services provided at the AAD. Highly involved academic staff could become ambassadors for the department and generate wider interests from faculty members to become active in the service delivery process. According to Jaakkola and Alexander (2011), positive word-of-mouth makes rail travel a more appealing option for other people, who were, therefore, willing to get the services and potentially contribute other resources that would result in additional improvements to organizations. By sharing their experiences through word-of-mouth or recommendations, customers influence and adjust the expectations of others (e.g., Bansal & Voyer 2000; Dholakia et al. 2009).

Therefore, the results infer that academic staff of Malaysian public universities who have a higher level of involvement are more probable to have a higher level of service experience. Because of this, the AAD management should be able to encourage academic staff to be more involved during service delivery process.

8.0 Conclusion and Future Recommendation

Even though customer service experience is an established practice in large-scale companies in developed countries, it is quite new in Malaysia. Customer service experience is deemed important to fill a primarily strategic role, which is highly needed in current service marketing environment. The organizations that implement customer service experience are clearly reaping the benefits of the activity. Thus, not surprisingly, customer service experience is seen as forming the core activity in large organizations in markets around the world nowadays. This research examined the AAD customer service experience utilizing a model which attempts to demonstrate the significant effects of familiarity and customer involvement. This study contributes to a better understanding of factors influencing customer service experiences in the context of public higher learning industry. The knowledge generated as a result of this research can help universities management to improve their service encounters especially improving the level of customer involvement and familiarity among academic staff in order to influence their service experience.

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