

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE PROFESSIONALISM: MEDIATING EFFECT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY

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Abstract: This paper examines the predictors influence the formatting and exercising of the business strategy of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. SMEs contribute more than 92% of national enterprise firms and they are unique in their characteristics. They vary substantially in their factors of production allocation; they are creative opportunity seekers and innovative risk takers. It is to examine the mediating effect of business etiquette over the strategic plan to customer loyalty. While customer loyalty can be imagined to have occurred if buyers choose to give a special shop or purchase one particular product, rather than use other funds or purchase products made by other companies. The data were read from a sample of 119 students from Manipal International University Nilai, Negeri Sembilan in the month of December 2015. The instrument employed to construct the survey was based on the 10 semantic differential scale questionnaire. The business etiquette professionalism describes the existing explanations for variation in business etiquette engagement in mannerism, courtesy, thoughtfulness and recognition. The paper has presented in 5 sections. Firstly, it is an introduction describing the definition of the key terms. Secondly, related antecedent articles being reviewed. Thirdly, discussion on the methodology implication of the study. Fourthly, the analysis by using SPSS and the presenting of the results. Finally, a description, and elaborate on the findings, and further suggestions were argued in the last section. The empirical study suggested that the relationship between strategic plan and customer loyalty was mediated partially by business etiquette.

Keywords: Strategic plan, business etiquette, customer loyalty, mediating effect, Small and Medium Enterprises, mediator.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Inserting customer loyalty becomes the key objective of designing an effective business plan. In customer relationship management it describes the loyalty which is established between the companies, persons, products and customer. Therefore,

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the individual market segments should be targeted in terms of developing customer loyalty. Contemporary marketing myopia that focuses on the product-orientation has structured the gap of the study. It is to suggest a change in management that should focus on the customer-orientation approach.

The paper has presented in 5 sections. Firstly, it is an introduction describing the concept of the loyalty. Secondly, the concrete support of related antecedent articles being reviewed. The concepts, principles and dimensions of strategic management, business etiquette and customer loyalty theories were appraised. Thirdly, discussion on the methodology implication of the study. Fourthly, the analysis by using SPSS and the presenting of the results. Finally, a description, and elaborate on the findings, and further suggestions were argued in the last section.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are tremendous theories and principles justifying the influencing effect of service quality, (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Malhotra, 2005); total quality management, (Hoyle, 2007); and customer relationship marketing (Shaw, 1991) upon service providers. It is about customer relationship management which is a business's long-term instruction method, software and internet capabilities to help companies manage customer relationships in an organized manner (Oliver (1997). These are the basic cause-effect of business etiquette - customer satisfaction (Nga, and Shamuganathan, 2009; Pang, 2013a; Pang & Shamuganathan, 2015; Pang, 2015; Pang, Pang and Shamuganathan, 2016).

Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty theories are based on the social and experimental psychology studies, carried out by Hoppe (1930) and Lewin (1936) in the first half of the 20th Century. Though the fundamentals of the discipline are close to a century old, in the last decade of the 20th century, it was witnessed that an increasing number of companies have been measuring customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and other performance areas as the basis for selecting performance measures directly tied to the goals of the strategic plan, this was proved by Ittner and Larcker (2003); Pang (2013b).

Kim, Park, and Jeong 2004 in their research work, on the effects of customer satisfaction and switching barrier on customer loyalty in Korean mobile telecommunication services have emphasized that increasing customer satisfaction and reducing switching barriers are the two factors which would enhance customer loyalty.

The view proposed by Clara Agustin and Jagdip Singh (2005) suggests that, the multiple determinants of loyalty include transactional satisfaction, trust, and value for relational exchanges. However the researchers emphasize that the trust as a "motivator," satisfaction as a "hygiene," and value as a "bivalent" factor in consumer loyalty mechanisms.

In their empirical study to discover the importance of customer loyalty as a critical factor for an organization's success Aydin, and Özer (2005), have emphasized on the importance of customer loyalty in their study about the analysis of the antecedents of customer loyalty in the Turkish mobile telecommunication market.

Palmatier, Scheer, and Steenkamp (2007), proved that only salesperson-owned loyalty with the consumer directly affects the evaluation of sales growth and selling effectiveness. Whereas both salespersons owned loyalty combined with loyalty to the selling company increases the customer willingness to pay a price premium.

However Gefen, Karahanna and Straub (2003), added more dimensions to the field of customer loyalty, they proposed that in the non-Internet marketplace, customer loyalty is primarily the product of superior service quality and the trust that such service provide. They examined whether the same factors to an online vendor applies which lacks the human aspect of interactions. However the date suggests that the five dimensions of service quality in SERVQUAL have been collapsed to three dimensions with online service quality: (1) tangibles, (2) a combined dimension of responsiveness, reliability, and assurance (3) empathy.

The view proposed by Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) on customer loyalty in the hotel industry in New Zealand reveals that hotel image and customer satisfaction with the performance of housekeeping; reception, food and beverage, and price are positively correlated to customer loyalty.

In their attempt to the development and empirically validate the customer loyalty model in a mobile commerce (m-commerce) context Lin and Wang (2006) have concluded that customer loyalty was affected by perceived value, trust, habit, and customer satisfaction. Whilst, customer satisfaction playing a crucial intervening role in the relationship of perceived value and trust to loyalty.

Lovelock, Christopher and Wirt Jochen (2011) have proved that all four dimensions of relationship quality influence attitudinal loyalty, however, only satisfaction and perceived service quality influence behavioural loyalty (purchase intentions). Most remarkably, results indicate that only the organizational level of relationship quality influences customer loyalty. The employee level of relationship quality does not influence B2B customer loyalty in this study.

With an increased usage of the internet and availability of social media, marketers have devised different strategies to engage loyal customers and loyal employees. They are using loyal customers and loyal employees as their brand evangelists. In his research work Matthew (2008), Saputra & Dewi (2016) proved that establishing high levels of customer loyalty and employee engagement are leading determinants of brand performance. These indexes can serve as powerful tools to build an integrated messaging.

Salanova, Agut, and Peiró (2005) have examined the mediating role of service climate in the prediction of employee performance and customer loyalty. Structural equation modeling analyses were consistent with a full mediation model in which organizational resources and work engagement predict service climate, which in turn predicts employee performance and then customer loyalty. Further analyses revealed a potential reciprocal effect between service climate and customer loyalty (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004; Bakker, and Demerouti, 2007; Macey, and Schneider, 2008; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris, 2008; Kuo & Chen, 2015).

In addition, Bowen and Chen (2001) developed and implemented a method for service providers) to identify attributes that will increase customer loyalty. The authors found the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty was nonlinear; containing a variable with an exponent other than one. Their suggestion was supported by; Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2004); Namkung, and Jang (2007); and Dimitriadis (2006).

Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol (2002), these authors develop a framework for understanding the behaviours and practices of service providers that build or deplete consumer trust and the mechanisms that convert consumer trust into value and loyalty in relational exchanges. The results support a tripartite view of trustworthiness evaluations along operational competence, operational benevolence, and problem-solving orientation dimensions.

Moreover, Lam, Shankar, Erramilli and Murthy (2004); Malhotra, Kim, and Agarwal (2004); Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Malhotra (2005); Palmatier, Dant, Grewal and Evans. (2006), the authors find evidence of contingent asymmetric relationships between trustworthiness dimensions and consumer trust. Value completely mediates the effect of frontline employee trust on loyalty in the retailing context and partially mediates the effect of management policies and practices trust on loyalty in the airlines context. The role of frontline employees is more critical in the retailing context, whereas management practices and policies play the dominant role in the airlines context. Overall, the proposed framework successfully models trust and loyalty mechanisms across the two industries examined in the study, while remaining sensitive to essential contextual differences.

3. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS, IDENTIFYING MEDIATING EFFECT AND PROCEDURE

Research Hypothesis

Many empirical studies have examined the influence of business etiquette on customer loyalty in the business plan. Hence, the subsequent hypotheses were put forward to justify the study.

The research null hypothesis is stated as;

H_0 : Business etiquette has no mediating effect on the relationship between strategic plan and customer loyalty.

There are four alternative hypotheses,

H1: Business etiquette strategically plays an influential role in the business plan.

H2: Business etiquette positively influences customer loyalty.

H3: Strategic business plan positively influences customer loyalty.

H4: Business etiquette mediates the relationship between strategic business plan and customer loyalty.

Identifying Mediating Effect

Baron and Kenny (1986), and Judd and Kenny (1981), have impressive views over mediating effect. Mediating variable accounts for the relationship between the predictor (IV) and the dependent variable (DV), also known as predictor variables. Mediating effects explains how an external variable or event, named as mediator, significantly affect the effect of the IV on the DV.

With reference to Figure 1, the general test for mediation is to examine;

- i) The relationship between the predictor strategic plan (IV) and customer loyalty (DV)
- ii) The relationship between the predictor (IV) and business etiquette (mediator) variable
- iii) The relationship between the business etiquette (mediator) and customer loyalty (DV).

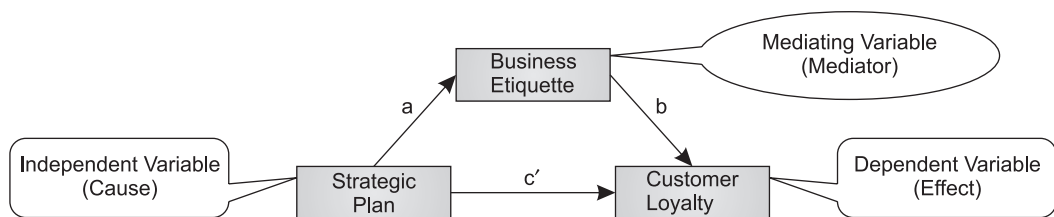


Figure 1: The research framework

The Procedure

The mediating effect has two possibilities; full mediating effect or partial mediating effect. Full mediating effect is identified when c' is not significant, while, ' a ' and ' b ' both are significant. On the other hand, a partial mediating effect is found when, $c' > a \times b$ (positive effect), and $c' < a \times b$ (negative effect). In the case there is not mediating effect, when both ' a ' and ' b ' are not significant or either ' a ' or ' b ' is not significant.

Analysis for the Mediating Effect

The analysis was conducted through SEM output. The procedures were as follows.

- i) Read the significant values for c' , b , and a ; $CR > \pm 1.96$
- ii) Compare the direct and indirect effect
- iii) Effect ration: $(a \times b) / c'$ that is the indirect effect divided by direct effect
- iv) Report the total effect and the magnitude

This study applied random sampling technique collecting opinions from 119 business administration students from the Manipal International University. Self-generating research questionnaire is used. There were 200 copies of the questionnaires distributed, 119 students were responding. The response rate was 59.5%, 47% were male respondents and 53% were female respondents.

4. RESULTS BY ESTIMATE, RESULTS, REPORTING AND CONCLUSION

Results by Estimate

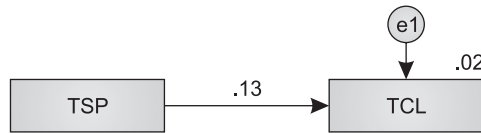


Figure 2: The result of direct effect of TSP on TCL

With reference to the Table 1 and Figure 2, the direct effect of TSP on TCL is 0.13 and in Figure 2 the coefficient of path c' has reduced to -0.25 .

Table 1
The direct effect of TSP on TCL is significant Regression Weights:
(Group number 1 - Default model)

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
TCL ← TSP	.13	.071	1.431	***	Significant

(Beta coefficient β is 0.13)

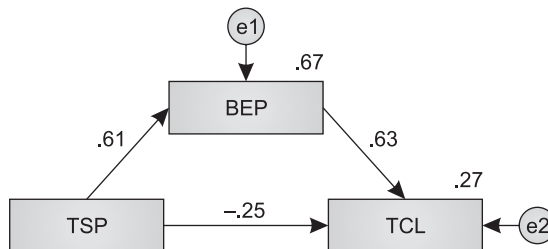


Figure 3: Path Diagram with mediating Loading Outputs

Table 2
Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>C.R.</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Label</i>
BEP ← TSP	.390	.047	8.305	***	<i>a</i>
TCL ← BEP	.761	.120	6.341	***	<i>b</i>
TCL ← TSP	-.195	.077	-2.536	.011	<i>c'</i>

Note: TSP = Strategic Plan, BEP = Business Etiquette Professionalism, TCL = Customer Loyalty, S.E. = Standard Error, C.R. = Critical Ratio, *p*. = *p*-value

Table 3
Standardized Regression Weights: (Group number 1 - Default model)

	<i>Estimate</i>
BEP ← TSP	.607
TCL ← BEP	.629
TCL ← TSP	-.252

Table 4
Standardized Direct Effects (Group number 1 - Default model)

	<i>TSP</i>	<i>BEP</i>
BEP	.607	.000
TCL	-.252	.629

Table 5
Standardized Indirect Effects (Group number 1 - Default model)

	<i>TSP</i>	<i>BEP</i>
BEP	.000	.000
TCL	.382	.000

5. RESULTS

Hence, when BEP entered the model, the strength of the effect has been reduced to 0.38, i.e. [0.13 – (-0.25)]. In Table 2 the direct effect of TSP on TCL is no longer significant (*p*-value = 0.011). The requirement for partial mediation is met.

According to the loading factors shown in Figure 3, the mediating effect was calculated by multiplying 0.61 against 0.63 ($0.61 \times 0.63 = 0.38$). Thus, it has exhibited that the total effects were 0.38 plus -0.25 [$0.38 + (-0.25) = 0.13$]. We conclude that the direct effect of the strategic plan toward customer loyalty has shown that 13% of the reason was due to business etiquette professionalism.

Consider an exogenous variable TSP(*x*) that is assumed to cause another endogenous variable TCL (*y*). The variable TSP is called the causal variable and the

variable that it causes or TCL is called the outcome. In diagrammatic form (Figure 1), the immediate model is TSP to TCL. Path TSP \rightarrow TCL (c') in the above model is called the total effect. The effect of TSP on TCL may be mediated by a process or mediating variable BEP (M) and the variable TSP may still affect TCL. The mediated model is in Figure 3. Path loading -0.25 (c') is called the direct effect. While standard errors are; $e_1 = 0.04$ and $e_2 = 0.12$ (Table 2). The difference between the predicted value and the observed value, y , is called the residual and is denoted e_2 .

6. DISCUSSION

Firstly, we have begun by modeling the effect of TSP on BEP, as shown in Figure 2. The mediating effect was tested as shown in Figure 3. The result shown in Table 3 (i.e. path a) is 0.61 and p value is *** (p -value $< .000$). TSM has a significant effect on TBE. Likewise, the effect of BEP on TCL is estimated 0.63 and p -value is *** (p -value $< .000$), and the effect (i.e. path b) is significant. The effect of TSP on TCL (i.e. path c') is -0.25 and p -value is 0.011 (p -value $> .000$), and the effect is not significant. Thus, the model has constituted a partial mediating effect. Therefore, the research questions and hypotheses postulated were answered with evidence. Factor loadings, β shown in Figure 2 and 3 have rounded to two places of decimals by default.

Mediator effect represents an indirect influence of business etiquette between strategic plan and customer loyalty. Inter-correlation among strategic plan, business etiquette and customer loyalty are all yielded significant at $p < .05$. There is a partial mediating effect of business etiquette. The indirect effect of TSP – BEP – TCL is stronger than direct effect of TSP – TCL (indirect = .38; direct = -0.25 ; at $p < .05$). (Table 4 and 5). The results have shown that there is a positive mediating effect of business etiquette.

7. REPORTING

According to the outputs shown in Tables, 1 and 2 (bold figures). The null hypothesis is failed to accept. It has implied that business etiquette has a positive effect on the relationship between strategic plan and customer loyalty. Therefore a way of enhancing the relationship between service provider (SMEs' entrepreneurs) and customer loyalty is to improve business etiquette professionalism in general.

8. CONCLUSION

Our research aimed to study the mediating relationship between strategic plan, business etiquette and customer loyalty. All research questions were answered.

The hypothesis statements postulated below were all accepted based on the test results shown in Table 1 and 2.

H1: Business etiquette strategically plays an influential role in the business plan.

H2: Business etiquette positively influences customer loyalty.

H3: Strategic business plan positively influences customer loyalty.

H4: Business etiquette mediates the relationship between strategic business plan and customer loyalty.

In this instance, null hypothesis; H_0 : Business etiquette has no mediating effect on the relationship between strategic plan and customer loyalty. Thus, we were failing to accept.

One motive for testing mediation is trying to recognize the mechanism through which the causal variable (exogenous) affects the outcome (endogenous). The mediator has been claimed an intervening variable. Mediation is not defined statistically; rather statistics can be used to evaluate a presumed mediation model. Full mediation is the case in which variable TSP no longer affects TCL after BPE has been measured and so path c' is zero. Therefore, in our study partial mediation is accomplished. In which the path from TSP to TCL is reduced in absolute size, c' from 0.31 to -0.25 , but is still different from zero when the mediator is introduced. Note that a mediation model is a causal model. The mediator is presumed to cause the outcome (TSP \rightarrow TCL) only. If the proposed model is not correct, the results from the mediation analysis are likely of no value. According to Wright, (1934), and Hyman, (1955), the learning of the mediation effect has come through a long history. Mediation is a very popular topic. The other topic is moderating effect. Mediation and moderation analyses are a key part of what has been called progression analysis, but mediation influence is likely to be more prevailing than moderation analyses. Moreover, in the examination of multivariate analysis, the mediation fragment of the model is habitually the most remarkable part of that model.

It is suggested that successful entrepreneurs are risk takers and opportunity seekers. They should have other characteristics like; creativity, innovative, hardworking, knowledge, and passionate. These characteristics make good predictors for the future study. The limitation of the study was, the opinions were from the sample of business school students. Moreover, the researcher may generate opinions, not only from the entrepreneurs, but also from the customers. The characteristics of services are suggested to link and chain together. We proposed that the service quality, TQM, intelligence quotient, and business etiquette, are inter-correlated and should be studied in the form of series circle, as "service-chain".

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