



The link between tourism involvement and service performance: Evidence from frontline retail employees



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ABSTRACT

Despite the increasing attention on employee performance, empirical research to explain the consequences of employee involvement in tourism on their service performance has been overlooked. This study proposes new insights into theoretical concepts and evaluates the empirical evidence on the direct relationship between tourism involvement and employee service performance and its indirect relationship through work engagement and job satisfaction in the context of retail. To test the proposed model, this study applies variance-based structural equation modeling partial least squares (PLS) with a sample of 408 frontline store employees in Bandung, Indonesia. The results reveal that tourism involvement directly affects service performance. Further, this study confirms that the linkage between tourism involvement and service performance is partially mediated by work engagement and job satisfaction. The theoretical and managerial practices consequences of these findings are discussed.

1. Introduction

The services marketing literature agrees that in competitive markets, one of the most sought after sustainable competitive advantages can come from having proactive and professional human resources (Menguc, Auh, Fisher, & Haddad, 2013). More specifically, having engaged and motivated frontline employees as the company's representative in dyadic interactions with the customers is crucial (Schepers, Nijssen, & van der Heijden, 2016). Besides representing the firm to the customers, frontline employees play an important role in every service encounter, and are fundamental in establishing and altering client outcomes. Empirical confirmation in retailing indicates that capable frontline service delivery staff are more likely to deliver a quality service, resulting in favorable services encounters, increased customer satisfaction, and ultimately increased spending and intention to repurchase in the future (Borucki & Burke, 1999). Due to this link between service employee performance and firm success, understanding how to effectively maintain and improve the performance of service employees is paramount. As such, the development and performance of service employees continues to be a crucial topic for both scholars and practitioners (Schepers et al., 2016).

Many factors determine the performance of service employees, but

how the service employees approach their job and how satisfied they are with their work are considered key determinants. Work engagement influences service performance because it drives employees' commitment and enthusiasm toward their work (Menguc et al., 2013; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzales-Roma, & Bakker, 2002). Job satisfaction is said to be a productivity enhancer and so it too has a positive influence on service performance (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011). This study argues that tourism involvement is also an important service performance driver specific to the retailing sector. Tourism involvement is a psychological state of understanding, enjoyment, and interest in tourism (Havitz & Dimanche, 1990). Studies have found an association between tourism involvement and quality of life, which, has a positive impact on working life (Kühnel & Sonnentag, 2011; Shin & You, 2017). Also, like the tourists that enjoy the benefits from their chosen tourism-related activities, service employees with a high tourism involvement are likely to share some of the enjoyment, amusement, and satisfaction that they have gained from being involved in tourism activities (Kay Smith & Diekmann, 2017; Sirgy et al., 2011). If the benefits outside of work influence work attitudes and behaviors, these past studies suggest that frontline service employees who are highly involved in tourism will be likely to demonstrate positive work outcomes, like higher service performance.

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Although the association between employee tourism involvement and employee performance has been suggested (Yeh, 2013), none of the past studies have empirically examined this issue. This study aims to close this gap by assessing the direct effect of tourism involvement on employee service performance and indirect effect through work engagement and job satisfaction in the context of the retail industry. By examining the proposed model, this study contributes not only to a clearer theoretical model, but also to the practical aspect of managing human resources and marketing of retail enterprises.

This study was conducted in Indonesia as its retail industry is vast (379.93 billion US dollars in 2016) and growing rapidly (10.5% year on a yearly basis). The size and the growth of this industry can be attributed to rising incomes, an increasingly productive population, and rapidly developing infrastructure (Patel, 2017). Concurrently, the Government has also eased restrictions for international retailers to enter the domestic market since 2014. Consequently, the Indonesian retail industry is attracting both domestic and international retailers, causing intense competition. In this highly competitive industry, having professional and highly perform frontline staff is essential.

2. Conceptual background

2.1. Tourism involvement

Involvement has been a popular construct among human resources and marketing scholars and involvement has been described in many ways. While there is no conclusive definition, involvement is generally viewed as a self-concept that connects a person's values to an idea, activity, or problem (Sherif, Kelly, Rodgers, Sarup, & Tittler, 1973). In the context of recreation and tourism, Havitz and Dimanche (1990) defined involvement as a psychological state of motivation, arousal or interest between an individual and recreational activities, characterized by the elements of pleasure value, risk probability and consequences, and sign value. Further, they suggest that recreation and tourism involvement affects the way a person searches, evaluates, and participates in tourism activities. When a person is involved with something, he or she will have stronger attitudes concerning the product or activity (Lambert, Minor, Wells, & Hogan, 2016).

Tourism involvement has been scrutinized in many ways. Gursoy and Gavcar (2003) have used involvement to profile tourists, revealing three components of involvement: the importance of pleasure in a vacation (pleasure), the possibility of mis-selecting some or all of a vacation (risk probability) and the importance of undesirable consequences due to mis-selecting some or all of a vacation (risk importance). Madrigal, Havitz, and Howard's (1992) study on married couple tourists reports that the vacation element has a positive relationship with education and gender, while the value element only has a positive relationship with age. Kim, Shin, and Swanger (2009) have examined the link between tourism involvement and satisfaction among bird-watching tourists. Their study points out that highly involved bird-watchers are inclined to watch more often, spend more on bird-watching gear and more likely to be bird-watching club members. In terms of information search behavior, Park and Kim's (2010) study to segment searching behavior among travelers reveals that a high tourism-involved travelers rely on their own experience and recommendations of others for making their travelling decision. Kyle and Chick (2004) examined the lasting tourism involvement among campers joining an agricultural campsite and fair, found that the campers tend to share their experiences of joining the fair. A recent study in the hotel industry conducted by Yeh (2013) reveals that tourism involvement affects both employee job satisfaction and work engagement. Although her study significantly contributes to our understanding on the effect of tourism on work related outcome, her study fails to elaborate the effect of tourism involvement on employee performance. The linkage between these factors is apparent as literature strongly suggests the important of job engagement and job satisfaction as important

drivers of employee performance (Alegre, Mas-Machuca, & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016; Menguc et al., 2013). Thus, it is justified that the current study includes service performance as the consequence of tourism involvement. The following sub-sections discuss three consequences of tourism involvement, namely service performance, work engagement, and job satisfaction.

2.2. Service performance

Liao and Chuang (2004) define employee service performance as behaviors where employees serve and help their customers. Borman and Motowidlo (1993) contend that employee job performance consists of three components: in-role, extra-role toward customers, and extra-role toward organization. The in-role component refers to the main tasks included in the job description such as, being well-informed of the delivered service, conducting proper product displays, and handling client orders. Extra-role toward customers is employee discretionary behaviors that indirectly affect the value chain of delivering the product such as providing extra service to the clients. Extra-role behavior toward the organization refers to employee willingness to promote the organization's welfare. In a retail context, the employee initiatives to increase the quality of his or her service delivery comprise an element of extra-role behavior toward the organization (Bettencourt & Brown, 2003).

Bowen and Ford (2004) maintain that for the employees to serve the customer exceptionally, the firm must motivate and satisfy the employees so they can deliver the service without difficulties. Further, Liao and Chuang (2004) suggest that employee service performance has three antecedent: individual level, store level, and service climate. Individual level is the personality of the employee consisting of continuousness, neuroticism, extroversion, and agreeableness. Store level is human resources practice including employee involvement, service training, and performance incentive. Service climate refers to the shared views among employees concerning the procedures, policies, and practices.

2.3. Work engagement

Kahn (1990) describes personal engagement as 'the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles' (p. 694). He maintains that, throughout the performance of his or her job, an engaged person tends to emotionally and physically devote themselves to their role in an organization. In contrast, a disengaged person detaches themselves from their work role in the organization. A disengaged employee tends to defend himself or herself emotionally and physically during the performance of his or her role. Schaufeli et al. (2002) developed an operational definition of engagement concept as a favorable accomplishing, job-related state of mind that is depicted by vigor, absorption, and devotion. Menguc et al.'s (2013) study among retail service employees contend that engaged employees can be depicted as dynamic, enthusiastic, and determined about their job. In contrast, disengaged employees tend to be indifferent, unresponsive, depersonalized, and alienated from their job. Further, their study confirms that work engagement has a positive effect on many outcomes related to work and organizational performance.

Sonnentag's (2003) study examining job-related consequences of job recovery resulting from tourism, reports that recovery positively affects work engagement. Empirical evidence in the hotel industry indicates that tourism involvement positively affects work engagement among the frontline hotel staff (Yeh, 2013). In recent studies, Vogel, Rodell, and Lynch (2016) have examined the effect of job crafting and tourism-related activity on employee performance. Their study suggests that both job designing and tourism-related activity tend to reduce the unfavorable effects of value incongruence on employee engagement and job performance. While research examining work engagement in the tourism context is limited, research on work engagement in the retail

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