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Manufacturers Satisfaction on Logistics Service Quality: Operational, Relational and National Culture

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Abstract

A number of studies had been conducted in western countries (e.g. Mentzer 2007) which identified the elements contributing to satisfaction. The difference in cultural background between individualistic countries and collectivist countries might suggest variations on how collectivist societies value the element of logistics service and how they derived maximum satisfaction. The objectives of the study were to investigate on what makes the users of logistics service satisfied among the collectivist societies. Qualitative research was deployed, whereby the main data were collected by using face-to-face interviews using semi-structured interviews. Four logistics service providers and three logistics service users (manufacturers) were interviewed. Data were transcribed and analysed by identifying the theme and patterns with the aim to understand the preset and emerging theories. The findings showed that in achieving customer satisfaction in Malaysia's context, operational technical ability within the logistics service quality (LSQ), such as timeliness and service condition, is a basic element contributing to satisfaction subject to influence of cultural values. The emerging elements provide the key insights on the elements and sub-elements which lead to satisfaction in the context of Malaysian logistics service users. Rather than the organization's performance-related factors, the results revealed that within the Malaysian national cultural context, there are influences of cultural elements towards customer satisfaction.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The concept of culture

Concept of culture has been explored by social scientists since few decades ago, resulting in the emergence of over 400 definitions (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Michael, 2010). Based on Johannes (1996), there are two basic meanings of culture. The first refers to civilization, which is the intricacy in intelligence as in arts, literature, education, sports and entertainment. Culture can be observed in different perspectives that refer to symbols, norms, heroes and values shared by a social group. The second refers to cultural value. It is the core of culture which becomes the principle for a society on what is perceived as good or bad, clean or dirty, normal or abnormal, logical or not logical, rational or irrational, and fair or unfair from their very own perspectives.

Culture values are derived from the continuous mind program through human day-to-day experiences, which are being transferred from families and surroundings. These values are strongly bonded, whereby detaching and remolding them are arduous tasks. Aquilon (1997) wrote that cultural values help to explain the reason why a person may think that what he/she does is always the best method and the most common, natural and acceptable practice, while other people have contradicting views and feelings towards any actions and thoughts. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), socio anthropologists emanate the idea that each society may have a different way of solving the same type of basic problem.

Mentzer, Myers and Cheung (2004) addressed that logistics service quality (LSQ), like any other services, is also subjected to consideration to cultural elements, and they have recommended for further detailed investigations on how national culture and organizational culture influence LSQ and customer satisfaction. Hofstede et al. (2010) topped it up with the notion that having the ability to be equipped with the knowledge on cultural elements is an advantage for a firm to be ahead in the market. Majority of studies conducted began in the hospitality service industry, such as hotel services by incorporating the SERVQUAL model, in which most of the studies compared results of the SERVQUAL between two or more countries. Most of the work proved that there are variations in terms of the expectation between each SERVQUAL component (Dash, Bruning, & Acharya, 2009; Espinoza, 1999; Furrer, Liu, & Sudharshan, 2000; Kutter, Dalama, Rey, & Carlos, 2007; Liu, Furrer, & Sudharshan, 2001; Reid, 2011; Seo, 2012). Within the logistics management study, the work which incorporated national culture explored the effects in the relationship among logistics chain, labor skills and employment. However, for the China Guanxi study, there is little work done on the exploration of national culture from the perspective of LSQ and customer satisfaction to date.

Logistics service quality model developed by Mentzer, Flint and Hult, (2001) consists of nine (9) constructs to determine customer satisfaction. It includes Personnel Contact Quality, Order Release Quantity, Information Quality, Ordering Procedures, Order Accuracy, Order Condition, Order Quality, Timeliness and Order Discrepancy Handling. The development of LSQ tools has gone through two major phases beginning with the qualitative method and further refined with the quantitative method. In order to explore further in understanding the effects of culture on LSQ, replicating the original LSQ model may not be sufficient as there is tendency to neglect any other unknown components. Further, it is also important to note that the first phase development of LSQ is gathered from the customer of Department of Logistics American (DLA), whereby all of the components emerged are derived from the perspective of western manufacturers and users.

Although the model has been widely used and validated in various countries, this study attempted to explore whether a collectivist culture like Malaysia has a different view on how LSQ and customer satisfaction are formed. Between western and non-western cultures, there are numerous differences in the national culture dimension (Abdullah & Low, 2001; Abdullah, 1996; Hofstede, 2011; Schermerhorn, 1994). Two dimensions which are highly different are power distance and individualist vs collectivism paradigm, as illustrated in Table 1.

By considering this differences, the author decided to conduct a qualitative work as in Mentzer's phase one in order to identify any other emerging themes.

Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-cultural society, with a total population of approximately 30 million people. It is hard to find an official published Malaysian population. Even in the Department of Statistics Malaysia, researchers may only found the data of 2008 but updated in 2014. Based on the country's meter information, it is estimated that the total population has reached 30 million. The Malays, Chinese and Indians, who make up 67.4%, 24.6% and 7.5%, respectively, are the major ethnic groups, while the other 1.6% comprises other indigenous groups. The Malays and other indigenous groups are the Bumiputera (son of the soil), in which the Malays form the largest

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