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Customer Satisfaction among Malls in Region XI: A Structural Equation Modelling

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to develop a model that best fits customer satisfaction with marketing mix, service quality and relationship marketing as the exogenous variables and customer satisfaction as the endogenous variable. Review of related literatures revealed that customer dissatisfaction provides for grave consequences in business. A quantitative non-experimental design utilizing correlational technique was used in this study. In arriving with the best fit model, a structural equation modelling was used. 420 mall consumers was randomly selected across Region XI.   Results of the study showed a very high descriptive levels for marketing mix, service quality, relationship marketing and customer satisfaction. Results of the correlation revealed that there was a significant relationship between marketing mix and customer satisfaction; service quality and customer satisfaction; and relationship marketing and customer satisfaction. Finally, the best fit model developed in this study revealed that product, place/ distribution, trust, conflict handling and customer expectations are the predictors of customer satisfaction. Hence, customer satisfaction is best anchored on marketing mix and relationship marketing.

Keywords: business administration, customer satisfaction, marketing management, structural equation modelling, Philippines

I.   INTRODUCTION

The advent of the marketing concept has brought about significant changes on the way organizations plan and execute their strategies to attain their objectives. With marketing concept, customer satisfaction is now the focus of many businesses with the understanding that profitability and long term business sustainability can only be accomplished if they are able to satisfy needs and wants. Bilgin, Kucukosmanoglu and Sensoy, (2010) explained that by performing at par with what the customers expect from them, businesses are able to achieve their objectives. This means that businesses need to put customers at the center of every business decision such as the proper blending of the` marketing mix elements (Ling, 2007), delivering quality service (Zeithaml, Bitner, &Gremler, 2006) and practicing relationship marketing (Ndubisi& Wah, 2005) in order to produce customer satisfaction. Moreover, Researchers argued that customer dissatisfaction have proven to produce undesirable behaviors from customers such as complaining, switching, and negative word of mouth which is known to negatively affect profitability and more importantly sustainability (Mattila and Ro 2008; and Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004).

The increasing competitive business environment among malls in Region XI has made customer satisfaction more elusive to accomplish despite the conscious effort among firms to make it a priority. Today's customers are armed with a plethora of choiceswhich make it so easy for them to defect whenever their expectations are not met or if they are dissatisfied which can significantly affect profitability and ultimately sustainability of business. Although customer satisfaction has been extensively studied, there is no existing research, particularly in the locality that seeks to establish a model that best fits customer satisfaction among malls in major component cities in Region XI. This study contributes to the diverse and rich literature of customer satisfaction and provides new knowledge about a new model that best fits customer satisfaction.

1.1 Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to develop a model that best fits customer satisfaction. Specifically, this study also seek to determine the level of marketing mix, service quality, relationship marketing and customer satisfaction as well as the correlation between the exogenous variables and the endogenous variable.

1.2 Hypotheses

The hypotheses of this study were tested at 0.05 level of significance stating that there is no model that best fits customer satisfaction and there is no significant relationship between marketing and customer satisfaction, service quality and customer satisfaction and relationship marketing and customer satisfaction.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study adds value to existing literatures about customer satisfaction, marketing mix, service quality and relationship marketing. It can serve as a basis for strategic formulation both for domestic and multinational businesses that intend to enter the mall industry. This study provides insights on how to achieve customer satisfaction using the elements of the marketing mix, service quality and relationship marketing as a tool.The result of this study will benefit the society as a whole, more particularly the consumers as it can help improve quality of life by getting what they need or want in terms of the blending of the marketing mix, receiving good quality service and having good relationships with businesses that have the ability to meet their expectations and therefore satisfy their needs and wants. Moreover, this study will provide beneficial insights to mall administrators in Region XI about customer satisfaction, marketing mix, service quality and relationship marketing. The result will help them formulate strategies and implement practices leading to the attainment of organizational objectives. For the consumers, this study will be beneficial as it will help them experience higher levels of customer satisfaction as mall administrators in Region XI acquire relevant knowledge about marketing mix, quality service and relationship marketing. Lastly, this study will benefit the future researchers who are interested to conduct a similar study or to extend the scope of this study as it will serve as a fertile source of information about the predictors of customer satisfaction.

II. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study was quantitative non-experimental research design using correlational techniques. In the generation of the best fit model, a structural equation model (SEM) was used.

2.2 Population and Sampling

The respondents of this study were the 420 consumers of major malls among component cities in Region XI namely: Tagum City, Davao City, Digos City, Mati City and Panabo City. Consumers in the Island Garden City of Samal was excluded in this study because of the lack or absence of a large mall in the area. As stated by Bentler, Yuan and Wu (2010), the appropriate number of respondents when using a structural equation modelling should be between 300 to 400 respondents. In the gathering of data, the researcher acquired the assistance of the various mall administrator and duly asked for their permission to conduct the study in order to reach the respondents. Hence, this study was limited only to the consumers of malls in Region XI who gave their approval to conduct this study within the area of their operation. Random sampling technique was utilized in the selection of the respondents who were aged 18 years old and above from June 2019- July 2019. The proponent chose simple random sampling method because of the large population of consumers in the Region. Using a simple random sampling provided a sample that was representative of the large population. The names of the respondents as well as the malls who participated in this study were never presented to protect their identity and confidentiality. Simple random sampling means that every case of the population has an equal probability of inclusion in sample (Pervez, 2005).

2.3 Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study was adapted from various sources. It was modified to make it more suitable for the study. The said instruments were submitted to the members of the panel for finality and validation prior to the actual conduct of the survey. After validation, pilot testing was conducted. Cronbach alpha was used to check the validity of the questionnaire. The cronbach alpha of this survey instrument used is 0.90 and above for all the variables which indicate that the instruments are very reliable and valid.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reflected in Table 1 is the level of marketing mix among malls in Region XI with an overall mean score of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 0.394 which is described as very high. The very high rating on marketing mix is a reflection that mall consumers in Region XI are very much satisfied when products are in good condition and is able to address their needs. Moreover, consumers are also satisfied when they are offered with products that are pleasant in appearance and when they have a wide selection of products to choose from. Furthermore, the result also reflected that customers are brand conscious as they showed satisfaction when offered with familiar or popular brands. The findings collaborated

with Ling (2007) that among the elements of the marketing mix customers have the highest perception of satisfaction towards the product. The result was also in consonance to Al Muala and Qurneh (2012); Sanchez, Callarisa, Rodriguez and Moliner (2006), and Oliver (1987) that consumers have their personal perception of value when it comes to evaluating a product which they use as a reference to compare to their expectations and in turn determine their satisfaction. Products therefore are tools to satisfy some needs or wants. This is in cognizant to the views of Wahab, Hassan, Shahib and Maon (2015) who declared that businesses need to tailor their products to the needs and preferences of their customers in order to achieve customer satisfaction. Hence, the right product is one that the benefits correspond to customer needs and wants.

Table 1. Level of Marketing Mix

Items	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Product	0.443	4.43	Very High
Price	0.500	4.42	Very High
Place/ Distribution	0.503	4.32	Very High
Promotion	0.506	4.29	Very High
Overall	0.394	4.37	Very High

Presented in Table 2 is the result for the level of service quality with an overall mean rating of 4.39, described as very high and a standard deviation of 0.423.The very high level of service quality is an indication that mall consumers in Region XI are very much satisfied when malls have employees who are knowledgeable in answering questions and have a reputation to be safe for customers in their transactions. Also, satisfaction can be felt when mall employees are approachable, friendly, competent in providing customer service, and consistently courteous to customers. The result reinforced the works of Hasin, Seeluangsawat and Shareef (2001); Siddiqi (2011); Kassim and Asiah Abdullah (2010) who nurtured the idea that assurance is a basis for customer satisfaction. This is because firms with knowledgeable and courteous employees are able to inspire trust and confidence for the organization (Akbar & Parvez, 2009; Siddiqi, 2011). Furthermore, this study opposed the findings of Zaim, Bayyurt and Zaim (2010) who claimed that assurance as a dimension of service quality is not significant to customer satisfaction.

Table 2. Level of Service Quality Among Malls

Items	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Reliability	0.514	4.41	Very High
Responsiveness	0.548	4.42	Very High
Assurance	0.482	4.43	Very High
Empathy	0.507	4.38	Very High
Tangibles	0.491	4.32	Very High
Overall	0.423	4.39	Very High

Shown in Table 3 is the level of relationship marketing among malls in RegionXI. The overall mean score is 4.42, described as very high with a standard deviation of 0.450. The very high level of relationship marketing portrayed that mall consumers in Region XI perceived greater levels of satisfaction when malls are respectful to customers; reliable in their services; consistent in providing quality service; fulfilling their obligations to customers; and when malls are reliable in their promises. The result gave further validity to the claims of Bricci, Fragata and Antunes (2016) that trust has a positive and direct consequence on satisfaction. Moreover, Ndubisi (2007) explained that in order to gain trust, businesses should be able to keep their promises to customers, makes customers safe in their transactions, deliver consistent high quality services, make customers feel respected, fulfill obligations, trustworthy and credible enough to build customers' confidence in their transactions. Moreover, various authors such as Ayio, (2018); Goswami and Fibich (2018); and Ndubisi (2007) believed that trust is a foundational ingredient towards business success.

Table 3. Level of Relationship Marketing Among Malls

Items	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Trust	0.507	4.51	Very High
Commitment	0.542	4.35	Very High
Communication	0.526	4.36	Very High
Conflict Handling	0.534	4.45	Very High
Overall	0.450	4.42	Very High

Depicted in Table 4 is the summary of the level of customer satisfaction among malls in Region XI with an overall mean of 4.40, described as very high, and standard deviation of 0.540.The very high level of customer satisfaction is a reflection that consumers among malls in Region XI are expecting that malls can be relied upon to provide quality goods and services, that malls will cater to their preferences or personal needs; and that malls can be relied upon to deliver service without errors. McKinney, Yoon and Zahedi (2002) argued that a customer's satisfaction is oftentimes measured

by using their expectations as a benchmark to compare with their actual experience of service or product performance. This is comparable to the findings of Maloney (2002) that meeting the expectations of customers is key towards customer satisfaction.

Table 4. Level of Customer Satisfaction Among Malls

Items	SD	Mean	Descriptive Level
Customer Expectations	0.578	4.45	Very High
Perceived Quality	0.624	4.36	Very High
Perceived Value	0.621	4.39	Very High
Overall	0.540	4.40	Very High

Presented in table 5 is the correlation between marketing mix and customer satisfaction. The overall p-value of 0.000 is lower than the level of significance at 0.05. This means that the exogenous marketing mix is correlated with the endogenous customer satisfaction. Moreover, the r-value at 0.558 indicates a strong positive relationship between marketing mix and customer satisfaction. Hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between marketing mix and customer satisfaction was rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between marketing mix and customer satisfaction. Thus, every increase in the variable marketing mix will result to an increase to customer satisfaction. This is a validation of the 4P's model of McCarthy (1960) that the marketing mix is a framework that firms can use in order to meet the requirements of their customers for their satisfaction. The result was also similar to the claims of Ahmed and Rahman (2015); Wahab, Hassan, Shahid and Maon (2015); as well as Shankar and Chin (2011) that the elements of marketing mix more popularly known as the 4P's of marketing to wit: product; price; place/distribution and promotion are positively correlated with customer satisfaction. This implies that the right mixture of the marketing mix will positively affect customer satisfaction. Tarekegn (2018) gave a comparable revelation that the marketing mix of an organization particularly through product, price and promotion had a significant relationship towards customer satisfaction. However, Tarekegn (2018) pointed out that price is negatively correlated with customer satisfaction. Hence, customer satisfaction decreases when prices increase.

Table 5. Correlation Between Marketing Mix and Customer Satisfaction

Marketing Mix	Customer Satisfaction			
	Customer Expectations	Perceived Quality	Perceived Value	Overall
Product	0.459*	0.510*	0.405*	0.517*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Price	0.414*	0.525*	0.445*	0.520*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Place/Distribution	0.382*	0.386	0.292*	0.399*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Promotion	0.410*	0.337*	0.245*	0.374*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Overall	0.514*	0.541*	0.427*	0.558*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

*p<.05

Depicted in Table 6 is the correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction with an overall p-value of 0.000 and an overall r-value of 0.733. This means that there is a strong and positive correlation between the two variables leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis of no significance in favor of the alternative hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Hence, when service quality increases, customer satisfaction also increases.This was comparable to the claims of Naik, Gantasala, and Prabhakar (2010) who underscored that service quality has a positive and significant impact towards customer satisfaction as customer's expectations regarding service quality and meeting those expectations particularly in the dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, and assurance are strong basis why retail firms are able to satisfy their customers. Moreover, Agbor (2011) gave a similar conclusion that service quality is significantly related to customer satisfaction as higher levels of quality will lead to higher level of customer satisfaction. Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) pointed out that customer service is the sum of all activities designed to create and enhance customer satisfaction. Hence, the key to achieve customer satisfaction is delivering products or service comparable to the expectations of the customers.

Table 6. Correlation Between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service Quality	Customer Satisfaction			
	Customer Expectations	Perceived Quality	Perceived Value	Overall
Reliability	0.480*	0.640*	0.585*	0.640*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Responsiveness	0.471*	0.594*	0.529*	0.599*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Assurance	0.502*	0.604*	0.573*	0.631*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Empathy	0.497*	0.601*	0.537*	0.615*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Tangibles	0.532*	0.508*	0.456*	0.563*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Overall	0.596*	0.709*	0.644*	0.733*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

*p<.05

Reflected in Table 7 is the result for the correlation between relationship marketing and customer satisfaction with an overall p-value of 0.000 which is less than the level of significance at 0.05. This means that the two variables are correlated Moreover, the r-value 0.778 indicates a strong positive relationship which means that relationship marketing positively affects customer satisfaction.The result agreed with the claims of Nauroozi and Moghadam (2015); Ndubisi and Wah (2005) who proved that there is a strong relationship between relationship marketing and customer satisfaction. Relationship marketing has become increasingly popular among businesses because of its ability to create deeper levels of customer satisfaction. Moreover, Ndubisi (2007) exposed that the four underpinnings of relationship marketing namely: Trust, commitment, communication and conflict handling and that these dimensions are significantly related to one another.

Table 7. Correlation Between Relationship Marketing and Customer Satisfaction

Relationship Marketing	Customer Satisfaction			
	Customer Expectations	Perceived Quality	Perceived Value	Overall
Trust	0.568*	0.688*	0.656*	0.719*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Commitment	0.531*	0.563*	0.450*	0.581*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Communication	0.558*	0.598*	0.522*	0.632*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Conflict Handling	0.592*	0.719*	0.614*	0.724*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Overall	0.660*	0.752*	0.656*	0.778*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

*p<.05

Shown on table 8 is the summary on Goodness of Fit. There were four generated models in this study to arrive at the best fit model that predicts customer satisfaction. Each model created a framework that can be dissected into structural model and quantified model. The quantified model represents the measure loads on each factor to their latent constructs while the structural model outlines associations among the variables. Further, the assessment of fit was used as baseline for accepting and rejecting the model. As a rule, the researcher established the causality relationship of the exogenous variables toward the endogenous variable. The moment that the structured model exhibits with suitable fit, it underscores that there is consistency of the empirical relationships among variables. Based on the findings, the model evidently illustrates that marketing mix and relationship marketing are important predictors of customer satisfaction among malls in region XI.

In identifying the best fit model, all indices included must consistently fall within the acceptable ranges. Chi-square/degrees of freedom value should be less than 2 with its corresponding p-value greater than .05. Root mean square error approximation value must be less than .05, the other indices such as normed fit index, Tucker-Lewis index, comparative fit index, and the goodness fit index must all be greater than .95. Model 4 got the following indices: P of Close Fit (P-Close) is .908; Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom (CMIN/DF) is .476; Probability Value (P-value) is .699; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) is .999; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is 1.000; Normed Fit Index (NFI) is .998; Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) is 1.007; Root Means Square of Error Approximation (RMSEA) is .000. These indices satisfied all the

requirement of the goodness of fit measures. Moreover, this is an indication that generated model 4 is a very good fit model which means that the null hypothesis is rejected.

The model shows the significance of marketing mix and relationship marketing as a predictor of customer satisfaction. However, the result showed that out of the four indicators of marketing mix, only two remained as a significant predictor of customer satisfaction namely: product and place of distribution. For relationship marketing, only two remained out of the four indicators namely: trust and conflict handling. On the part of customer satisfaction, the indicator customer expectations remained out of the original three indicators. Thus, the findings suggest that customer satisfaction among malls in Region XI was best anchored on marketing mix which was measured in terms of product and place of distribution; and relationship marketing which was measured in terms of trust and conflict handling. The findings substantiated the relationship marketing theory of McCarthy (1960) that with the effective use of the marketing mix elements, businesses are able to meet the needs and wants of their customers by offering them the specific benefit or value that they require from each of the marketing mix elements. The marketing mix is a tool that every business should use to their advantage by using it to satisfy needs and wants. Moreover, the findings also gave credence to the relationship marketing theory of Christopher, Payne and Ballantayne,(1991) who established that the goal of relationship marketing is to acquire and retain customers by delivering value in a specific target market that is sustainable for a long period of time. Practicing relationship marketing requires that firms close the quality gap between what the customers expect and what they get. Hence, attaining customer satisfaction. On the other hand, the result mirrored the claims of Zineldin and Philipson (2007) that marketing mix and relationship marketing compliments each other.

Table 8. Summary of the Goodness of Fit Measures

	Index	Criterion		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
CMIN/DF	0<value>2	5.778		5.680		5.376	0.476
p-value	<0.05	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.699	
NFI	>0.95	0.884	0.934	0.953		0.998	
TLI	>0.95	0.881	0.917	0.928		1.007	
CFI	>0.95	0.902	0.945	0.961		1.000	
GFI	>0.95	0.828	0.918	0.952		0.999	
RMSEA	<0.05	0.107	0.106	0.102		0.000	
P-close	>0.05	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.908	

Legend:

CMIN/DF	-	Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom
NFI	-	Normed Fit Index
TLI	-	Tucker-Lewis Inde
CFI	-	Comparative Fit Index
GFI	-	Goodness of Fit Index
RMSEA	-	Root Means Square of Error Approximatio
P-close	-	P of Close Fit
p-value	-	Probability Value
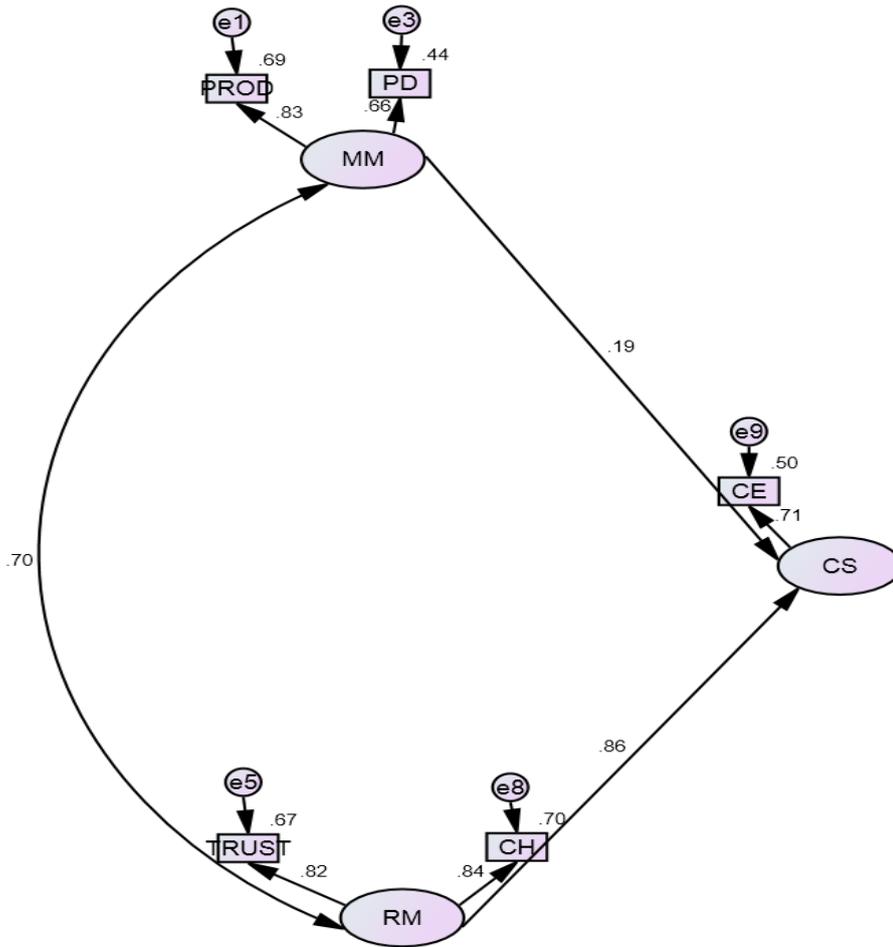
Fig. 1Best Fit Model of Customer Satisfaction

Legend:

PROD –Product	TRUST- Trust	CE- Customer Expectation
PD- Place/Distribution	CH-Conflict Handling	CS-Customer Satisfaction

IV.   Conclusion

In lieu of the revelations of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:Customer satisfaction is best anchored on marketing mix with product and place of distribution as its indicators and Relationship marketing with trust and conflict handling as its measurement. This study sheds light on the importance of having a reliable quality control system and place of distribution strategies as well as the development of trust and a well-established complaint handling process/ system among malls in Region XI. Moreover, the result also highlighted the importance of having a clear understanding on the expectations of customers since customers judge their satisfaction based on their expectation.

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