

Personality Traits and Customer-Oriented Behavior in the Health Tourism Hospitals in Malaysia

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Abstract—The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior in the Malaysian health tourism hospitals. The respondents were consisted of nurses in the 13 health tourism hospitals in Malaysia. Data were collected by using administered on-site questionnaires and the constructs of this study were developed from past researchers with tested validity and reliability. Multiple regressions were employed to test the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior. The findings of this study revealed that openness to experience and conscientiousness were significantly and positively related to customer-oriented behavior. These findings may be of help to healthcare managers to select the right candidates for customer-oriented nurses.

Index Terms—Customer-oriented behavior, health tourism hospitals, nurses, personality traits.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the health tourism industry, health tourists are looking for abroad medical facilities not only with experienced and well-trained medical professionals but those that offer high standard of care. Standard of care is related to human perception and preference as how the healthcare services are to be provided. Generally, the healthcare service providers are facing challenges from a rapidly changing operating environment due to the increasing expectations especially on the healthcare services. In the past, patients were focusing only on the technical dimension and outcome of the medical treatment but nowadays, patients are viewing healthcare services from different angles and perspectives. The increased expectation of service delivery is due to the rising consumer affluence and well-informed patients with regard to the standard of care. In light of the rising expectation of patient care, responding to patient needs in an efficient and effective manner is obviously a crucial leverage point to the health tourism hospitals. If the country health tourism would to attain a distinguished position by extending its customer base, health tourism hospitals should make significant leaps in their level of care delivery. In this context, customer-oriented behavior will certainly make a difference and betterment in terms of improving patients' overall experience in the hospitals. This paper discusses the importance of nurses' customer-oriented behavior which is critical to success in gaining patient's preference and how personality traits can influence their customer-oriented behavior.

II. CUSTOMER-ORINATED BEHAVIOR

A. Definitions and Concepts

The term customer-oriented behavior is referring to particular behavior exhibited by individuals during service encounters and such behavior will lead to satisfying customers [1]. It is the customer-oriented behavior which is essential in fulfilling customers' needs and interests by delivering proper solutions. Scholars have specifically defined customer-oriented behavior as understanding customers' needs, assisting customers to attain their goals and influencing customers by providing information and assistance [2]. Customer-oriented behavior is also viewed as employee's predisposition or tendency to meet customer needs in a workplace context [3]. It is a main determinant of customer overall satisfaction in order to create a long-term profitable organization.

In the healthcare context, it is explained that the term customer-oriented behavior refers to the service behavior and ability of the care providers to adjust their service in order to reflect patients' reality [4]. On the same note, researchers [5] stated that nurse-patient interface embraces elements of the nurse-patient interaction in the process of co-producing a service. Therefore, customer-oriented behavior is an essential interface element for nurses to meet the incremental patient's expectation. In addition, patient's inability to assess medical treatment makes them rely on behaviors exhibited by the caregivers when evaluating their experience in the hospital. As a result, patient's evaluation will be highly depends on nurses' behavior they frequently encounter [6]. It is widely accepted that a customer-oriented organization is more likely to generate satisfied customers and create more favorable behavioral outcomes than organization that lack of customer-orientation [7]. Hence, hospitals are no exception to the need for customer-oriented behavior [8]. This behavior is believed to facilitate achievement of a hospital's goal and increase its performance. Health tourism hospitals with customer-oriented nurses have the competitive advantage over those do not perceive customer-oriented behavior as an important factor for long term business development [9].

B. Personality Traits and Customer-Oriented Behavior

Trait theory [10] posits that a person's behavior will be generated consistent with his or her personality traits. There were empirical studies [11]-[17] reported that personality traits have a significant relationship with customer-oriented behavior. It was also found in the studies that personality traits are meaningful related to work-related behaviors [12]. Personality traits matter when it comes to predict and explain human behavior at work. Employees possess enduring personality traits are able to induce customer-oriented

behavior [15]. Parallel to the empirical findings, this study used the Five-Factor Model of personality traits to predict customer-oriented behavior. Past researchers [15]-[17] stated that Big Five personality traits are predicting variables of customer-oriented behavior. The Big Five personality traits encompass openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism [18].

Individual who possess the trait of openness to experience is broadminded and creative. They think out of the box and are more incline to think of alternative ways to solve a problem [19]. Nurses who are high on openness to experience view stressful patient encounters as opportunities to learn and grow. They are more prone to exhibit customer-oriented behavior. The term conscientiousness refers to employees who are hardworking, organized, reliable, thorough, efficient, persistent and attentive to their work [20]. Nurses who are conscientiousness are good at depersonalizing stressful patient encounters and do not let this experience affect their daily job performance. The characteristics of conscientious employees are prone to comply with procedures and policies and committed to work performance especially for nurses [16]. It will result in higher customer-oriented behavior among them in the hospitals. Extraversion individuals are described as highly social, affectionate, friendly and often exhibit strong commitment to social interaction and group activities [21]. They view challenges as achievable, problems as solvable and put an effort to make a difference each day. Therefore, nurses who are highly extraverted are more likely to display customer-oriented behavior. Agreeable individuals are always concern and sympathy for others. A person who possesses this trait is seen as being trusting, straightforward, altruistic, tender-minded and modest [22]. Nurses who possess this trait will display more customer-oriented behavior because they are kind, forgiving, sympathetic and tolerant. Neuroticism refers to an individual's emotional condition where it is related with depressed, worried, angry and unstable [20]. Neurotic nurses treat emotionally stressful encounters as personal attack and easily bothered [23]. Generally, those who are high on neuroticism are less likely to perform customer-oriented behavior. Based on the aforesaid empirical evidence, this study seeksto propose the following hypothesis:

- H1a: There is a significant relationship between openness to experience and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1b: There is a significant relationship between conscientiousness and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1c: There is a significant relationship between extraversion and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1d: There is a significant relationship between agreeableness and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1e: There is a significant relationship between neuroticism and customer-oriented behavior.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected by means of administered on-site questionnaires completed by nurses of the health tourism

hospitals. The sampling frame consisted of 13 health tourism hospitals which contributed 65-70% of the health tourists in Malaysia. Given that nurses have to respond to patient's needs and upholding the standard of care, this study intendsto focus on the nurses' customer-oriented behavior in the health tourism hospitals. A total of 670 questionnaires were distributed to the nurses within the sampling frame and 349 completed questionnaires were collected with a response rate of 52.1 percent. The response rate is relatively high considering the fact that administered on-site data collection method is very efficient in generating large amount of data especially when the survey is conducted face to face with the respondents [24].

B. Measures and Instrumentation

The Selling Orientation Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale [25] was adapted for measuring customer-oriented behavior in this study. It contains 12 items of positively phrased customer-orientation items. The items have been validated and used inservice related studies [25]-[27]. This variable is one-dimensional and the items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The respondents have to indicate the extent to which the items represent their customer-oriented behavior in the hospitals. Measures of the personality traits are based on the Big Five Inventory (BFI) [28]. There are a total of 44 items in the questionnaire. BFI measures were adapted from the Five Factor Model (FFM) because it is a short instrument and easy to understand by the respondents. The personality traits construct consist of five dimensions namely openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The items were rated on a five point Likert scale.

C. Validity and Reliability

The constructs of the independent variable and dependent variable were validated through factor analysis. Principal Components analysis (PCA) has been selected as the method to perform factor analysis. During factor analysis, a factor loading of 0.35 or higher will be identified as significant factor loadings [29]. Items that have factor loadings lower than 0.35 and cross-loading should become a candidate for deletion. Factor analysis was conducted on the personality traits scale which consisted of 44 items. The principal component analysis with varimax rotation extracted four factors compared to the original five factors. These four factors cumulatively captured 48.571 percent of the variance as shown in Table I.

The data for customer-oriented behavior were also assessed via Principal Components Analysis (PCA). The varimax rotated principal component analysis revealed the presence of a single structure with 11 items of strong loadings. One item of the construct was discarded due to cross loading. Based on the factor analysis results in Table II, the extracted single factor has an Eigenvalue of 5.483 and able to explain a total of 49.844 percent of the variance.

Reliability of the constructs was conducted to determine the suitability and internal consistency of the measures used. The cutoff point for measuring reliability in the present study must be at least 0.70 or greater as suggested by references [30]-[32]. Table III depicts the reliability coefficients for the constructs. Since all the Cronbach's Alpha values of the

constructs were above 0.70, the measuring items of each construct were deemed reliable.

TABLE I: FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR PERSONALITY TRAITS

Items	Description	Factor Loading			
		1	2	3	4
E1	Talkative.		0.701		
E2	Full of energy.		0.698		
E3	Passionate and spirited.		0.718		
E4	Not quiet.		0.616		
E5	Assertive personality.		0.682		
C1	Carry out job thoroughly.				0.803
C2	Reliable worker.				0.685
C3	Do things efficiently.				0.645
C4	Make plans and follows up with them.				0.690
N1	Seldom feel tense.			0.681	
N2	Not worry a lot.			0.618	
N3	Emotionally stable and not upset.			0.717	
N4	Seldom feel moody.			0.671	
N5	Remain calm in tense situation.			0.717	
O1	Come up with new ideas.	0.620			
O2	Creative and a deep thinker.	0.615			
O3	Active imagination.	0.631			
O4	Value artistic experiences.	0.646			
O5	Like to reflect and play with ideas.	0.721			
O6	Have plenty of artistic interests.	0.686			
O7	Advanced in art, music or literature.	0.573			
	Eigenvalue	4.237	2.434	2.024	1.505
	Cumulative	20.178	31.766	41.404	48.571
	Percentage of Variance Explained				
	KMO		0.806		
	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Sig.)		P < .001		

TABLE II: FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR CUSTOMER-ORIENTED BEHAVIOR

Items	Description	Factor Loading
		1
COB1	Help patients by fulfilling their needs.	0.720
COB2	Achieve goals by satisfying patients.	0.718
COB3	Have the patient's best interest in mind.	0.744
COB4	Get patients to discuss their needs.	0.701
COB5	Influence a patient with information rather than by pressure.	0.650
COB6	Offer nursing care best suited to the patient's needs.	0.748
COB7	Find out nursing care most helpful to the patients.	0.725
COB8	Answer patient's question about nursing care correctly.	0.705
COB9	Use nursing care to solve patient's problem.	0.639
COB10	Give patients an accurate expectation of nursing care.	0.680
COB11	Figure out patient's needs.	0.728
	Eigenvalue	5.483
	Percentage of Variance Explained	49.844
	KMO	0.921
	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Sig.)	P < .001

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Since there were only four components extracted from the variable of personality traits, hypothesis has been restated as below:

- H1a: There is a significant relationship between openness to experience and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1b: There is a significant relationship between conscientiousness and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1c: There is a significant relationship between extraversion and customer-oriented behavior.
- H1d: There is a significant relationship between neuroticism and customer-oriented behavior.

TABLE III: RELIABILITY COEFFICIENTS FOR CONSTRUCTS

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Openness to Experience	7	0.779
Conscientiousness	4	0.727
Extraversion	5	0.725
Neuroticism	5	0.716
Customer-Oriented Behavior	11	0.898

Multiple regression analysis was employed to test the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior of nurses in the health tourism hospitals. The results were shown in Table IV. The F statistic (28.043) was significant at the 0.001 level and the result shows that 24.9 percent (R square = 0.249) of the variance in customer-oriented behavior can be explained by the variations in openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism. The results reveal that openness to experience has a positive relationship with customer-oriented behavior ($\beta = 0.443, p < 0.001$) and conscientiousness was positively related to customer-oriented behavior ($\beta = 0.110, p < 0.05$). This implies that a person who possesses personality traits of openness to experience and conscientiousness are prone to exhibit customer-oriented behavior. Among plausible reasons to explain these significant relationships are those nurses possess the trait of openness to experience were creative in generating new ideas to help patients to solve their problems whereas conscientious nurses are more responsible, meticulous, hardworking and dependable. They can do a better job especially in meeting and satisfying patient's needs. Referring to the analysis results in Table 4, hypothesis H1a and H1b were supported whereas hypothesis H1c and H1d were rejected.

TABLE IV: REGRESSION OF PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CUSTOMER-ORIENTED BEHAVIOR

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
Personality Traits	Customer-Oriented Behavior
Openness to Experience	0.443***
Conscientiousness	0.110*
Extraversion	-0.001
Neuroticism	-0.070
F value	28.043
R square	0.249

***significant at the 0.001 level**significant at the 0.01 level*significant at the 0.05 level

V. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide support that personality traits (i.e. openness to experience, conscientiousness) are able to predict nurses' customer-oriented behavior in the Malaysian health tourism hospitals. This study may be of

help to healthcare managers to select the right candidates for customer-oriented nurses. It assists the managers to recruit customer-oriented nurses by identifying their patterns of personality traits. In addition, this study also represents the efforts offered to explain the importance of customer-oriented behavior in the health tourism hospitals where patients' expectation was high on care delivery.

There were some limitations in this study where it needs to be addressed in future research. Firstly, the respondents of this study were mainly comprised of nurses but not to other groups such as doctors, management and administration staffs. Future study should investigate different group of respondents to observe the differences of their level of customer-oriented behavior. Secondly, the independent variables of this research were confined to personality traits only. Future study may consider other individual factors such as motivation, self-monitoring and organizational commitment as the predicting variables. Perhaps, it would elicit different results in relation to nurses' customer-oriented behavior and able to explain nurses' customer-oriented behavior in a better insight.

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