

Determinants of Satisfaction for Automotive After Sales Service Quality: A Preliminary Application of AutoSERVPERF Model

Nooraini Mohamad Sheriff^{1*}, Nur Idayu binti Roslan², Yuhanis binti Yusoff³

^{1,2,3} Arshad Ayub Graduate Business School,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Authors' Email Address: *¹nooraini@uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Successful delivery of customer satisfaction through excellent automotive after sales service quality (AASSQ) can drive long-term profits and reinforces the image of automakers. Customers are generally willing to pay a huge sum of money to secure guarantees and dependable after sales service. Based on this premise, this study determined the automotive after sales service quality dimensions (using AutoSERVPERF model) to deliver customer satisfaction. Data were solicited from 226 respondents who are customers of an automotive after sales service center in Selangor. Convenient sampling technique was used to select volunteer respondents for the survey and a self-administered questionnaire with a 5 point Likert scale was administered for data collection. The responsiveness, empathy, assurance and reliability dimensions of the AutoSERVPERF model were uncovered to be important in delivering satisfaction towards AASSQ. However, among these four dimensions, the empathy and assurance dimensions were perceived to have delivered high performance and are of high importance to customers. Hence, to deliver customer satisfaction towards automotive after sales service, periodic knowledge and skill enhancement training is essential. Instituting clear standard operating procedures, close monitoring and supervision of service staffs would help preserve the consistency and hence reliability of after sales service delivered.

Keywords: Service quality, AutoSERVERF model, automotive after sales service, customer satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

The key to sustainable competitive advantage of a business is to deliver high-quality customer service and attain customer satisfaction, which in turn would impact profitability positively (Keisidou et al., 2013). Satisfied customers will repeat their order, tend to be loyal and can spread positive vibes to others. The delivery of excellent service quality has been postulated as a key determinant of customer satisfaction (Gegeckaite, 2011). This postulation extends to the delivery of after sales service quality. According to Ahmad and Butt (2012), the income made from the arrangement of the after sales service and spare parts sale exceeds three times the value of the initial automotive purchase. Customers are generally eager to pay a huge sum of money to secure guarantees and dependable after sales service. This would be a catalyst to the development in the after sales service businesses which is a significant source of revenue for firms and reinforces the image of automakers. Studies have uncovered that there is a significant

relationship between customer satisfaction and after sales service quality dimensions (Berndt, 2009). This was echoed by Yan and McLaren (2010) in their study where a significant gap was discovered between customers' expectation and perceptions on after sales services quality in the automotive industry. As competition in the Malaysian automotive industry heightens in recent years, it has become increasingly important for automotive after sales service providers to have an in-depth understanding of salient after sales service quality dimensions affecting customer's satisfaction. Successful delivery of excellent automotive after sales service quality can create a platform for a sustainable competitive advantage and long-term success. However, the measures for service quality are still debatable and there is no agreement among researchers on common dimension as measures for service quality (Bhat, 2012; Shekarchizadeh, et al.,2011). The SERVQUAL model no doubt has been the most popular measures of service quality (Parasuraman, 1985,1988), is still insufficient to fully describe service quality in all service settings particularly on automotive after sales service (Bhat, 2012). Further refinement of the multi-dimensional scale of service quality is still needed (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). Moreover, majority of service quality literature were of Western origin, hence more studies are needed to enhance the service quality understanding specifically in automotive after sales in the Eastern context (Kashif et al., 2014).

This study has explored dimensions of automotive after sales service quality basing on the SERVPERF instrument by Parasuraman et al. (1985) to deliver customer satisfaction and sustain a good long-term relationship with them. This study adapted the SERVPERF model and is known as AutoSERVPERF. The scope of AASSQ adopted by this study was based on the SERVPERF instrument. The SERVPERF dimensions were derived based on the SERVQUAL instrument. According to Jain and Gupta (2004), the difference between SERVPERF and SERVQUAL is SERVPERF measures only the customers' perceptions, which is obtained after the service consumption has taken place, but SERVQUAL, measures customers' expectations of what they want through the services and also the perceptions of what they get after the services. Tyagi and Gupta (2013) defined service quality as customer's experience derived from their consumption process that translates into their feelings towards the service received. Customers perception of service quality is based on how satisfied they are with their experience. Parasuraman et al. (1985) on the other hand, defined service quality as consumers' attitude that reflects their perceived overall superiority and excellence in the process and outcome of the service provider. Additionally, service quality has also been characterized as customers' perception on how an administration meets or surpasses their expectations. Service specialists have characterized service quality as the contrast between customers' desires for the administration experience and the impression of the service received. Customers' expectation and perception are the two principle fixings in service quality. Customers would evaluate the service quality as low if performance does not meet their desire and the service quality as high when performance surpasses expectations. In addition, the Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) was performed to ascertain the most important after sales service quality attributes as perceived by customers and firm's performance on them, to facilitate managerial decision-making process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Automotive After Sales Service Quality

After sales service are services provided to customers after exchange and transaction have taken place and the products delivered. Automotive after sales service quality (AASSQ) comprises of customer support and technical support service components which are deemed important in the delivery of automotive after sales service. As such, a context customer satisfaction will be affected by perceptions of product quality, service quality and service environment. Nowak and Washburn (1998) too concurred that

product quality, service quality, cost and timeliness are the main factors leading to customers' satisfaction.

The AutoSERVPERF and AutoSERVQUAL instrument was based on Parasuraman et al. (1985) which advocated the quality of a service to embrace five dimensions, Tangible (appearance of physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personnel and communication materials), Reliability (the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), Responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), Assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence) and Empathy (the caring, individualized attention the firm provides to its customers). In addition, an AutoSERVQUAL model for automotive after sales service quality in Turkey was the primary reference used to formulate the AutoSERVPERF model used in this study for the Malaysian context. This was because of the rigor applied in the operationalization of content and reliability analysis (Gencer & Akkucuk, 2017). Al-Shammari and SamerKanina (2014), reaffirmed that achievement of high service quality would result in high level of customer satisfaction and loyalty. These dimensions of service quality have been adapted to gauge the delivery of automotive after sales service by a leading automotive manufacturer in Malaysia.

AutoSERVPERF Model: Tangible Dimension

Tangibles are a part of the automotive after sales service delivery process. They are physical cues and are used to communicate with the customers about the service that can be expected from the service provider. Tangibles can influence customers' loyalty (Zainal Hanim Saidin et al., 2015). According to Al-Shammari and SamerKanina (2014), tangibles can be defined through customers via their agreement if quality is present or otherwise. Tangibles may include comfortable company's facilities, modern tools, equipment and good technology that are used by the company. Berndt (2009) postulated aspects of tangibles to include signage, parking and layout of the dealership itself. Parasuraman et al. (1988) added that, tangibles can encompass physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel. In the context of automotive after sales service, tangibles would encompass sufficient parking space for customers, utilization of modern equipment in repairing cars, apprentices appear professional at their place of work, offering a replacement vehicle while a customer's car is left at the after sales service center or transportation facilities such as taxi cab or other transportation means during the repair, cleaning cars after the cars were serviced by the technicians, providing sufficient waiting space to customers while their car was being serviced, offering a clear checklist of repairs that have been carried out and ensuring the service center provides a danger free environment (Gencer & Akkucuk, 2017; Bouman & Van der Weile, 1992). These elements would tangibilize the after sales services provided and would directly influence customers' perception of service quality rendered at the automobile after sales service center.

AutoSERVPERF Model: Reliability Dimension

Reliability can be defined as the ability of the automobile after sales service center (AASSC) to deliver their service based on promises that have been made to customers. This dimension is a critical component of an automobile after sales service quality (Berndt, 2009). According to Al-Shammari and SamerKanina (2014), reliability shows that the service is promising and when customers have problems, the staff can attend to their needs sincerely, professionally and in a good manner. Reliability is also about the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately, that is whether the center's technical personnel were able to fix the car as promised or were they reliable in handling faults in the car. Customers will be informed early by the service advisor when their car is ready for collection and this act

clearly shows that they have done their work as promised to the customer (Palmer & O'Neill, 2003). According to Cronholm and Solomonson (2014), reliability includes consistency of performance and steadfastness. It implies that the automotive after sales service center firm plays out the service right the first time around. This is a clear affirmation that the firm respects its promises. In addition, other aspect of reliability would also include exactness in charges imposed on after sales service rendered, keeping records accurately, playing out the service at the assigned time and the firm operates via modern equipment and management system (Zhang et al., 2013). Consequently, Gencer and Akkucuk (2017) incorporated accurate detection of car failure, use of original product parts and personal information security as elements contributing to the reliability of an automobile service quality.

AutoSERVPERF Model: Responsiveness Dimension

Customer responsiveness is the breaking point of a business to see and respond to changing customer needs. It entails the ability or preparedness of workers to deliver benefits to customers. A responsive organization adopts a serious focus on meeting customer needs and prepares its' staff to pass on the most critical standard of customer service (Leviticus, 2011). The responsiveness dimension embodies timeliness of service delivered, examining the needs of customers, offering helpful working hours and individual consideration by staff on customers' safety issues (El Saghier & Nathan, 2013). According to Siddiqi (2011), responsiveness shows the staff's willingness to help customers and their ability to provide good service. Parasuraman (1988) added that responsiveness is the ability of staff to provide prompt service such as rectifying faults in cars, after sales service charges are reasonable, service advisor keeps customers informed about the servicing schedule of their cars and as well as convenient operating hour. The willingness of service provider to deliver assistance to customers is also important such as changing service hours from just weekdays to include weekends and night services due to the changes in the needs of customers (Berndt, 2009). Lastly to heighten customers' satisfaction with their work, it is important for the service provider to explain to the customer why the car repair is carried out. This proactive measure on the part of the service provider implies their responsiveness to mitigate problems that may ensue from their customers' cars, solely for their driving safety and pleasure.

AutoSERVPERF Model: Assurance Dimension

Assurance can be defined as the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. When extended to the automobile after sales service quality, it includes the display of professionalism among staffs in handling car faults, creates customers' confidence in the service delivered, staff's ability to fix the car within the promised time and the ability of staffs to serve their customers in a proper way (Parasuraman et al., 1988). For instance, the after sales service staff will contact customers if there are extra repairs needed, which would make the entire service more expensive, so that the customers will not question the price charged (Bouman & Van der Weile, 1992). Assurance also refers to the level of confidence and trust towards the after sales service center based on the relationship established between the staffs, specifically the service advisor and customers. This implies their level of knowledge, mastery of skills and manner of interaction with customers will inspire trust in the automobile after sales service firm (Berndt, 2009).

AutoSERVPERF Model: Empathy Dimension

Empathy is the ability to accurately diagnose customers' needs and offer individualized attention to customers such as the ability to acknowledge regular customers and learn about their specific

requirements (Yarimoglu, 2014). In the automobile after sales service center, empathy can be demonstrated through the interaction between the staff of the after sales service center and their customers (Ambekar, 2013). Among the essential features of this interaction includes giving customers individual attention, making the effort to understand customers' specific need, dealing with customers in a caring manner, being apologetic for mistakes made and reciprocates with appropriate corrective measures, responding to customers' inquiries, being polite and knowledgeable in answering to customers' queries. According to Holder and Berndt (2011), in delivering empathy, customers should be treated in a way that promotes a sense of belonging to the firm where they are being cared and they received individualized attention. Consequently, empathy can also be understood as personalization that embodies the understanding of customers' specific needs and providing service related to convenience (Zeithaml et al., 2002, 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were solicited from 226 respondents who are customers of an automotive after sales service center in Selangor. Sample size was determined based on the average number of 550 customers per week who sought the after sales services at this center in reference to Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size in relation to population size. The convenience sampling technique was used to select volunteer respondents on the basis of them being customers as well as car owners who have sent their cars to the said after sales service center. Car owners who sent their cars for after sales service more often than not take pride in their vehicles and hence the after sales service quality received from the center is definitely of concern to them and may in turn influence future brand of automobile to be purchased (Zhao & Zhao, 2015). A self-administered structured questionnaire with a 5 point Likert scale was used as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire had 2 sections: section A focused on customers' demographic profile, while section B addressed the AutoSERVPERF dimensions for automotive after sales service quality (performance) and customer satisfaction. Section C of the survey measured the importance of the AASSQ dimensions to customers. The dimensions were evaluated by customers to demonstrate their perceived importance to these dimensions. Section C used the Itemized Rating Scale (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016) whereby '1' represents 'Not Important' and '5' represents 'Very Important'. The results were then analyzed together with the data collected in Section 2 (performance) in order to produce the IPA grid. The IPA analysis will enable AASSC to evaluate their actual performance levels based on the AutoSERVPERF dimensions and the importance customers place to the AutoSERVPERF dimensions. The outcome of this analysis would highlight priority areas that need improvement and assist in the development of strategies for greater performance.

Results from the reliability analysis, descriptive analysis and importance performance analysis performed are presented in the following tables below. The empathy dimension of automotive after sales service quality obtained the highest Cronbach Alpha value of 0.902. Assurance and customer satisfaction showed a good Cronbach Alpha value of 0.797 and 0.719, while tangible, reliability and responsiveness obtained moderate rating of 0.681, 0.685 and 0.658 respectively (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Among the 226 respondents, 58% are males, while 42% were females. A majority (27%) are between 26-30 years old whilst slightly more than two thirds (70%) of customers who have serviced their cars at this service center are Malays. Most of the respondents (40%) are Bachelor's Degree holders with income of between RM2001- RM3000. Managers or executives made up 30% of those who serviced their cars at this service center. Thirty two percent (32%) indicated car repairs as the nature of repair sought at the after sales service center while 73% send their cars for a routine check-up. About 71% of the respondents who patronized this service center had their engine oil changed while 53% changed their oil filter at this service center.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The responsiveness dimension of automotive after sales service quality (AutoSERVPERF Model) attained the highest overall mean of 3.98 followed closely by empathy 3.96 and assurance 3.88. Customers at the automobile after sales service center have agreed that service personnel at this service center were responsive, able to deliver assurance and empathetic in their delivery of automotive after sales service quality to customers (Table 1). Customer responsiveness entails the preparedness of workers to meet customer needs and adhere to the most critical standard of customer service (Leviticus, 2011; Siddiqi, 2011). The responsiveness dimension embodies timeliness of service delivered, examination of customers' needs, offering helpful working hours and consideration on customers' safety issues (El Saghier & Nathan, 2013). Empathy is the ability to accurately diagnose customers' needs and offer individualized attention to customers in a way that promotes a sense of belonging to the service center (Yarimoglu, 2014; Holder & Berndt, 2011). Consequently, assurance entails the level of confidence and trust towards the after sales service center based on the relationship established between the service advisor and customers (Berndt, 2009). In short, AASSC should consistently focus on the responsiveness, empathy and assurance dimensions in delivering their AASSQ to satisfy customers.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation: Overall AASSQ dimensions

Automotive After Sales Service Quality Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (based on mean)
Tangible	3.38	1.03033	5
Reliability	3.74	0.92167	4
Responsiveness	3.98	0.78383	1
Assurance	3.88	0.78660	3
Empathy	3.96	0.79371	2

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Tangible, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy

Elements of Tangible	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (based on mean)
Sufficient parking space at service center.	3.77	0.730	1
Provides car cleaning services after repairs.	3.44	0.913	4
Sufficient space for waiting area.	3.57	1.094	3
Clear signage at service center.	3.62	1.103	2
Checklist of repairs carried out.	2.97	1.179	5
Replacement cars provided.	2.91	1.163	6
Overall Mean	3.38		
Elements of Reliability	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (based on mean)
Employees are reliable in handling car faults.	3.71	0.895	3
Service records are kept accurately.	3.76	0.950	2
Employees fixed car as promised.	3.63	0.972	5
Employees are sincere in solving customer complaints.	3.71	0.967	4
Service center operates with modern equipment.	3.60	0.981	6
Service center uses modern management system.	4.04	0.765	1
Overall Mean	3.74		

Elements of Responsiveness	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (based on mean)
Employees willing to provide prompt service.	4.06	0.709	1
Employees rectify car faults willingly.	4.06	0.692	2
Reasonable charges for repairs.	4.05	0.722	4
Customers informed of their car service schedule.	4.06	0.767	3
Provide assistance to customers, i.e car delivery.	3.86	0.935	5
Explain why car repairs are carried out.	3.76	0.878	6
Overall Mean	3.98		
Elements of Assurance	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (based on mean)
Knowledgeable employees.	3.98	0.718	1
Employees are courteous.	3.91	0.841	2
Fix car within promised time.	3.88	0.797	3
Serves customers in a proper way.	3.84	0.780	4
Contacts customers if extra repairs are needed.	3.81	0.797	5
Reasonable after sales service charges.	3.80	0.796	6
Overall Mean	3.87		
Elements of Empathy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (based on mean)
Initiative to learn about customer's specific requirement.	3.86	0.813	5
Employees answer customer inquiries.	4.23	0.716	1
Employees know customer needs.	3.92	0.776	3
Provide individualize attention to the customer.	3.79	0.843	6
Deals with customer in a caring manner	4.16	0.700	2
Polite in answering customer's enquiries	3.89	0.810	4
Employees apologize for mistakes.	3.89	0.898	4
Overall Mean	4.00		

The descriptive statistics for the tangible dimension showed that the highest mean was 3.77 while the lowest mean was 2.91. This indicates that a majority of the respondents have agreed that there were sufficient parking space at this service center (Berndt, 2009). In contrast, the customers have disagreed with how replacement cars are provided to customers because it was only made available to customers who have major problems with their cars because only limited number of replacement cars were available (Gencer & Akkucuk, 2017; Bouman & Van der Weile, 1992). The reliability dimension of AutoSERVPERF attained the highest mean of 4.04 while the lowest mean stood at 3.60. Customers at their service center have concurred that modern management system had been used by the after sales service center as postulated by Zhang et al. (2013). This could probably explain customer's agreement with a mean of 3.76 that their service record were kept accurately. Two elements in the reliability dimension scored the same mean, of 3.71 which implied customer's agreement that the service personnel at this service center were reliable in handling faults in car and are also sincere in solving customer complaints, as accorded by Al- Shammari and SamerKanina (2014).

Elements in the responsiveness dimension garnered the highest mean is 4.06 with the lowest mean being 3.76. Three elements in this dimension attained mean of 4.06 which implies that service personnel at this center are willing to provide prompt service, rectify faults in their customers' car and kept their customers updated about their service schedule which parallels literature by Parasuraman et al. (1988). This clearly expresses the center's serious focus on meeting customer needs and has prepared its' staff to pass on the most critical standard of customer service (Leviticus, 2011). The assurance dimension showed the highest mean of 3.98 whilst the lowest mean was 3.80. The highest mean postulated that service personnel at this

service center are knowledgeable (3.98) and courteous towards customers (3.91). This implies that staffs can assure customers and inspire trust towards their service through their competent level of knowledge, skills and good interaction (Berndt, 2009).

The empathy dimension of AutoSERVPERF attained the highest mean of 4.23 while the lowest mean stood at 3.79. Thus, implying that customers who patronized this service center were satisfied with the service personnel as their inquiries were well answered (4.23) and were dealt with in a caring manner (4.16). In the automobile after sales service center, empathy can be demonstrated through the interaction between the staff of the service center and their customers, such as dealing with customers in a caring manner and knowledgeable in answering customer's queries (Ambekar, 2013).

In complementing the findings of the study, an Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) was performed on the 5 dimensions of automotive after sales service quality as displayed in Figure 1. The AASSQ dimension that fell into quadrant A was reliability. This showed that the reliability dimension was deemed to be of high importance to customers who have patronized this service center but unfortunately, the center's performance on the reliability dimension was low. Thus, the strategy advocated in Quadrant A for the reliability dimension is 'concentrate here'. Aspects of the reliability dimensions that need improvement are developing employees who are capable of handling faults in car, able to keep accurate car service records and displays sincerity in solving customer complaints (Zhang et al., 2013). This implies there is an immediate need for this after sales service center to train and drive employees to better handle their customers.

The AASSQ dimensions that fell into quadrant B are assurance and empathy. Quadrant B implies that customers at this service center have perceived the assurance and empathy dimensions of AASSQ to be of high importance to them and has delivered high performance. Based on the strategy advocated in quadrant B that is 'keep up the good work', this service center should keep up the good work they have achieved in delivering assurance and empathy to customers. Among aspects of the assurance and empathy dimensions that need to be maintained are knowledgeable and courteous employees, ability of the employees to inform customers on changes in service charges and their mannerism in meeting customers' needs.

The tangible dimension of AASSQ fell into quadrant C that advocates low importance and low performance. The proposed strategy of 'low priority' in quadrant C has suggested that the tangible dimension of AASSQ was perceived by customers to have delivered a low performance and was also of low importance to them when sending their cars for servicing at this service center. Aspects of the tangibility dimensions such as sufficient parking space, sufficient waiting area, clear signage, clear checklist of repairs carried out and the replacement cars although have been provided but may still have not met the expectations of customers, thus explaining the low performance rating received. The low importance could indicate that as much as these "tangibles" does communicate about the quality of the service center, the ultimate service, that is of prime importance to customers is very much associated with services directly impacting their vehicle safety and functionality such as repairs, parts replacement, oil changes and alike.

Consequently, the AASSQ dimensions that fell into quadrant D was responsiveness. Quadrant D is associated with low importance and high performance. The strategy postulated was 'possible overkill' by the business. Quadrant D advocates that customers who have sent their cars for servicing here have perceived the responsiveness dimension of AASSQ to be of low importance but this after sales service center has been performing very well on the responsiveness dimension. Thus, this service center should not overly focus on delivering responsiveness but instead use their resources to develop the more important dimensions of automotive after sales service quality as depicted by their customers.

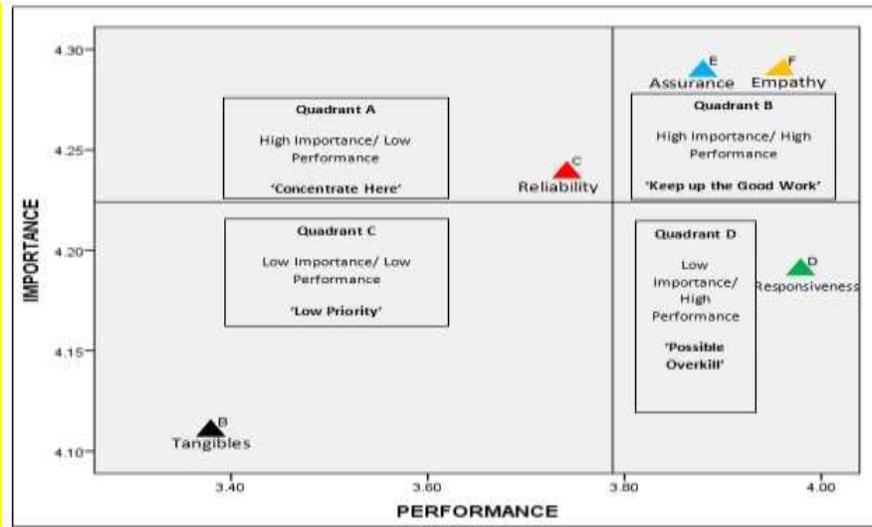


Figure 1: Importance-Performance Analysis for AASSQ Dimensions.

CONCLUSION

It is important for automotive after sales service centers to deliver excellent after-sales service, which has a very important role in customer satisfaction. As the Malaysian automotive industry is fast becoming a mature market, car producers are consistently challenged to upkeep their after sales service quality in serving and satisfying customers. Customer satisfaction is important as organizations can leverage on their satisfaction indicators to improve and manage their business. High customer satisfaction leads to repeat visitation to stores, repeating product purchases, and positive word-of-mouth, while low customer satisfaction will result in customers' public and private complaints. Findings of this study has revealed that responsiveness, empathy, assurance and reliability are dimensions of after sales service quality that have been well performed by service personnel at this service center. However, among these four dimensions, the empathy and assurance dimensions have been perceived to deliver high performance that is of high importance to customers patronizing the service center. Additionally, the reliability dimension was perceived to be of high importance to customers but the service center attained low performance while responsiveness was rated to be of high performance but unfortunately customers rated the dimension to be of low importance to them.

IMPLICATION

This study will also contribute theoretically to literature since it examines automotive after-sales service quality identified from various service quality concepts and how it affects customer satisfaction. Practically, this study provides empirical suggestions for automotive after sales service centers to improve their quality of service and focus on customer satisfaction as the strategy for long-term profitability and sustainability. In managing to deliver customer satisfaction towards automotive after sales service center, resources must be channeled to sustain the empathy and assurance dimensions while improving the reliability dimension. Periodic training for knowledge and skill enhancement should be the mainstay of such service centers in assuring customers of the service delivered. Additionally, the ability of service providers to empathize with customers too is important. The ability to diagnose customers' need

accurately, responding to their queries politely, attentively and in a caring manner would show the organization's empathy towards their customers. The "pleasantness" in customer handling and treatment will result in good service experience, which in turn will positively impact the service organization. Instituting clear standard operating procedures for employees to abide would help to preserve the consistency of service delivered hence resulting in the delivery of reliable services. Close monitoring and supervision of service staffs too would facilitate the delivery of reliable services as depicted by customers.

This study only focused on customer satisfaction in the context of an automotive after-sales service center of a national carmaker. A future study can be done at the industry level and examines both national and non-national carmakers to compare between them. A more diverse sample may improve the generalizability of the findings and enhance the understanding of the concept of automotive after sales service quality. The study too can be further extended by dividing the customers into free service group (within warranty period) and non-free service group.

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