Comparison of Expectations-Performance of Malaysian Frontliners and Satisfaction Level on Government Decisions During The Early Stage of the COVID-19 Outbreak

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Abstract

This study investigates the gap between expectation and perceived performance of Malaysian frontliner and examines the citizen's satisfaction level with the government decision-making during the first wave of the pandemic. A cross-sectional survey of 346 Malaysian citizens uses snowball sampling until it reaches the appropriate sample size. The analysis of this study used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software such as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Normality and Wilcoxon's Signed-rank Test for matched pairs of perceived performance and expectations of five frontliner services, namely healthcare, police, armed, immigration, and maritime. Finally, this study used descriptive analysis to examine whether a disconfirmation met, exceeded, or below citizen expectations and satisfaction levels upon government decisions implementing several measures to curb the virus spread. The finding revealed that the perceived performance of all the frontliner services during the pandemic met and exceeded the respondents' expectations, and they were satisfied with the government's decisions. Based on the findings, future studies might consider using probability sampling and thus be able to conduct parametric analysis.

Keywords: Expectations; Perceived Performance; Disconfirmation; Satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have measured citizens' satisfaction in various ways. Citizens' satisfaction has been discussed for a long time in a variety of contexts, which may have implications for government and public service providers (Elrehail et al., 2019; Jilke, 2018; Li et al., 2013; Suchánek & Králová, 2018; Wang, 2010; Zenker & Rütter, 2014). Citizens may evaluate services only for their interests or for the welfare of society at large (Song et al., 2020). Citizen satisfaction is influenced by expectations, experiences, and previous attitudes. A crisis is one aspect that affects citizen satisfaction (Lakovic, 2021; Venetoklis, 2021). A crisis highlights the necessity for comprehensive crisis management and preparedness in the public sector. Political and administrative authorities sense a threat to society's fundamental beliefs and life-sustaining institutions amidst significant uncertainty (Rosenthal et al., 1989). Due to political and pandemic occurrences, Malaysia has been in shock for approximately two years, with severe sociopolitical repercussions. The Malaysian government has enacted

hundreds of billions of ringgit worth of humanitarian and economic stimulus packages, indicating that it listens and acts to support citizens and the economy. Malaysia adopted complex measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (MOF, 2020). The government's response to and communication about a crisis directly impacts the public's well-being and shapes public expectations of the government. Any perceived or actual failures would undermine the legitimacy of the government (Bowie, March 16, 2020). Citizens' discontent with the government's handling of COVID-19 is eroding policymaking and societal stability (Faiez & Rao, 2019). Despite several studies on the expectation-performance link in public administration, this relationship under crises has not been well studied and deserves additional study (Mung, 2021, June 8). Consequently, this research examines people's expectations, perceived performance, and satisfaction concerning Malaysian frontline personnel during the early stages of the pandemic. This study analyzed citizens' perceptions using Expectancy-disconfirmation Model (EDM) by Oliver (1997).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive Data

The respondents of this study were Malaysians who volunteered to participate in the research. The respondents come from a wide diversity of backgrounds. This study surveyed 346 Malaysians. After data cleaning, 345 samples were received and utilised in the study. This study created an online questionnaire using Google Form and sent it to the authors' contacts. Respondents were requested to complete the survey and distribute the online questionnaires to as many connections as possible using WhatsApp until the researchers attained the sample size. The data collection period commenced on June 15, 2020, and concluded two weeks later. This study used a snowball sampling technique as the targeted respondents were vulnerable to movement restrictions imposed by the Malaysian government during the pandemic outbreak. The respondents consisted of users and non-users of public services because both groups have distinct viewpoints on public services (Van de Walle, 2018). Regarding sample size, prior studies have provided several criteria (Hair et al., 2018; Jackson, 2003; Kline, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). This study considered 300 samples after considering the recommendations of the scholars.

Paired Comparison Tests for Two Related Samples of Measurement

A study performed a t-test to compare paired data when a parametric inferential condition was fulfilled (Daniel, 1990) and examine the significant mean difference from zero. The primary assumption for parametric statistics is that the data follows a normal distribution. If not, the t-test paired comparison was not generally valid (Das & Imon, 2016). Thus, it was essential to assess the normality assumption before proceeding with any formal statistical analysis. According to Öztuna et al. (2006), the general normality assumption test was Kolmogorov-Smirnov, which supports the null hypothesis for normality assumption as the p-value of the test was more than 0.05.

The study aimed to investigate the gap between expectation and perceived performance of frontliner before and after the pandemic. Wilcoxon's signed-rank test was used for matched pairs to compare the median for two distributions. A characteristic of these nonparametric tests was the median rather than mean as its considerable interest in parameter testing for non-normal distribution (Daniel, 1990). Wilcoxon's signed-rank test also allows determining not only the difference but also the magnitude of any difference. As the null hypothesis of the median for the population, that the difference is equal to or less than zero, was rejected, this finding concludes that one treatment is more effective than the other. In this study, the perceived performance of the overall frontliner services meets the respondents' expectations, therefore rejecting the null hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondent that contributed to this study were female, with 70.4 %, while only 29.6% were male. Most of the respondents were single, with 73.3%, 26.4% were married, and only 0.3% were others, such as widowed or divorced. Most respondents had STPM/Matriculation/Diploma as their education level, with 58.6%, followed by SPM and degree level, with 17.1% and 16.8%, respectively. Lastly, most of the respondents, with 69.8%, came from the other sector, 18.3% public sector, 7.8% private sector, and 4.3% were self-employed.

Table 1: *Respondent's Demographic Profile*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	243	70.4
Marital Status	Single	253	73.3
	Married	91	26.4
	Others	1	0.3
Education Level	SPM	59	17.1
	STPM/Matriculation/Diploma	202	58.6
	Degree	58	16.8
	Master's Degree	24	7.0
	PhD	2	0.6
Sector	Public	63	18.3
	Private	27	7.8
	Self-employed	15	4.3
	Others (includes those who are not working or those who are still studying	240	69.8

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality for the Differences Perceived Performance and Expectation

This study investigated five frontline services: healthcare, police, armed, immigration, and maritime service. The respondents rated frontliner services based on expectations before the pandemic and their perception of the performance of the frontliners during the pandemic using a 7-point Likert scale of measurement. Table 2 shows the result of the normality assumption for the difference between perceived performance and expectation using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The significant value for all the service differences in Table 2 was less than 0.05, indicating that the normality assumptions were not fulfilled, thus rejecting the null hypothesis. Therefore, further analysis should conduct non-parametric statistical testing (Fitzgerald et al., 2001).

Table 2: *Result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov*

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Statistics	df	Sig
Diff_Healthcare	345	0.800	1.00	-5.00	5.00	0.224	345	.000
Diff_Police	345	0.8754	1.00	-2.00	5.00	0.217	345	.000
Diff_Armed	345	0.8580	1.00	-3.00	5.00	0.244	345	.000
Diff_Immigration	345	0.8464	1.00	-3.00	6.00	0.226	345	.000
Diff_Maritime	345	0.7942	1.00	-2.00	5.00	0.245	345	.000

Wilcoxon's Signed-Rank Test for Matched Pairs

Table 3 shows the results of Wilcoxon's signed-rank test for matched pair of perceived performance and expectations of frontliner services for healthcare, police, armed, immigration, and maritime. The negative ranks indicate the value of the perceived performance level is less than the expected level. In contrast, positive ranks were higher than expected for the perceived performance level. The total of ties value was for an equal perceived performance and expectation level, indicating zero value differences. The zero-value ties will be eliminated from the analysis and reduce the samples accordingly (Daniel, 1990). The significant value based on Table 3 for all pairs of differences frontliner services was less than 0.05, and rejected the null hypothesis. Therefore, the perceived performance of all the frontliner services during the COVID-19 outbreak for healthcare, police, armed, immigration, and maritime exceeded the expectation level of the respondents.

Table 3: *Result of Wilcoxon's Signed-rank Test*

Variables (Perceived –Expectation)		N	Mean Rank	Sums of Ranks	Z value	Sig (1-tailed)
Diff_Healthcare	Negative Ranks	30	77.53	2326.00	-9.869	0.000
	Positive Ranks	175	107.37	18789.00		
	Ties	140				
	Total	345				
Diff_Police	Negative Ranks	22	81.14	1785.00	-10.812	0.000
	Positive Ranks	189	108.89	20581.00		
	Ties	134				
	Total	345				
Diff_Armed	Negative Ranks	20	69.80	1396.00	-10.584	0.000
	Positive Ranks	176	101.76	17910.00		
	Ties	149				
	Total	345				
Diff_Immigration	Negative Ranks	27	70.00	1890.00	-10.475	0.000
	Positive Ranks	179	108.55	19431.00		

	Ties	139				
	Total	345				
Diff_Maritime	Negative Ranks	21	70.40	1478.50	-10.539	0.000
	Positive Ranks	175	101.87	17827.50		
	Ties	149				
	Total	345				

This study compares the expectations and perceived performance before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a well-known consumer satisfaction marketing theory, although public sector studies on this relationship are new and limited in developing countries (Chatterjee & Suy, 2019). The model indicated that expectations, particularly disconfirmation, play a significant role in satisfaction formation. A high rating on performance tend to have positive disconfirmation and this lead to increased satisfaction, but a higher rating on expectations tend to have negative disconfirmation and which will lower satisfaction (Oliver, 1997). The result shows that citizens perceive frontliners' effectively perform their duties and exceed their expectations before and during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, which is in line with past studies (Filtenborg et al., 2017; Morgeson, 2012; Van Ryzin, 2006). This paper offers empirical results from citizens' satisfaction during pandemic crises by validating and generalizing EDM in a developing country context. Besides, this study enables researchers, public managers, and others to better understand citizen satisfaction in this situation and continuously improve public information provision and service delivery.

Disconfirmation of Government's Performance

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for disconfirmation variable in delivering citizen-centric services during the COVID-19 outbreak using a 7-point Likert scale. This variable measures to what extent the government's performance either meets, exceeds or below citizen expectations. On average, the respondent's rate 5.70 indicates the performance of the government approaches significantly exceeds the expectations. The finding shows that 50% of the respondents rate more than 6.00 while another 50% rate less than 6.00. Thus, it confirms that government performance meets and exceeds citizens' expectations in delivering citizen-centric services during the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, the minimum value of the disconfirmation was 3.00, and the maximum value was 7.00.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics on Disconfirmation*

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max
Disconfirmation	345	5.70	6.00	2.00	7.00

Satisfaction on Government Decision during Covid-19 Outbreak

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for the variable of a decision made by the government during the COVID-19 outbreak using a 7-point Likert scale. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the government decided to overcome the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The decision implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO), offering the PRIHATIN scheme for an economy package, essential services allowed during MCO, and implementing Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) during MCO.

On average, the respondents' rate was 5.72 to 5.83, which indicates satisfaction with all government decisions (MCO, PRIHATIN Scheme, Essential Services, SOP during MCO) during the COVID-19 outbreak. The satisfaction level shows a 50% rate more than 6.00 while another 50% rate less than 6.00 on all government decisions during the Covid-19 outbreak. The analysis concludes that respondents are satisfied with the government's decision to deliver citizen-centric services during the COVID-19 outbreak to overcome the spread of viruses. In addition, the only minimum value of the offering PRIHATIN Scheme was 1.00, while the others were 2.00, and the maximum value was 7.00.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics of Variable of Interest*

Variable	N	Mean	Median	Min	Max
MCO	345	5.83	6.00	2.00	7.00
PRIHATIN Scheme	345	5.80	6.00	1.00	7.00
Essential Services	345	5.72	6.00	2.00	7.00
SOP during MCO	345	5.77	6.00	2.00	7.00

CONCLUSION

This study was driven by a literature gap regarding the impact of the crisis on citizens' expectations and perceptions. The literature on the Expectancy-disconfirmation Model that originated in the marketing field shows existing theoretical and empirical support for satisfaction in the public sector. However, the empirical studies were limited to developing countries and crisis contexts. Therefore, the researcher inclines to compare citizens' expectations and perceptions of the government's operation in handling the pandemic and satisfaction with government decisions to curb the spread of COVID-19 and financial assistance. This study discovered that all frontliners' performances met the citizens' expectations during the crisis. Thus, it shows the frontliners of our country have done their best to carry out their duties to serve the community. In addition, the government is doing well in handling the pandemic to meet and exceed citizens' expectations.

Furthermore, citizens are satisfied with the decisions made by the government. We anticipate that gaining a better knowledge of this process will also give us fresh and more detailed insights into the overall governance of crisis management. The result of this study cannot be generalized because it used a non-parametric sampling technique; thus, the sample was limited and did not represent the whole Malaysian population. As a recommendation, future studies might consider using probability sampling to extend the result to the population. Hopefully, future studies can conduct more parametric analyses.

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