Differences in Customer Delight Rating Linked to Customer Actions in Japanese and Foreign Residents Using Restaurant Services in Japan

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Abstract. Customer satisfaction is seen as an important perspective that affects customer loyalty. But it is difficult to analyze each customer's evaluation reason in a simple manner. In this research, a web questionnaire system is applied to handle this issue, allowing a respondent who is the customer to describe their actions in the service experience and to evaluate it. Customer delight in the use of restaurant services by Japanese and foreign residents in Japan is selected to validate hypotheses related to the targeted issues. And then, the data acquisition and analysis are conducted. The results indicate that there are differences in customer actions related to customer delight based on the comparison. 40% of the factors that impressed Japanese customers in restaurant service were the taste and appearance of food. On the other hand, foreign residents have the factors related to taste and appearance, but they are more than satisfied with the provision of services, and there are not many descriptions of evaluation from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. We suggest that a more elaborate customer loyalty design is possible based on customer action by clarifying the impact of customer delight based on this kind of research approach.

Keywords: Customer delight · Restaurant · Cross-cultural comparison

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In a globalized economy, service companies need to properly grasp the points at which various customers with diverse cultural backgrounds evaluate their service provision. Currently, many customers in the service industry use mobile devices such as smartphones. Also, in the provision of services, the use of such technology has created an environment for providing services based on the characteristics of individual customers, from mass marketing to one-to-one marketing [1].

However, the data acquisition environment is insufficient in place to determine what kind of service is appropriate for each customer in providing services that involve real interactions between service providers and customers, such as the hospitality industry. The more specific problem is that the cost of data collection and analysis is high for methods such as current interviews and questionnaires. Thus, it is challenging

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to put analysis to obtain the viewpoint of what reason each customer has evaluated the service based on the machine learning and automation system using AI. In other words, it is difficult to automate the one-to-one marketing that takes into account the individuality of customers in the analysis based on the current customer survey method in the service provision with real interaction.

In conventional service research, the interaction between a customer and a service provider is called service encounter, and its constituent elements are not only the provision of products and services but the provision of the entire series of processes [2, 3]. Service provider behavior at the forefront of service delivery is critical to customer evaluation of services [4]. The quality of service encounter has been recognized as a source of competitive advantage for service companies [5, 6]. How service experience affect customer loyalty is an essential concern for service companies. The measure of customer loyalty is related to the customer's intention to act after providing the service, such as the intention to repurchase/reuse the service, the intention to recommend to a specific company or business, or a positive or negative review [7–10].

Factors affecting customer loyalty were identified in the evaluation of service encounters at retail stores, hotels, and restaurants. In particular, as a leading indicator of customer loyalty, it has been pointed out that customer cognitive responses such as service quality have the strongest influence on future customer behavior [11–13]. Typical service quality cognitive measures include SERVQUAL's evaluation on the axis of Reliability, Assurance, Responsive, Tangibles, and Empathy. Other dimensions have also been proposed and verified [3, 14, 15]. For example, it has been verified that food quality in the restaurant industry is a factor in the future purchasing behavior of customers [16–18]. The view that service companies are not just providing physical products has evolved their service quality metrics [19, 20].

At the same time that management progress has been made to improve the quality of services, efforts are being made in consumer research to deepen understanding of customer satisfaction [7, 21–23]. It has been confirmed that the customer's emotional reaction when the customer is treated favorably at the service encounter also affects customer behavior such as repurchasing and reuse [24].

However, while customer satisfaction has long been a pursuit for companies, research on customer satisfaction has consistently shown a weak relationship with the customer loyalty scale [25, 26]. In the industry, a high level of customer satisfaction, known as "customer delight", was considered a clear goal for customer loyalty and profit [27]. Academically, the concept of customer delight, a very high level of satisfaction, has been described as a "surprisingly unexpected function of pleasure" resulting from "very pleasant performance" [28]. In emotion research, there is an agreement that delight is one of the synthesized emotions characterized by a combination of high pleasant (joy, uplifting) and high activation [29, 30]. Customer delight is a strong predictor of crucial outcomes such as commitment, willingness to pay, and purchase intent in customer loyalty [31–36].

A comprehensive view is given that the cognitive response of the customer in such a series of service encounters stimulates an emotional response, and in turn affects behavioral intentions such as customer loyalty [37–43]. At service encounters such as hotels, restaurants, tourism, and banks, the relationship between service quality and

positive emotional responses (e.g., joy, happiness, excitement) and behavioral intentions such as customer loyalty is also being verified [44–47].

In service companies, there is a high interest in identifying specific actions that can be implemented to delight customers for on-site employees at service encounters. In terms of service delivery, in a service experience that is difficult to evaluate before using the service, customers often rely on recommendations from the service provider when selecting a service. There is an approach to analyze the impact from the customer regarding whether it is a request from the customer and regarding what kind of recommendation the employee on the site leads to the customer delight [48]. Given the nature of these recommendations, service providers can provide customers with high up-front expectations with experiences that lead to customer delight. However, on the other hand, unsolicited advice has also proved to be problematic due to its invasive nature [49].

From the viewpoint of evaluation of service encounters in conventional service research, the influence from emotional aspects such as the quality of service encounters and customer satisfaction affecting customer loyalty has been analyzed. There have also been discussions on ways to reach customers based on recommendations to customers. However, because of data acquisition, it is difficult to quantitatively analyze the impact on customer loyalty associated with each action of the service encounter, such as what kind of service provision will increase customer satisfaction and customer delight.

Given these observations, a simple data acquisition and analysis method are required to capture the context of the customer during service evaluation. The use of a web questionnaire method has already been used in many practices and is proposed. Nevertheless, there is a need to extend the methodology to obtain data to better understand the context in customer evaluation while utilizing such an approach. In terms of this viewpoint, a dynamic web questionnaire model was proposed [50].

1.2 Research Purpose and Objective

Here, the Web questionnaire method [50] is applied that can more easily analyze the reasons for evaluation linked to the actions of each customer in the service encounter. This will provide essential data that will contribute to the development of One-to-One marketing. In this paper, based on the data obtained from this Web questionnaire method, we construct exploratory hypotheses about customer loyalty based on the evaluations associated with each service behavior in the customer service experience and the viewpoints of the reasons. This will further expand the data maintenance, expansion, and verification of marketing theory related to customer loyalty based on the evaluation criteria and dynamic characteristics of each individual customer.

In addition, a simpler data management and analysis environment will be discussed based on the data. The first step required to solve the set research subject relates to the correction required to interpret the customer's context for the existing web questionnaire. The second step is to conceptualize the automation of data analysis and the visual confirmation method of the results utilizing the acquired data. Due to current web questionnaires mainly use static analysis methods with pre-defined question items, it is difficult to adapt to the wide range of the customer's criteria to their service provision automatically.

1.3 Approach

The Web questionnaire system [50] has a two-stage Web page structure. In the Web form on the first page, the actions from the start to the end of the service used by the respondents themselves can be described on the Web form in one-line with a one-action, and then the contents can be sent to the second page. On the second page, in addition to the questionnaire items related to general service evaluation, question items related to each customer satisfaction evaluation and the reason is generated in connection with each service action sent from the first page. This means that survey respondents can perform service evaluations linked to their own service behavior in addition to the usual service evaluation questions.

An analysis will be conducted on the difference in evaluation criteria when using restaurant service between Japanese and foreign residents in Japan to build a hypothesis from evaluation data linked to service behavior for each customer obtained from this method. In particular, to see the difference in service evaluation standards due to the different cultural backgrounds of customers, more specific service behavior, and customer delight, which is immense pleasure and surprise, were taken up. By constructing a hypothesis about the relationship between the evaluation linked to the specific service behavior described by each survey respondent and customer satisfaction, discussions will be held on theoretical expansion based on the viewpoints of differences in service evaluation standards for each customer and their dynamic changes.

The following two hypotheses are defined. Hypothesis 1: Among customers who are impressed by using restaurant services, Japanese people have a higher percentage of satisfaction with taste than foreign residents. Hypothesis 2: Among customers who are impressed by using restaurant services, foreign residents are more likely to be based on cultural factors than Japanese.

2 Method and Data Acquisition

2.1 The Applied Web Questionnaire System

The applied Web questionnaire system [50] has two stages of pages. There are two input forms on the first web questionnaire page. In the first form (see Fig. 1), the name of the service used is written. In the second form, the behavior/action of the service experienced in the evaluation target service of each questionnaire respondent is described.

On the second questionnaire page, in addition to the usual question items, each customer satisfaction and open-question item linked to each service action sent from the first is generated (see Fig. 2). The following items were set as common questionnaire questions: Usage date/time, number of frequency, number of visitors, prior expectations, cost, a gap with expectations after usage, overall satisfaction, intention to revisit, intention to recommend, overall comment (free-answer). For evaluation of prior expectations, gaps between expectations, overall customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction linked to each service action, intention to revisit, intention of recommendation, a seven-level Likert scale of −3 to +3 is used.

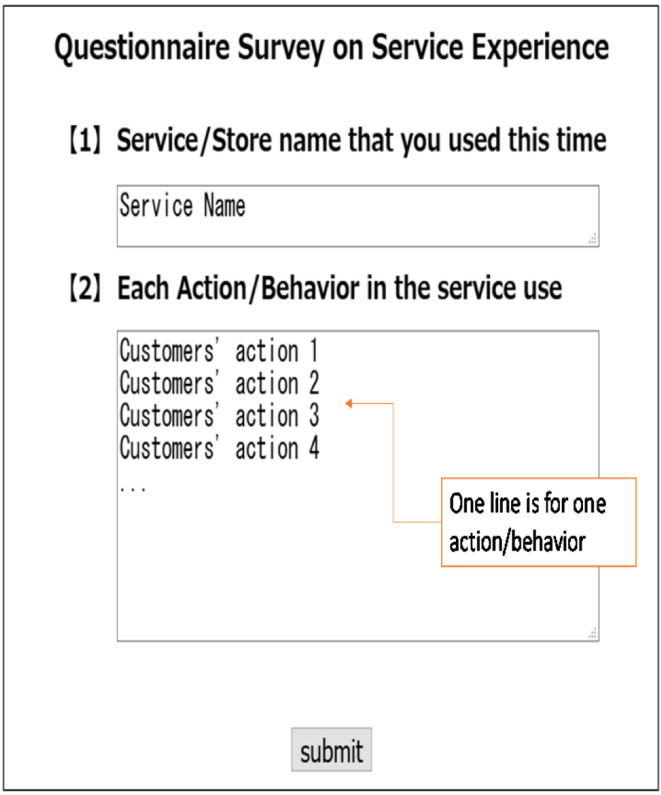

Fig. 1. Overview of the 1st page of the web questionnaire.

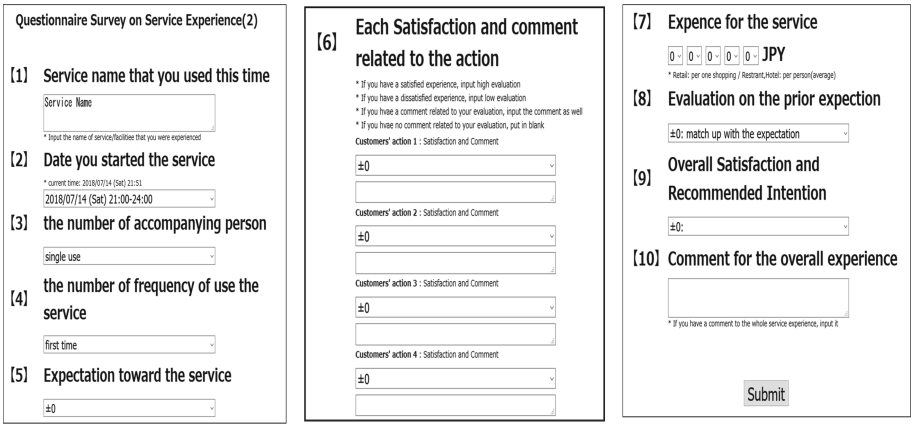

Fig. 2. Overview of the 2nd page of the web questionnaire.

The CS pattern linked to the behavior of the customer experience can be analyzed from the viewpoint of data analysis. The customers are requested to fill items in the web questionnaire form based on each customer's satisfaction linked to the behavior in the range from entering to leaving the store. The data is plotted on the 0–1 number line by representing 0 when entering a restaurant and 1 when leaving it (see Fig. 3). By structuring the CS rating linked to the customer's actions, the research design can be made for comprehensive analysis and interpretation.

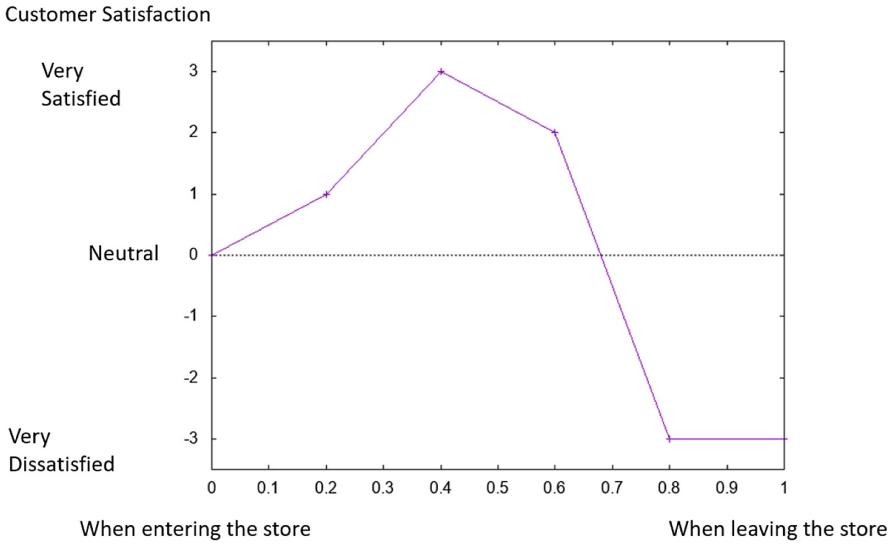

Fig. 3. An example of the data analysis.

In addition, an implementation of this system using business process models as a basis to manage and analyze such data visually is available. The business process models are established using the ADOxx Metamodelling Platform [51] which is a platform to implement domain-specific metamodels for experimentation. In particular, ADOxx supports the development of hybrid modeling methods that are composed of artifacts and fragments required by a specific domain and extended to needs observed. As the objective is to provide an intuitive environment, graphical tool support is required. The ADOxx platform is used as a development and deployment environment following a meta-modeling approach based on building blocks [52] utilizing conceptual structures as a formal means to identify the syntax and semantics of required constructs.

2.2 Survey Design

A web questionnaire survey was conducted in March 2019 to acquire data for this web questionnaire method. With regard to the use of restaurant services in Japan, 82 respondents from 39 Japanese (female ratio 54.0%, average age 34.9 years, age standard deviation 10.6 years), allowing multiple responses to respondents. 82 responses

were obtained from 43 people (44.2% female, average age 33.0 years, standard age deviation 9.0 years). The respondents of this questionnaire are registrants of research monitors owned by a marketing research company in Japan. The population of the Japanese research monitor is 3.87 million across Japan. The population of foreign monitors in Japan is 5794 throughout Japan. Monitors for foreign residents in Japan include multiple nationalities such as the United States, the Philippines, China, the United Kingdom, and India.

3 Result

3.1 Result from the Restaurant Data

In the question on overall satisfaction with service use (7-level Likert scale), data with an answer of +2 or +3 was judged as the customer satisfaction group. The percentage of customer satisfaction in restaurant use obtained from this survey was 42.7% for Japanese respondents and 53.7% for foreign respondents in Japan (Table 1). Comparing the customer satisfaction group (N = 35) and the non-customer satisfaction group (N = 47) in the Japanese data, in the independent sample t-test, the customer satisfaction group has a statistically significant difference in a gap of expectation, customer satisfaction, reuse intention, and recommendation intention. Comparing the customer satisfaction group (N = 44) and the non-customer satisfaction group (N = 38) in the foreign residents data, in the independent sample t-test, the customer satisfaction group has a statistically significant difference in a gap of expectation, customer satisfaction, reuse intention, and recommendation intention.

In addition to the customer satisfaction mentioned above, a question about the gap in expectations (7-level Likert scale), +2 or +3 respondents who could be interpreted as having achieved a service experience better than expected was classified as a customer delight group. This means that the respondent using the service is satisfied and has a positive service experience that exceeds expectations. In the customer data of service experience in restaurant usage obtained from this survey, the percentage of responses judged as customer delight was 22.1% for Japanese and 24.4% for foreign residents in Japan. There were 18 responses for Japanese customer delight group, and 17 for non-customer delight and customer satisfaction group. In the t-tests of the independent samples of both groups, there was a statistically significant difference at the significance level of 0.05 only the gap of expectation and the intention of recommendation. There were 20 responses for foreign customer delight group in Japan, and 24 for non-customer delight and customer satisfaction group. In the t-tests of the independent samples of both groups, there was a statistically significant difference at the significance level of 0.05 only the gap of expectation.

In this questionnaire method, data for each customer action/behavior in service experience with customer satisfaction and the evaluation reason is obtained. Specifically, the data structure that can be acquired is service action (one action per line) with customer satisfaction and comment on the reason for evaluation (free-answer). Respondents are asked to rate and comment on their behavior when there is some notable point of view in the targeted service experience. For service actions that do not

Table 1. Frequency of the data: gender, age, CS, and delight.

Japanese		Foreign residents in Japan	
Gender		Gender	
Male	21	Male	19
Female	18	Female	24
	39		43
Age		Age	
20-29	8	20-29	9
30-39	13	30-39	16
40-49	9	40-49	14
50-59	9	50-59	4
	39		43
		Custoemr Satisfaction	
Custoemr Satisfaction		Satisfied	44
Satisfied	35	Dissatisfied	38
Dissatisfied	47		82
	82		
Customer Delight		Customer Delight	
Delighted	18	Delighted	20
Non-delighted	64	Non-delighted	62
	82		82

have a particularly noteworthy point of view, plus/minus 0 (±0), which is the default customer satisfaction answer item, is attached.

Next, in the data judged to be customer delight in using Japanese restaurants by Japanese and foreign residents in Japan, an analysis of customer satisfaction linked to individual behavior in each service experience was made. In the Japanese customer delight group, 32 data on each service behavior with positive customer satisfaction and reasons were obtained. On the other hand, the 48 data were obtained from the customer delight group of foreign residents in Japan. The evaluation and interpretation of these extracted service behaviors were coded from a qualitative point of view. As a result, the elements that delight Japanese people in service experiences at restaurants are as follows (Table 2). Meal contents (taste and appearance of dishes, etc.) is 44%, service delivery (how to provide the service, customer service, speed, etc.) is 28%, store exterior/interior/interior maintenance is 9.4%, communication (conversation) is 6.3%, price is 6.3%, and service recovery (such as an apology from the service provider) is 3%. The elements that delight the service experience for foreign residents in Japan are as follows (Table 3). Service delivery is 40%, meal content is 35%, exterior/interior/interior maintenance is 15%, and price is 9.9%. The results show that as a difference in the proportion of elements that delight in the service experience, foreign residents in Japan have a higher proportion of service delivery (service delivery, customer service, speed, etc.) than Japanese.

Table 2. Positive actions in delighted customer (Japanese).

The reasons of the positive service actions	
Taste/appearance of meal	43.8%
Service delivery	28.1%
Exterior/interior/interior maintenance	9.4%
Communication	6.3%
Price	6.3%
Service recovery	3.1%

Table 3. Positive actions in delighted customer (Foreign residents).

The reasons of the positive service actions	
Service delivery	39.6%
Taste/appearance of meal	35.4%
Exterior/interior/interior maintenance	14.6%
Price	8.3%

3.2 Overview of the Implemented System

Based on the data analysis performed above, the extended system for integrated process visualization support is also presented by applying the process-based web questionnaire system [50]. Figure 4 shows an object for data visualization connected to this survey data. The system can display these data in terms of several aspects, such as one variable, line-chart of customer satisfaction, and customer action evaluation with the reason. The uniqueness of this system is the customer action evaluation. It makes association by connecting one customer action, customer satisfaction for each action, and the reason for the evaluation (see Fig. 5). And then, the target industry, data analysis range, data analysis method, and output result are also adjusted. These characteristics establish the continuous dataflow from the process-based web questionnaire as semantically enriched data assets for analysis and processing.

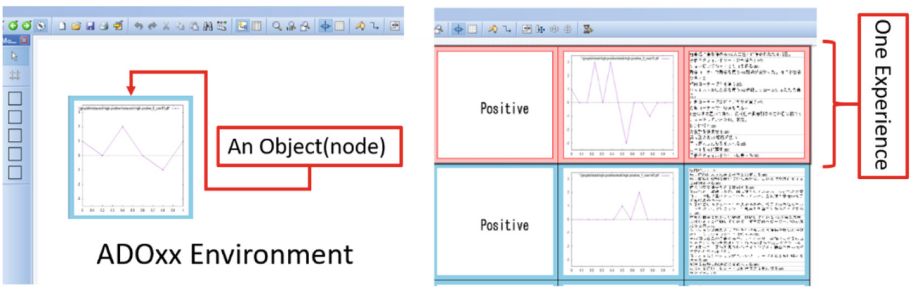

Fig. 4. Overview of the integrated process visualization support.

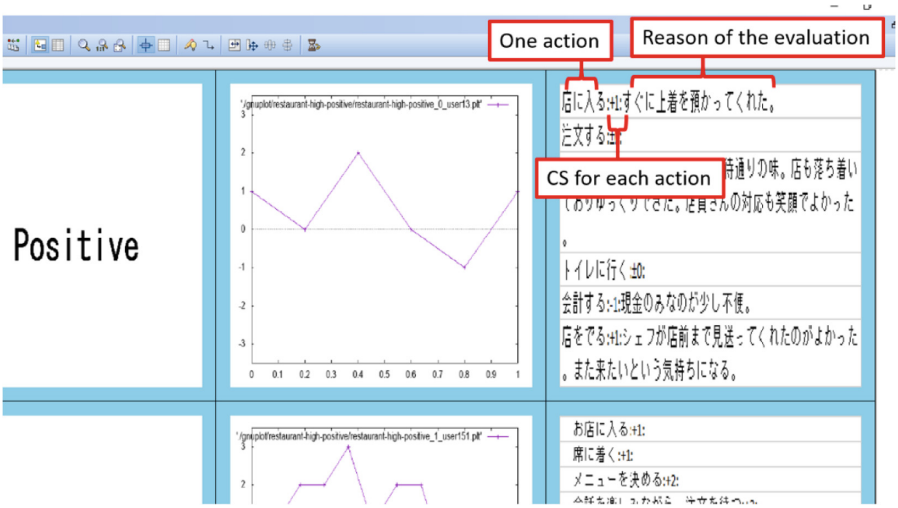

Fig. 5. Customer action evaluation with the reason.

4 Discussion

Regarding Hypothesis 1, 40% of the factors that impressed Japanese customers were the taste and appearance of food. On the other hand, foreign residents have also the same factors, but they are more than satisfied with the provision of services. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Regarding Hypothesis 2, it was found that foreign residents didn't have any descriptions of the evaluation of the restaurant services from the perspective of cross-cultural communication. And they are actually interested in the way of providing each service as a function. The results did not emphasize explicit cultural factors and did not support Hypothesis 2. However, since the evaluation of uniqueness such as standardized service systems in Japan can be seen as a cultural aspect, more detailed factor analysis is required for this hypothesis.

The first point of view suggested by the results of this study is the difference in the background of customers related to the effects of customer satisfaction and customer delight. The customer delight group in Japan had a statistically significant intention to recommend to the non-customer delight and customer satisfaction group. However, the difference was not seen in foreign residents in Japan. In the foreigner group, this means that the non-customer delight and customer satisfaction group had the same impact on customer behavior intentions as the customer delight group. From this, it is assumed that there are two cases. The first case is customer delight is more effective in customer attitude than usual customer satisfaction. On the other hand, the second case is that there is no difference in the effect on customer attitude between customer delight and usual customer satisfaction. Based on the target customer of a service organization, it will be necessary to make a decision on how to weight regular customer satisfaction strategy or customer delight strategy.

The second viewpoint obtained from the results of this study is that the priority of customer service behavior in customer delight can change according to the target customer attributes. In service companies, it is significant to clarify what evaluation criteria are related to customer delight of the target customers and how there are differences among customer groups. Because, by clarifying the conditions under which customer delight works productively and the factors that strongly influence customer delight, it is possible to systematically treatment on improving customer delight factors corresponding to the target customers. And then, the probability of increasing the customer loyalty of the target customer can be considered. In restaurant services in Japan, there are elements that are common to Japanese and foreign residents in Japan, such as the taste of the food, as a factor that triggers customer delight. On the other hand, it was suggested that for foreign residents residing in Japan, in addition to the taste of the food, it is possible to more effectively increase the probability of bringing customers delight in terms of how to provide services.

In the future, it is necessary to consider a customer satisfaction strategy for each target customer with diverse backgrounds in Japan, where foreign tourists from overseas are expected to increase. The viewpoint of this research can be used for decision makings, such as optimization based on the classification of customer satisfaction strategy and customer delight strategy base on the characteristics of each target customer.

As a framework for customer loyalty in consumer research, marketing and service marketing research, the relationship that cognitive aspects such as service quality affect emotional aspects such as customer satisfaction, and in turn, that affects customer loyalty, which is the behavioral intention, is being discussed. This study suggests that evaluation criteria for services are not absolute values, and the elements of service behavior that affect customer delight and the effect of customer delight on customer loyalty vary according to customer characteristics. There is room for service organizations to develop strategies that increase customer loyalty more effectively by clarifying what factors increase customer delight and what situation customer delight works effectively against customer loyalty, This proposed research method can also be viewed from the perspective of providing a new experimental environment that enables the implementation of empirical research and basic theoretical frameworks for designing service personalization that increase the probability of customer loyalty with considerate with customer delight.

In the future development of this research, this method will be used to analyze the impact on customer satisfaction, customer delight, and customer loyalty based on more detailed customer background information. For example, factors such as the classification of services provided based on service prices and brands on the service provider side, cultural differences in each country on the user side, and experiences of individual customers' usage services are considered. On the other hand, in order to further reduce the input cost of respondents using this questionnaire method, the proposed Web questionnaire system will be improved as a smartphone application, and an environment for collecting data more easily will be prepared. The preparation of data handled in this study will lead to the expansion of basic data sets that contribute to the development of machine learning and AI utilization in marketing. Thus, contributes to

service personalization based on the characteristics of service provision and customer characteristics, will be pursued from both theoretical and empirical perspectives.

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