

Airline Service Failure: Determinants of Passengers' Intention to Fly Again and Likelihood to Recommend

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impacts of causal attributions (controllability, stability, and locus of control) and failure severity on the behavioral intention of passengers in the context of airline service failure. This study also extended the causal attribution theory by incorporating failure severity as another explanatory variable. Furthermore, all the above direct relationships were also expected to be mediated by brand attitude. Essentially, this study attempted to address the issue of the desire of passengers to fly again with the affected airlines and the extent to which they will recommend it to others. This study employed purposive sampling and a questionnaire survey that involved 518 respondents as the main data collection method. All hypotheses were tested using Smart-PLS. The findings revealed that only controllability and failure severity exhibited direct impacts on behavioral intention, whereas stability and locus of control indirectly affected behavioral intention through the mediator of brand attitude. The findings also indicated that brand attitude was a full mediator in the relationships between stability and behavioral intention, as well as between locus of control and behavioral intention.

Keywords: causal attributions, failure severity, brand attitude, behavioral intention, controllability

1. Introduction

Service failure is one of the most important areas of research in the airline industry because having sufficient information and knowledge on its determinants and consequences enables the development of effective service recovery efforts to retain existing passengers in the highly competitive industry (Al-Gharaibeh, 2018). However, a review of existing literature revealed that the knowledge on service failure in the context of the airline industry is very limited compared to other service sectors such as financial, food service, hotel, and retail (de Matos et al., 2013; Tsai et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2017). This study essentially attempted to bridge this knowledge gap by offering valuable insights on how passengers react to the airlines that have experienced service failure from the perspective of brand attitude as well as the attributions of the failure.

According to recent studies by Ithnan and Ariffin (2020) and Al-Gharaibeh (2018) regarding airline service failure, passengers' responses toward the brand of an airline can be appropriately represented or measured by behavioral intention. However, the extant literature indicated that past studies had largely focused on consumers' behavioral intention toward new or ordinary service provisions rather than on those that had encountered service failures. The behavioral intention resulting from a post-service failure is relatively more critical than that from ordinary services because the service rendered had failed the customers (Al-Gharaibeh, 2018).

In the effort to explain the state of behavioral intention, this study employed one of the most fundamental theories in the context of service failure – known as the Causal Attribution Theory – which was proposed by Weiner (1974, 1986). The theory stated that consumers would make their evaluative judgment or causal attribution to explain the cause of a service failure. Despite its theoretical importance, the extant tourism

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literature showed that the applicability and validity of the theory to explain service failures in the airline industry as well as its impact on the behavioral intention of passengers are still very limited.

To date, the study by Nikbin and Hyun (2015) was the only systematic empirical study that utilized the Causal Attribution Theory to explain behavioral intention in the context of airline service failure. However, the causal attribution framework was not fully employed in the study, and the presumption made was that the state of behavioral intention was negative. This study differs from past relevant studies as it attempted not only to employ the full framework but also to extend it by incorporating a new variable to explain behavioral intention, namely the failure severity. Apart from that, this study also sought to explain the underlying mechanism between causal attributions and behavioral intention by proposing a relevant mediator identified as brand attitude.

According to Weiner (1986), the causal inferences made by consumers due to a service failure can be categorized into three dimensions, namely controllability, stability, and locus of control. Due to the enormous impacts of airline service failure as compared to those of other service sectors, the magnitude of service failures should also be taken into consideration to succinctly predict behavioral intention. Therefore, this study set out to expand the causal attribution framework by incorporating an additional explanatory variable known as the failure severity.

As mentioned earlier, most of the past related studies, including that of Nikbin and Hyun (2015), only focused on the attributions of controllability and stability. In contrast, locus of control has been largely neglected by previous studies because a majority of the sources of service failure were assumed to be originated from the service providers (Bitner, 1990; Smith et al., 1999; Hess Jr. et al., 2003). However, in the context of airline service failure, some forms of failures are undeniably originated from the passengers. This is primarily contributed by the increasing roles the passengers play in the airline service provision. Therefore, locus of control was also employed as one of the explanatory attribution variables to explain behavioral intention in this study. A plethora of service research, including the Theory of Planned Behavior, argued that attitude is an essential determinant of behavioral intention that must be taken into consideration (Ithnan & Ariffin, 2020). Based on the claim that attitude is essentially not easily susceptible to change (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007), it is argued that if passengers possess a strong positive attitude toward a particular airline, the possibility of recurrent usage of the same airline will be higher despite having encountered negative experiences with the airline. This is why brand attitude was employed as the mediator to explain the underlying mechanism between causal attributions and behavioral intention in this study.

To address the research issues as described above, this study strived to answer the following two core research questions – i) To what extent do the causal attribution dimensions, namely controllability, locus of control, stability, as well as failure severity, influence the intention of the passengers to fly again with the airlines that they have experienced service failure with? and ii) Does brand attitude play a mediating role between causal attribution and behavioral intention? Addressing the above two questions is significant to ensure the long-term survival of airlines that are involved in service failure in the very competitive aviation industry. The findings of this study will also provide insight on the relative influence of the four dimensions of causal attribution on intention to fly again, as well as the extent to which the underlying mechanism of the predicted direct relationships is influenced by the current branding strategy of the airlines.

2. Literature review

Weiner's (1985, 1986) Attribution Theory posits that one makes a judgment of the cause of an event failure along three causal dimensions, namely controllability, stability, and locus of control. Past studies had indicated that the causal attributions made by the consumers about the failure they experienced would affect the brand attitude as well as the behavioral intention toward the service providers (Bitner, 1990).

Firstly, controllability refers to the extent to which a focal party perceives a cause to be volitional or non-volitional (Bougie et al., 2003), and thus can be viewed as either controllable or uncontrollable (Davies, 1992). This attribution involves the consumer's belief about whether the service provider can cause or prevent a failure from occurring (Hamilton, 1980; Weiner, 2000). When the failure cause is controllable, consumers will blame the provider, feel angry, and has the tendency to create a negative image toward the provider (Folkes, 1984). Consumers that attribute failures to controllable factors are less forgiving in satisfaction evaluations. In contrast, when consumers feel that the failure cause is not controllable, they put less blame on the service provider (Nikbin et al., 2011). Some previous research had also clearly demonstrated that attributions of controllability were related to several important behavioral outcomes (Hess Jr. et al., 2003; Tsiros et al., 2004; Choi & Mattila, 2008; Nikbin & Hyun, 2015).

Secondly, stability is the extent to which a cause is viewed as temporary or permanent (stable) (Heider, 1958). In general, an excellent service provider should have less tolerance for stable failures (Hess Jr. et al., 2003). Therefore, consumers who have experienced excellent quality performance in the past are less likely to make stable attributions when a failure occurs (Weiner, 2000; Vázquez-Casielles et al., 2007). Consumers are expected to be somewhat forgiving of a failure, especially if it is caused by an organization with excellence as compared to an averagely reputed organization (Hess Jr. et al., 2003). This is because people generally understand that humans are much likely to perpetrate mistakes than machines (Iglesias, 2009). However, if a deemed stable failure happens again and the organization cannot correct the problem, the consumers will then question the organization's reputation because they believe that stable failures should be prevented by the organization (Nikbin et al., 2011). Besides, people may perceive malfunctions of machines to cause unexpected incidents that differ over time when perceptions of stability attribution level are contrasted to failures of procedures and employees (Choi & Cai, 2016).

Thirdly, locus of control refers to the degree to which people perceive that the outcomes of situations they experience are under their control. Individuals with an internal locus of control orientation perceive that they can exert control over the outcomes of the situation, whereas individuals with an external locus of control will attribute the outcomes to external factors, such as luck or actions of other people (Hunter, 2002). When the failure is related to an organization, consumers tend to feel that they deserve some form of compensation (Folkes, 1984). On the other hand, the more the cause is related to the consumer, the more likely they will do nothing, even in the case of feeling dissatisfied (Oliver, 1997). Although the locus attribution is important in certain failure events, many researchers had excluded this attribution because consumers perceive most causes to have originated from service providers instead of from consumers, making the locus attribution unambiguous, and thus less relevant in most situations (Bitner, 1990; Hess Jr. et al., 2003).

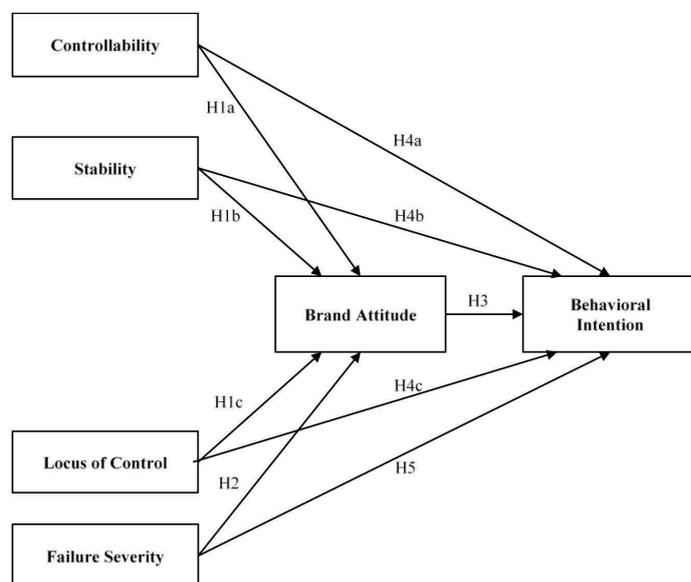
Next, the severity of service failure can be defined as the degree of seriousness or magnitude of loss experienced by consumers due to the failure by a particular service provider (Weun et al., 2004; Sengupta et al., 2015). According to Chuang et al. (2012), the greater the severity of service failures, the greater the loss experienced by the consumers. In an earlier study by Smith et al. (1999), it was stated that the service failure severity significantly affects the impression the consumers have toward the service provider. Besides, it will also trigger unfavorable behavioral actions such as consumer complaints, negative word-of-mouth (WOM), and service termination or switching to other service providers (Soares & Proença, 2015). In addition, the severity of service failure will also have adverse effects on business outcomes, such as loss of customers and a decrease in revenue (Keiningham et al., 2014).

Lastly, a positive brand attitude will increase the desire of a consumer to purchase a particular product (Kotler & Keller, 2008). Ducoff (2014) defined attitude as a way in which an individual responds to his or her environment and may have conscious and subconscious aspects. Previous studies mentioned that an attitude could have multiple attributes, such as the degree of preference, harmful or beneficial, and pleasantness (Ajzen,

2001; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Besides, past studies also suggested that brand attitude has a positive impact on the purchase intention of consumers (Wu & Lo, 2009; Shah et al., 2012). Attitude toward a product or brand is considered the most reliable indicator for identifying the purchase intention of a consumer (Kim et al., 2010; Lloyd & Luk, 2010). Hence, it is useful in evaluating the contribution to a brand by consumers in the future (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000; Wang et al., 2017).

2.1 Conceptual model and hypotheses

Figure 1
Research conceptual framework



Weiner's Attribution Theory (1985) suggested that consumers will make judgments on the cause of service failures, and the outcome of the judgments will subsequently affect their emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Choi and Mattila (2008) argued that upon the occurrence of a service failure that could have been prevented, a negative brand attitude of the consumers will be triggered. These attitudes are developed through the cognitive evaluation of consumers, which is based on the negative incidents that they encountered (Mohamed & Ariffin, 2012).

Negative attitudes of consumers toward a particular brand and the service provider are developed through the negative emotion exhibited by the consumers because of the inconveniences caused by the service failure, such as upset, despair, frustration, anger, and blame (Jorgensen, 1994; Al-Gharaibeh, 2018). A past study by Vázquez-Casielles et al. (2007) indicated a significant relationship between controllability and negative emotion of passengers in commercial air travel services. Therefore, this study hypothesized that:

H1a. There is a significant relationship between controllability and brand attitude in the context of airline service failure.

Besides controllability, Vázquez-Casielles et al. (2007) also identified a positive correlation between stability and negative emotions of consumers toward a particular brand that was involved in a service failure. Stability is related to the uncertainty of future performance (unstable) of the services, as the cause of the failure is expected to vary over time (Hess Jr. et al., 2003). This condition will negatively affect the cognitive evaluation of the brand by consumers. Likewise, Weiner (2000) stated that unstable attribution would have a negative

impact on the attitude and behavior of consumers toward the faulty brand and the service provider. Thus, this study hypothesized that:

H1b. There is a significant relationship between stability and brand attitude in the context of airline service failure.

Also, in a study conducted by Griffin et al. (2007) on the incident of food poisoning, it was reported that locus of control has a significant impact on the attitude of consumers. A review of the literature showed that if failures are attributed to internal causes (e.g., service provider), the impression of consumers toward the organization and its brand will be significantly impacted (Mohamed & Ariffin, 2012; Hillen et al., 2014). In addition, Song et al. (2016) revealed that upon the occurrence of a product or service failure, the respective brand would become less favorable by consumers when the failure is identified as a company-caused failure as compared to that of a consumer-caused failure and a natural disaster-caused failure. Therefore, this study anticipated that:

H1c. There is a significant relationship between locus of control and brand attitude in the context of airline service failure.

According to Keiningham et al. (2014), the severity of a service failure will significantly impact customer satisfaction and other business outcomes, including brand reputation and brand attitude. Also, Balaji and Sarkar (2013) stressed that the severity of service failure is a conditional factor that acts as an important determinant in the development of post-service failure attitude of consumers, in which the severity of the service failure is directly proportional to the negative attitude of consumers toward the respective brand or service provider. Moreover, Laufer et al. (2005) stated that the severity of product-harm crises as perceived by consumers also affects the degree of culpability. Thus, the greater the severity of the product crisis, the greater the degree of culpability, resulting in a greater impact on consumers' attitudes toward the respective brand. In regard to that, this study anticipated that:

H2: There is a significant relationship between failure severity and brand attitude in the context of airline service failure.

Reibstein et al. (1980) argued that the behavior toward a particular object may be affected by the change in perceptions of an individual toward that object, or simply put, the change of attitude. According to Rizvi and Oney (2018), attitude is believed to be a key predictor of the purchasing behavior of consumers. The Theory of Planned Behavior highlighted the significant relationship between consumer attitude and behavioral responses (Ajzen, 1991). Kotler and Keller (2008) also mentioned that a positive brand attitude will increase the purchase intention of consumers toward the brand. However, some studies on fatal airline accidents, such as the one by Jorgensen (1996), identified that the attitude of consumers does not have a significant effect on their purchase intention. Hence, this contradicting result prompted this study to investigate the relationship between attitude and behavioral intention of passengers in the context of an airline service failure with the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a significant relationship between brand attitude and behavioral intention in the context of airline service failure.

Nikbin et al. (2015) highlighted that controllability is significantly related to the negative behavioral intention of passengers in the airline industry. Regarding this, Curren and Folkes (1987) and Folkes (1988) stated that controllability substantially impacts the recurrent purchase of consumers and their WOM intention. Choi and Mattila (2008) also proposed that the occurrence of service failures that could have been avoided by the service provider will significantly decrease the repurchase intention and WOM of consumers. Based on the Attribution Theory, it was stated that a service provider should hold a higher degree of accountability for any service failure, which is controllable as compared to one that is uncontrollable. This presumption could negatively affect the purchase intention of consumers toward the responsible service provider (Jorgensen,

1994). Jorgensen (1994) also argued that the behavioral response of consumers is expected to be indirectly affected by attitudes. Thus, this study hypothesized that:

H4a. There is a significant relationship between controllability and behavioral intention.

H5a. Brand attitude partially mediates the relationship between controllability and behavioral intention.

Hess Jr. (2008) found that stability is negatively correlated to the intention of recurrent purchase of consumers. Similarly, Nikbin and Hyun (2015) and Folkes et al. (1987) stated that stability directly impacts both the intention of recurrent purchase and the negative WOM of consumers. Theoretically, stability will affect expectations such that consumers will exhibit high confidence or expectation for the recurrence of a particular outcome which was caused by a stable reason as compared to that of an unstable reason (Weiner, 1986). To elaborate, consumers will exhibit greater dissatisfaction, and adverse behavior toward the service provider should the service failure be caused by a stable reason (Nikbin & Hyun, 2015). Yang et al. (2012) also argued that passengers are more likely to distrust an airline upon the frequent occurrence of accidents. In addition, Weiner (2000) stated that the instability of a service failure would have a negative impact on the attitude of consumers. Thus, this study hypothesized that:

H4b. There is a significant relationship between stability and behavioral intention.

H5b. Brand attitude mediates the relationship between stability and behavioral intention.

If consumers attribute a service failure to the action of the service provider, the service provider will more likely receive a poor evaluation, experience a decrease in overall satisfaction, and prompt unfavorable behavioral intention of the consumers (Weber & Sparks, 2010). In contrast, if the cause of the service failure is perceived as being internal, the impacts on the intention for recurrent purchase and other behavioral acts of consumers will not be as significant (Jorgensen, 1994). According to Chang et al. (2015), the occurrence of any form of failure by a service provider will lead to a higher propensity to spread negative WOM by the consumers. Brown et al. (2002) stated that external locus of attribution is significantly associated with psychological distress or negative emotion. Therefore, the emotions of consumers due to internal attributions may affect their evaluation or attitude toward a particular brand (Kim et al., 2016). Thus, this study hypothesized that:

H4c. There is a significant relationship between locus of control and behavioral intention.

H5c. Brand attitude mediates the relationship between locus of control and behavioral intention.

Weun et al. (2004) found that failure severity is highly associated with consumers' disloyalty and negative WOM communication. Similarly, Hosany et al. (2017) indicated that emotion is one of the antecedents of intention. Previous studies have also shown that the greater severity of service failure will lower consumer satisfaction levels (Sengupta et al., 2015). Thus, failure severity may also have a significant relationship with consumers' behavioral intention. Balaji and Sarkar (2013) stated that the change in consumers' attitudes is significantly affected by service failure severity. Therefore, brand attitude is expected to be able to mediate the relationship between the severity of service failure and the behavioral intention of consumers. Thus, this study hypothesized that:

H5. There is a significant relationship between failure severity and behavioral intention.

H6. Brand attitude mediates the relationship between failure severity and behavioral intention.

3. Methods

The population of this study was the passengers of commercial airlines who had traveled internationally and had experienced any form of service failure. Only those with international flights experiences within the last six months from the date of the data collection were included in this study. A total of 650 questionnaires were

distributed using purposive sampling. The questionnaires were distributed at KLIA airport in Malaysia. The measurements for the questionnaire data were adapted from well-established existing measurements. Besides, three scholars in the area of services marketing were appointed to assess the content validity of this study.

The measurement for behavioral intention consisted of six items adapted from Al-Gharaibeh (2018) and Park and Park (2016). Controllability was measured by employing four items adapted from Hess Jr. et al. (2003) and Russell (1982), while stability was operationalized using four items adapted from Hess Jr. et al. (2003) and Russell (1982). Locus of control was measured using four items borrowed from Hess Jr. et al. (2003). In this study, failure severity was operationalized by employing three items adapted from Weun et al. (2004). Brand attitude in this study was measured using five items borrowed from Al-Gharaibeh (2018) as well as Grace and O'Cass (2005).

This study used the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) for data analysis. This two-step approach of SEM was introduced by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, the uni-dimensionality and the validity of the constructs involved were assessed with the measurement model. Then, the hypothesized model was tested by assessing the structural model. Before conducting SEM, a preliminary analysis is crucial to ensure the assumptions of the SEM are met, and the data are free from any violation. The bootstrapping procedure evaluated the mediating effects involved in the theoretical model of this study.

4. Findings

A total of 522 self-administered questionnaires were completed by the targeted respondents. However, only 518 questionnaires were suitable for further analysis. The remaining four questionnaires were discarded due to an extensive missing of values. Based on Hair et al. (2013), the measurement model possessed high internal consistency as all the composite reliability values lay between 0.833 and 0.941. The convergent validity was also achieved as the values of loadings, and Average Variance Extracted for all variables were above the recommended value of 0.5. The results also showed sufficient discriminant validity as the square roots of Average Variance Extracted (diagonal) were higher than the correlations (off-diagonal) for all the reflective constructs, as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981).

The evaluation of the structural model involved five criteria, i.e., inner variance inflation factor (VIF), R square, F square, predictive relevant, and path coefficient. Collinearity tends to increase the variance of the estimated regression coefficient by a minimum value of one unit. The finding showed that the VIF values for each relationship were less than 10, indicating the absence of collinearity in the proposed model of this study. The R square represents the quantity of variance in the endogenous constructs, which is explained by all of the exogenous constructs that are linked to the R square. Based on Hair Jr. et al. (2017), the resulting R square values of 0.341 (brand attitude) and 0.479 (behavioral intention) represented a weak to moderate effect size. Cohen (2013) stated that the F square is typically used to examine the relative impact of a predictor construct on an endogenous construct. The results of this study indicated that most of the effect sizes involved in this study were relatively small, with the exception of the relationship between locus of control and brand attitude, which was considered a large effect size. The Q^2 value was determined to assess the magnitude of R Square as a predictive accuracy criterion (Geisser, 1974; Hair et al., 2013). The results showed that predictive relevance had been attained for behavioral intention and brand attitude since the value of Q^2 was greater than zero, for both behavioral intention and brand attitude.

Table 1
R square of the model

Construct	R square	Adjusted R square
Behavioral intention	0.341	0.335
Brand attitude	0.479	0.474

4.1. Direct effects

Path analysis was performed to test all the hypotheses of this study. From the nine hypotheses on direct effects, six hypotheses were supported. In the case of the prediction of brand attitude, only H1a was not supported as the study results showed no significant relationship between controllability and brand attitude of passengers. In addition, from the five hypotheses related to the prediction of behavioral intention, two were not supported. The two hypotheses were related to the relationship between stability and behavioral intention (H4b), and between locus of control and behavioral intention (H4c).

Table 2
Path coefficients – Direct effects

Hypotheses	Beta value	t statistic	P values
H1a: Controllability → Brand-attitude	-0.01	0.28	0.780
H1b: Stability → Brand attitude	-0.17	4.55	0.000
H1c: Locus of control → Brand attitude	-0.59	20.65	0.000
H2: Failure severity → Brand attitude	-0.16	4.14	0.000
H3: Brand attitude → Behavioral intention	0.25	4.35	0.000
H4a: Controllability → Behavioral intention	-0.12	2.82	0.010
H4b: Stability → Behavioral intention	-0.02	0.35	0.730
H4c: Locus of control → Behavioral intention	-0.05	1.06	0.290
H5: Failure severity → Behavioral intention	-0.37	8.67	0.000

4.2. Mediating effects

The bootstrapping procedure was conducted to evaluate all the mediating effects involved. The results showed that brand attitude was a mediator in all the hypothesized relationships, except for the relationship between controllability and behavioral intention.

Table 3
Mediating effects

Hypotheses	OS	SM	SD	t	P values
H5a: Controllability → Brand-attitude → Behavioral intention	-0.002	-0.002	0.009	0.272	0.786
H5b: Stability → Brand attitude → Behavioral intention	0.041	0.042	0.014	2.993	0.003
H5c: Locus of control → Brand attitude → Behavioral Intention	-0.146	-0.146	0.034	4.285	0.000
H6: Failure severity → Brand attitude → Behavioral intention	0.040	0.040	0.013	3.076	0.002

Note: OS: Original sample, SM: Sample mean, SD: Standard deviation, t= t statistics.

5. Discussion

5.1. Determinants of brand attitude in the context of airline service failure

Interestingly, the results of this study indicated that the passengers still exhibit a positive attitude toward a particular airline despite encountering service failure that could have been avoided by the airline. This could be due to the nature of the human attitude, which is hardly probable to change, especially over a short period of time. Hence, the attitude of passengers toward an airline with a history of service failure will not be affected as a result of only a single unpleasant service experience, regardless of the source of the failure. Passengers tend to be more considerate toward service failures of an airline as the aviation industry is very unpredictable. On most occasions, passengers are uncertain about the possibility of the airline management to control or avoid a particular failure since airline services are universally known to be quite vulnerable and

fragile, where many factors or conditions are beyond the control of the airline management. However, the factors that will significantly impact the brand attitude of passengers are the frequency and the severity of the service failure.

In this study, approximately 56 percent of the respondents were involved in a traveling distance of fewer than four hours, which was considered as a medium-haul. The attitude of the passengers is expected to not be easily affected by any form of service failures for short-haul to medium-haul flights. This claim was supported by the results of the path analysis that showed the presence of a strong negative relationship between stability and brand attitude of passengers. Nevertheless, the attitude of passengers will be affected negatively by the frequent reoccurrence of similar forms of service failures. This is because passengers usually expect the affected airlines to take all necessary efforts to avoid the reoccurrence of a similar error in the future, or otherwise, it will cause dissatisfaction of the passengers.

The results of this study also showed that there is a strong negative relationship between locus of control and brand attitude. If the cause of the service failure is associated with the responsibility of the airline or its staff, the attitude of passengers toward the brand will be affected. Therefore, this study concluded that passengers might exhibit lower tolerance should the source of a particular service failure originate from the airlines, compared to that caused by the passengers due to their negligence.

Furthermore, the statistical evidence in this study showed that the brand attitude of passengers toward an airline would be worse in the case of greater severity of service failure. This finding is congruent with Walton and Hume's (2012), which stated that a higher degree of failure is associated with a higher degree of negative emotions, such as anger and unpleasantness.

5.2. Determinants of behavioral intention in the context of airline service failure

The frequent occurrences of any form of service failure that is in the control of an airline will prompt passengers to avoid using the services of that airline in the future, and the likelihood of them recommending it to others will also decrease. Laufer (2002) posited that when failures are deemed controllable, the blame is targeted to the entity perceived as having the control. Under similar circumstances, an airline may be deemed ineffective and inefficient in managing their services or perceived as exhibiting negligence toward providing quality services and the safety of their passengers. Thus, this will disrupt the confidence of passengers in using the service of the airline in the future. Also, according to Balaji and Sarkar (2013), when service failures are caused internally (by the service provider), consumers are more likely to launch complaints to the company or any associated third parties, refuse to repurchase or reuse the products or services of the company, and spread negative opinions about the products and services.

This study also showed that stability did not cause negative impacts on the behavioral intention of the respondents, despite its negative impact on the brand attitude. In general, it can be concluded that passengers will still travel with the airline despite the reoccurrence of similar service failures. The plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that stable attributions are usually regarded as common causal attributions, which are applicable or relevant to all airlines. Examples of common service failures in the airline industry are the delay of flight departure, rerouting of flights, or even flight cancellations (Mohamed & Mohd Ariffin, 2012). As these failures are common in all airlines, the risks faced by the passengers are similar among different airlines. Hence, passengers will still travel and recommend their preferred airlines despite the expected reoccurrence of similar issues in the future.

The results of this study also revealed no significant relationship between locus of control and behavioral intention of passengers. In other words, despite the source of the failure, the behavioral intention of passengers toward the airline will not be affected. Passengers will still travel with the airline in the future, although the

failure is believed to have been resulted from the airline. The interpretation of causality is highly dependent on cultural aspects (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987). Empirical findings from cross-cultural studies suggested that in collectivistic societies, such as in the perspective of this study, consumers are more likely to consider external or situational-related factors as the cause of a service failure, thereby reducing the negative implications of the consumers toward the service providers (Laufer, 2002).

Finally, this study also concluded that the greater the severity of a service failure, the lower the likelihood of the passengers to travel with the same airline in the future and spread positive WOM recommendations to their associates. This is because a greater magnitude of service failure will result in a greater unpleasant service experience of the passengers, which in turn triggers further dissatisfaction of the passengers.

5.3. The mediating effects of brand attitude

The data of this study indicated the presence of the mediating effect of brand attitude on the relationship between all the causal attributions variables and behavioral intention, except for the case of controllability. Specifically, the results showed that controllability directly affected passengers' behavioral intention. This is because the attitude of passengers toward an airline is less likely to be changed by controllability, especially when the passengers are not aware of the possibility of the airline controlling a particular service failure. Generally, service failures in the airline industry are contributed by many factors beyond the passengers' understanding, such as those situational in nature.

In the case of stability, brand attitude significantly exhibited the role of a full mediator as stability had no direct relationship with the behavioral intention of passengers. As previously explained, stability is essentially the frequency of the service failure, in which whether its reoccurrence is to be expected in the future. Thus, stability will exert a strong negative impact on the attitude of passengers toward the airline in the case of a frequent reoccurrence of a similar issue over an extended period of time. This will diminish the reputation or image of the airline, particularly in the long term, which will trigger negative behavioral intention of the passengers.

This study also found that brand attitude was a full mediator between locus of control and behavioral intention in the context of airline service failure. The respondents were observed to have lower tolerance if the source of the service failure was originated from the airline as compared to that which was originated from the respondents. Hence, in the case where the airlines are deemed negligent by the passengers, it will significantly affect the attitude of the passengers toward the airlines. This will subsequently lead to a negative behavioral intention of passengers, such as a lower level of loyalty. Therefore, necessary service recovery efforts and strategies should be conducted by airlines that experienced any form of service failure. In short, brand attitude is the underlying mechanism that links the locus of control and behavioral intention of passengers in the context of airline service failure.

Finally, this study also identified the presence of the mediating effect of brand attitude on the relationship between failure severity and the behavioral intention of passengers. Brand attitude was identified as a partial mediator as the failure severity was revealed to impact the behavioral intention of passengers directly. As a partial mediator, the strength of brand attitude in affecting both loyalty and the referral intention of passengers is not significant. Nevertheless, airlines should still effectively focus on the perception of the passengers regarding the magnitude of a service failure during the execution of service recovery efforts. The perception of passengers on the magnitude of the service failure can be relieved by shifting the attribution to the other causal attributions, which are controllability (if the cause of the failure is beyond the control of the airline), stability (if the failure is only temporary in nature), or locus of control (if the failure is originated from an external factor).

6. Theoretical and practical implications

From the theoretical standpoint, this study managed to extend the Causal Attribution Theory by incorporating failure severity as a new attribution dimension. Failure severity essentially relates to the magnitude of the service failure and strengthens the explanatory power of the model to predict the impacts of service failure on the post-failure consumption behaviors of consumers. Secondly, the findings of this study also enrich the body of knowledge in the service failure research stream by integrating both causal attribution theory and part of the theory of planned behavior into a single theoretical model to generate new insights. The integration of these two founding theories offers a more comprehensive understanding and views on the influence of service failures on the intention to fly again with those airlines that are involved in service failures. Thirdly, by employing brand attitude as the mediator, this study also provides theoretical insights on the underlying mechanism or process as to how and why causal attributions factors are related to behavioral intention in the context of airline service failure. Generally, the framework proposed in this study as well as its findings, contribute to the development of a theoretical linkage that connects failure attributions with attitude and purchase intention by bringing together the literature on airlines marketing, service failure, brand attitude, and behavioral intention.

This study also contributes significantly to the practice of crisis management, particularly in the context of the airline industry. The findings could be employed as inputs to the airline management and aviation policymakers in developing tactical plans to manage public perception of the cause of an airline service failure. This effort is critical to protect the image or the brand reputation of the affected airlines in the commercial aviation industry. The results of this study also contribute to the airline industry by recommending effective service recovery strategies to regain the satisfaction and loyalty of the passengers after experiencing negative incidents. Moreover, this study also provides empirical evidence on the mediating effect of brand attitude on the relationship between failure severity and the intention to fly again with the airline. This specific finding clearly indicates the important roles played by the branding strategy in the case of airline service failure. The unfavorable consequences of a service failure on behavioral intention could be cushioned by maintaining a strong brand in the eyes of the passengers.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, only controllability and failure severity were observed to exhibit direct impacts on the behavioral intention of passengers, whereas stability and locus of control affected the brand attitude of passengers, which then indirectly affected their behavioral intention. The results showed that brand attitude exhibited full mediating effects in the relationships between stability and behavioral intention, as well as between locus of control and behavioral intention. Conversely, brand attitude only exhibited a partial mediating effect in the relationship between failure severity and behavioral intention but did not mediate the relationship between controllability and behavioral intention. The results concluded that controllability and failure severity are two of the most critical attributions as they directly impact the behavioral intention of passengers. Furthermore, it can be concluded from this study that failure severity is the most dominant explanatory variable due to its capability to influence intention to fly again with the airline, both directly as well as indirectly via brand attitude. With regard to that, suitable service recovery efforts and effective marketing communication strategies must be developed to minimize the impacts of controllability and failure severity.

Future studies should attempt to employ the triangulation method to enhance the validity of the research because causal attribution in the context of airline service failure is a complex and complicated marketing element. Comparative studies between full-service airlines and low-cost carriers and between commercial airlines and national carriers are also highly recommended in the future because passengers' perceptions vary depending on the category of the airlines.

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