



Bibliometric Profile of Studies Related with Equity Theory

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Abstract

This study aims to present a general framework about studies on equity theory. For this purpose, articles related with equity theory were examined in terms of various bibliometric characteristics. Word “equity” and “equity theory” were searched among the articles published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services between 2014 and 2018. 31 articles were identified related to equity theory and then were examined in terms of year of publication, number of authors, number of pages, keywords, number of references, research topic, type of research, data collection tool, sample group and sampling method. According to the results of the study, the number of articles related with the theory increased from 2014 to 2018. The number of articles related to this theory was the highest in 2018. It was seen that most of the articles containing the theory examined price, perception of justice, service failures, and compensation for service failures.

Keywords

Equity • Equity theory • Bibliometrics • Bibliometric analysis • Marketing

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Introduction

In order to maintain their activities, businesses need to satisfy their customers and even their employees. It can be said that the satisfied customer will have positive behavioral intentions and with satisfied employees their loyalty to the business will increase. Customer's or employee's perception of equity is among the factors affecting satisfaction. Therefore, it is possible to say that equity theory related to the perception of equity is important in terms of predicting the behavior of individuals. Equity theory is a concept related to the perception of equity that an individual has as a result of comparing the inputs and outcomes with the input and outcome of the referent. The perception of inequity occurs when ratio of outcomes to inputs obtained by the individual is different from the ratio of the referent to which it compares. The individual may exhibit many different behaviors in this case of inequity. For this reason, it is important to know which factors affect the perception of equity of individuals and to determine the relationship between perception of equity and satisfaction and similar variables.

From the first study on equity theory, many studies have been conducted in different fields related to the subject. In this study, bibliometric profiling of studies on equity theory is the aim. In this context, the equity theory is explained first. After that, articles dealing with equity theory published between 2014-2018 in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services were examined according to various bibliometric characteristics. Studies involving equity theory were examined in terms of factors such as subject, method, keywords, etc. Briefly, in this study, a general framework about the studies related to equity theory is presented.

Conceptual Framework

It is necessary to ensure customer satisfaction in order for business to maintain their presence. Swan and Oliver (1991: 15) states that customer satisfaction is accepted as the keystone of marketing strategies, as the satisfied customer will be more likely to buy again and that customer's perception of equity will affect satisfaction. Perceived equity; it is defined as a psychological reaction to the value that a service company provides (Olsen & Johnson, 2003: 184). The theory of equity, which was based on the concept of equity evaluated by comparing the outcomes of individuals with inputs to determine whether a fair outcome was obtained in return for the efforts or resources allocated, was introduced by Adams in 1963 (Joshi, 1990: 788).

Equity theory includes four different elements: input, outcome, choice of a referent and an individual's motivation to reduce inequity (Fadil, Williams, Limpaphayom, & Smatt, 2005: 19). Inputs are contributions of participants to exchange while outcomes are treated as positive or negative consequences (Walster, Berscheid, & Walster,

1976: 3). While money, time, effort, or opportunity cost counted as inputs, provided tangible and intangible benefits are considered as outcomes (Lacey & Sneath, 2006: 459). According to Adams (1963: 424) that referent to which the person compares his own inputs and outcomes may be another person, the person himself or a group. A person perceives equity or inequity as a result of his comparison with referent. In the event of inequity being perceived, dissonance, guilt, and anger are formed and these negative situations are overcome as a result of various activities carried out by the individual to achieve equity (Alexander, 2002: 226).

In case of exchange between two individuals, Adams (1963: 422-426) stated that there is a possibility that one or both individuals may feel that the exchange is not equal and that there will be no inequity if compared individual's inputs and outcomes matches their own inputs and outcomes. If this does not happen; it is assumed that the relationship is not equal and this situation leads to tension between individuals in search of equity (Balassiano & Salles, 2012: 271).

According to equity theory, if ratio of outcomes to inputs of the individual is greater than referents, customers will be satisfied (Ellyawati, Purwanto, & Dharmmesta, 2012: 89). Otherwise, the feeling of inequity creates anger against the service provider and this anger may cause dissatisfaction (Bambauer-Sachse & Rabeson, 2015: 120). In this sense, it can be said that positive or negative results may arise depending on the perception of equity. According to Nguyen and Klaus (2013: 311) while positive results include; loyalty, better reputation and re-patronage, negative results include; complaints, dissatisfaction, switching behavior, negative word of mouth, distrust and consequently damage to the brand.

Individuals experience cognitive dissonance when inequity is perceived after reviewing the inputs and outcomes of themselves or others and the discrepancy between them is higher than when the equity is perceived (Carrel & Dittrich, 1978: 203). Accordingly, it can be said that there is a connection between the perception of equity and dissonance. Thus Joshi (1990: 789) stated that inequity may affect attitudes of individuals and that the theory of equity is based on the cognitive dissonance theory developed by Festinger. Huppertz, Arenson, and Evans (1978: 250), who treats the theory of equity as a special interpretation of cognitive dissonance, states that in a situation where cognitive mismatch occurs, there is a need to restore balance or equity in individuals and that individuals may resort to the following methods to reduce inequity.

- Increase inputs if they are low in relation to outcomes and the inputs of appropriate referents
- Decrease inputs if they are high in relation to outcomes and the referent's inputs
- Increase outcomes if they are low in relation to inputs and the referent's outcomes

- Decrease outcomes if they are high in relation to inputs and the referent's outcomes
- Leave the exchange module
- Psychologically distort inputs or outcomes
- Distort the referent's inputs and outcomes
- Change the referent

Although the theory of equity is related to the theory of cognitive dissonance, it is stated in the literature that the theory is also associated with social exchange theory. Akduman, Hatipoglu, and Yuksekbilgili (2015: 3) states that the theory of equity is based on Homans' social exchange theory and in this theory social relations come to the forefront and those relations are shaped according to cost and benefit. As a result, it is stated that the equity theory offered by Adams is based on Homans' Social Exchange Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory developed by Festinger (Aksoy, Aslantas, & Arslan, 2016: 23).

In the theory of equity, two criteria based on equity are defined as distributive justice and procedural justice (Palmer, Beggs, & Keown-McMullan, 2000: 515). Distributive equity is based on Homans's rule of justice, where a person's rewards in exchange should be proportional to his or her investments (Olsen & Johnson, 2003: 186). According to Homans, distributive justice focuses on the distribution of rewards between individuals or groups (Fernandes & Calamote, 2016: 37). Procedural justice; focuses on the impact of basic procedures applied to identify outcomes (Xia, Monroe, & Cox, 2004: 1). Speed and timing of dealing with complaints in terms of procedural justice in relation to perceived justice of procedures applied during the compensation of the service is important (Choi & Choi, 2014: 111). Apart from these two types of justice, in the literature, interactional justice is also mentioned in relation to equity theory. Interactional justice is the relevance of interactions between the service providers and customers during service failure and service compensation in terms of explanation, honesty, courtesy, and empathy (Saraswita & Yasa, 2017: 21).

It is stated that equity theory is used to increase the understanding of many different subjects such as satisfaction, service failures, relations between customer and business (Tanrikulu, 2015: 131). As a matter of fact, many studies have been conducted about this theory since it was found in 1963 (Cook & Parcel, 1977; Carrell & Dittrich, 1978; Huppertz et al., 1978; Romer, 1979; Leventhal, 1980; Fisk & Young, 1985; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Oliver & Swan, 1989; Swan & Oliver, 1991; Joshi, 1990; Sweeney, 1990; Goodwin & Ross, 1990; Goodwin & Ross, 1992; Lapidus & Pinkerton, 1995; Boyd & Bhat, 1998; Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000; Palmer et al., 2000; Olsen & Johnson, 2003; Fadil et al., 2005; Lacey & Sneath, 2006; Gelbrich, 2011; Balassiano & Salles, 2012; Kwon & Jang, 2012). In the studies, it is seen

that especially reactions towards the perception of equity and inequity are focused on, and relations between equity perception and different variables are discussed. It was determined that perception of equity was handled together with demographic features, satisfaction, quality perception, trust perception, loyalty, commitment and intention. There was no study found to determine bibliometric profile of research on equity theory within examined studies.

Methodology

In this study, articles published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services in the last five years about equity theory have been examined. The articles were evaluated on the basis of different bibliometric characteristics. Bibliometrics as a scientific research; it is stated that in accordance with the statistical results obtained with statistical analysis of data such as author, subject, cited author, cited sources helps to reveal the general structure of a particular discipline (Zan, 2012: 15).

In order to determine the evaluation criteria, studies aiming at bibliometric profile of different publications were examined (Cicek & Kozak, 2012; Ozel & Kozak, 2012; Zencir & Kozak, 2012; Sahin & Acun, 2015; Temizkan, Cicek, & Ozdemir, 2015; Tayfun, Kucukergin, Aysen, Eren, & Ozekici 2016; Yılmaz, 2017; Erkol Bayram, Bayram, & Karacar, 2017; Tayfun et al., 2018). In this context, studies on equity theory were decided to be evaluated according to the criterias of year of publication, number of authors, number of pages, keywords, number of references, research topic, type of research, data collection tool, sample group and sampling method.

In this study, only articles published in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services were evaluated. Equity theory is mainly related to the perception of equity of the individual as a result of comparing input and outcome of the individual with referent. According to the theory, individuals who buy or use a product are emphasized. In this direction, Scopus (Elsevier, 2019a), which is the largest abstract and citation database of peer reviewed literature (scientific journals, books and conference proceedings), has been searched for journals with the words “customer or customers” and “consumer or consumers” in the title (Scopus, 2019). Five journals with the word customer or customer were found in the title. It is seen that three of these five journals are no longer included in the database and one entered the database in 2018. The last remaining journal’s subject area was not marketing. As a result of the search made with the words “consumer or consumers”, a total of 24 journals were found. Eight of these 24 journals were no longer included in the database. It was seen that the remaining 16 journals had different subject areas. Eight of the 16 journals included marketing within the subject area, but within those eight journals there was only one journal whose subject area consisted only of marketing. This journal was

the “Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services”. The Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services began its publication in 1994. Language of the journal is English. For the year 2018, it could be seen that the Impact Factor of this journal is 3.585 and Source Normalized Impact per Paper (SNIP) value is 1.559 and SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) value is 1.211 and CiteScore value is 4.53 (Elsevier, 2019b). In order to determine the equity theory among the articles published in the journal, all published issues were examined year by year from 2018 backwards. Previous years were not examined due to the publication of one article on equity theory in 2014.

Results

The journal was published four times a year from 1994 to 2000. In addition, the journal was published six times a year from 2001 to 2018. Between 1994 and 2014, 21 volumes and 110 issues were published within the scope of the journal. Between 2015 and 2018, 24 volumes were published. In the last five years (2014-2018) which are considered in this study, a total of 720 articles were published in the journal. Distribution of the articles related to equity theory in all articles is given in Table 1.

Table 1
Distribution of articles by years

Years	Total Number of Articles	Concerning Equity Theory
2014	115	1
2015	103	4
2016	168	8
2017	157	8
2018	177	10
Total	720	31

In a total of 720 articles published in the last five years, equity and equity theory words have been searched within each article in order to find articles on equity theory. Out of 720 articles, 31 articles which were found to be related to equity theory were examined. The distribution of the articles evaluated by the number of authors and the number of pages is given in Table 2.

Table 2
Distribution of articles by number of authors and number of pages

Number of Authors	Quantity	Percent	Number of Pages	Quantity	Percent
1 author	3	9.7	1-10	24	77.4
2 author	13	41.9	11-20	7	22.6
3 author	7	22.6	Total	31	100
4 author	5	16.1			
5 author	3	9.7			
Total	31	100			

When the distribution of the articles according to the number of authors was examined, it was discovered that articles with two authors are predominant. 41.9%

of the articles have two authors. The lowest rates are in single-author and five-author articles. The rate of articles with a single author and five authors was 9.7%. However, it was revealed that 77.4% of all articles are between 1 and 10 pages. Table 3 presents the distribution of the articles by the number of keywords.

Table 3
Distribution of articles by keyword number

Keywords	Quantity	Percent
No keywords found	1	3.2
3 keywords	5	16.1
4 keywords	6	19.4
5 keywords	11	35.5
6 keywords	2	6.5
7 keywords	5	16.1
8 keywords	1	3.2
Total	31	100

A total of 149 keywords were used in all articles. When the distribution of articles according to the number of keywords were examined, it was found that the majority of the articles (35.5%) have 5 keywords. When keywords of the articles were examined, it showed that only one of the articles published in 2016 contained the word equity theory. However, it was found that the words justice or fairness was frequently used in keywords (18 times). At the same time, other frequently used words within keywords include satisfaction (9), intention (6), loyalty (6), trust (3), and word-of-mouth (2). Table 4 presents the distribution of the articles reviewed by number of references.

Table 4
Distribution of references in articles

	Quantity	Percent
Article	2080	84.83
Book	234	9.54
Other	138	5.63
Total	2452	100

The minimum number of references used in an article was 35 and the highest number of references was 139. It was found that mostly articles were used in the references. Other sources mostly included proceedings, doctoral dissertations and master's theses and internet resources. Sources like book reviews, institution reports, or researches, and data provided by companies and homework were also included in article references. As many as 50-99 sources were used in the articles. It has been found that 7 articles use more than 100 sources and 5 articles used less than 50 sources. The distribution of all articles by subject is given in Table 5.

Table 5
Distributions of articles by subject

Subjects of the Articles	Quantity	Percent
Price (price differentiation, price fairness and price sensitivity)	7	22.58
Service failures - Compensation of service failures	6	19.35
Perception of justice	5	16.13
Loyalty programs	3	9.68
Technology (augmented reality and search engines)	3	9.68
Brand value - Brand popularity	2	6.45
Other	5	16.13
Total	31	100

In order to determine the subjects, titles and abstracts of all studies were read. Six topics were found: perception of justice, price, service failures and compensation, loyalty programs, technology, and brand. Articles are classified under these topics. The articles mostly deal with price and service failures. It was found that price related issues were examined together with perceptions of fairness, trust perception, value perception, satisfaction, purchase intention, word of mouth intention, and cross buying behavior variables. The issue of service failure and compensation has been examined with the issues of value, perceived justice, loyalty, positive word of mouth, repurchase intention, satisfaction, brand credibility, and online revenge behavior. It has been determined that the perception of justice is mostly handled with subjects of satisfaction, commitment, perceived trust, and behavioral intentions (such as repurchase, loyalty, word of mouth). In the other group of articles, topics of customer citizenship, customer relations, coupon use, retailer or service provider to request positive evaluation from consumers after the purchase and evaluation of the impact of supplier and consumer efforts on customer satisfaction are included. When the research approaches adopted in the articles are examined, it was seen that all 31 articles adopt the empirical research approach. The distribution of the articles according to the data collection technique used is given in Table 6.

Table 6
Distribution of articles by data collection technique

Data Collection Technique	Quantity	Percent
Experiment	16	51.6
Survey	10	32.3
Interview	1	3.2
More than one technique	4	12.9
Total	31	100

When the articles were examined in terms of data collection techniques, it was seen that a mostly experimental technique was used. It is stated that this technique is increasingly used in social sciences (Coskun, Altunısık, Bayraktaroglu, & Yıldırım, 2015: 66). In social sciences, an experiment is defined as a type of observation performed by the experimenter to test hypotheses and to reveal the effect or direction

of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Islamoglu & Alniacık, 2016: 129). As can be seen, in order to test the hypothesis in experimental technique, it can be said that the conditions were created by the researcher. In the articles examined, it was seen that the desired conditions were created with the help of scenarios in the articles which have adopted the experimental technique. In the articles reviewed, it was seen that experimental technique was followed by a survey and interview. In the articles where more than one technique was used, combinations of interviews, surveys, focus groups, and document analysis techniques were used. The distribution of the collected articles in terms of the sample group is given in Table 7.

Table 7
Distribution of the articles by sample group

Sample Group	Quantity	Percent
Consumer - Customer	14	45.2
Student	6	19.4
Unspecified	5	16.1
Employee	1	3.2
More than one sample group	5	16.1
Total	31	100

It was determined that data was collected from consumers and customers in 45.2% of the articles reviewed. In 19.4% of the articles, it was seen that data was collected from students and it wasn't specified where data was collected in 16.1% of the articles. In some studies, it was seen that data was collected from more than one sample group. In these articles, data was collected from the combination of different audiences such as students, consumers, employee, business owners, or partners. Distribution of the articles according to the sampling method is given in Table 8.

Table 8
Distribution of articles by sampling method

Sampling Method	Quantity	Percent
Convenience sampling	10	32.26
Purposive sampling	2	6.45
More than one	1	3.23
Unspecified	18	58.06
Total	31	100

When distribution of the articles according to the sampling method was examined, it was determined that 58.06% of the articles did not specify sampling method. It was seen that a convenience sampling method was adopted in the articles which stated a sampling method. However, two articles used a purposive sampling method.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, it is aimed to present a general framework about studies on equity theory by examining articles according to various bibliometric factors and that were

published between 2014-2018 in the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services. Accordingly, firstly the distribution of articles by years was examined. It was seen that most of the articles on equity theory were published in 2018 and that the publication number has increased in years from 2014 to 2018. The articles were mostly prepared by two authors and the number of pages was between 1 and 10. The articles were found to have a different number of keywords, but most of them had five keywords. It was noted that the word justice was frequently used within the keywords.

When the distribution of articles was examined, it was found that the most used source was articles. In the articles containing equity theory, it was determined that the issues of price, justice perception, service failures, and compensation of service failures were prominent. These issues are mostly addressed together with variables such as value perception, trust perception, satisfaction, and behavioral intention. In the articles, the most used data collection techniques were experiments and data was collected from customers/consumers. Accordingly, considering the journal is related to retailing issues, in studies dealing with perception of equity, it can be stated that more weight is given to customers and consumers. Although the sampling method was not mentioned in the majority of articles, it has been determined that the convenience sampling method was the most used among the mentioned studies.

When the literature is examined, it is not possible to compare results because there is no study aiming to obtain a bibliometric profile of equity theory. In this respect, it is thought to contribute to the literature of the study. A number of findings have been put forward, such as which topics are covered by theory studies, from whom data is collected, or which methods are used. Based on these findings, information about the current situation is provided for the studies to be carried out in order to learn more about the theory. It is seen that most of the studies carried out with equity theory concentrate on price related issues. If this situation is evaluated in terms of implementation, it can be said that price-related policies should be planned more carefully by enterprises in order to prevent individuals from perceiving inequity. Studies also focused on service failures and compensations for these failures. In the face of service failures, the individual perceives inequity and enterprises apply various compensation methods to reduce this inequity. These compensations have many consequences such as satisfaction, dissatisfaction, loyalty, positive or negative intention. For this reason, it can be stated that in order to restore the perceived deterioration of equity or to achieve positive results, especially in case of service failures, enterprises should compensate for failure in a way that ensures equity.

This study has some limitations. In this study, only articles published in a particular journal between specific years were examined. In this study, it is aimed to

present a general framework about the studies dealing with theory in a given journal in a certain period. Therefore, in order to obtain more comprehensive information, boundaries can be extended or more than one journal may be addressed in future studies. Or comparisons can be made by analysis of the studies on equity theory in different fields.

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