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### Service Quality Dimension and Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Study in the Malaysian Hotel Industry

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## **Service Quality Dimension and Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Study in the Malaysian Hotel Industry**

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*The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the service quality dimension and customer satisfaction in the Malaysian hotel industry. A nonprobability sampling technique with a convenient sampling approach has been used in this study. Respondents have been restricted to those who have the experience of staying in hotels in Malaysia. The majority of the hotel customers were satisfied with the overall quality of the service provided by their hotels. The findings suggest that service quality dimension makes a significant contribution to the prediction of customer satisfaction.*

**KEYWORDS** *service quality, customer satisfaction, hotel, Malaysia*

### INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is one of the most popular travel destinations in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region, and received approximately 23.6 million international tourists in 2009, an increase of approximately 7% over the previous years (MarketResearch.com, 2012). Travel and tourist activities escalated and yielded profits of 33.6 billion in the year 2007. In that year, tourism industry in Malaysia is estimated to have risen by 4.5%, and this

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figure is likely to grow by 6.6% yearly. MarketResearch.com forecasts that in 2012, international tourist arrivals in Malaysia will grow at a CAGR of approximately 8% during the forecast period (2011–2013) and tourism receipts from overseas tourists are also expected to rise at a CAGR of approximately 8% during the same period. It has been forecast that in the years 2011–2013, tourists from the ASEAN countries, such as from China, India, and the Middle East, will visit Malaysia in growing numbers. The Malaysian tourism industry will continue to grow rapidly in the coming years due to the ever-increasing promotional activities of the government and the growing reputation of the country as a shopping center (MarketResearch.com, 2012).

There are many reasons for people to travel, including work-related travel, visiting family and friends, and vacations. Socialization, enjoyment, and historical appreciation are among the benefits that can be gained by people on vacation, perhaps by attending a local festival (Liang, Illum, & Shu, 2008). As Ramanathan and Ramanathan (2011) have classified “value for money” as an influencing factor of customers’ future choice behavior. Similarly, Mattila and O’Neill (2003) have found price as a significant predictor of overall guest satisfaction and confirmed the existence of service quality and guest satisfaction in enhancing the behavior of tourist customers (Gallarza & Saura, 2006). Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between the service quality dimension and customer satisfaction in the Malaysian hotel industry. Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between the service quality dimension and customer satisfaction in the Malaysian hotel industry.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Service Quality in the Hotel Industry

In measuring service quality, the best-known model that has been used for many studies is the SERVQUAL model. The model gives emphasis to comparative differentiation in terms of the service quality with respect to the customer service expectations and perceptions, as customers assess the actual performance of the service obtained within a stipulated time (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985, 1991, 1994; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). The gap between customer perceptions and customer expectations of service quality has been applied in the SERVQUAL model. The results determine the perceived service quality. The smaller the gap, the greater the increase customer’s satisfaction with the service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Basically, differences arise when there is a conflict of interest in the service delivery perception between managers and the customers. For

managers, the business product to be delivered to customers is considered customer value. Whereas for the customers, value is derived when they are satisfied with the services they have experienced (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). Opponents of the SERVQUAL model mention several flaws related to this model in terms of the methodological and measurement aspects. Instead of performing measurements based on the five-dimensional construct, the model actually focuses on the unidimensional construct only. For example, Carman (1990) suggested that the SERVQUAL be modified by changing the item wording or adding items. The SERVQUAL dimensions stability are also considered vague, insufficient in meeting the service quality measurement requirement, and not entirely generic.

For the hotel industry, Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000), Getty and Thompson (1994), and Wilkins, Merrilees, and Herington (2007) have developed LODGQUAL, which uses related dimensions from SERVQUAL to derivative targeted applications for hotel industry. There are two dimensions that have been identified as generic: reliability and tangibles. The Lodging Quality Index (LQI), which consists of tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, communication, and confidence has been constructed for this new model (Getty & Getty, 2003; Ladhari, 2009). Salazar, Costa, and Rita (2010) have modified the SERVQUAL model to deal with hotels by developing their HOLSERV scale. Its purpose is to determine the service quality dimensions on hospitality. The items that have been identified are responsiveness, empathy, and confidence, all of which are linked to the staff attributes. Similarly, Mei, Dean, and White (1999) and Ladhari (2009) introduced new criteria when using HOLSERV; these are employee reliability and other tangibles to measure the service quality specifically in the hotel industry.

### Customer Satisfaction

Like service quality, customer satisfaction has become very important. Customer satisfaction can be measured as the prices or values that are important factors influencing and assisting the development of satisfaction (Getty & Thompson, 1994). Excellent quality of service and high customer satisfaction are the most important challenges facing the service industry (Hung, Huang, & Chen, 2003). Previous studies have shown that for today's hospitality environment, the true measure of a company's success lies in its ability to satisfy customer's needs continually and consistently. Results show that customers have become increasingly more demanding over the value for money in terms of both the price and the quality of product/service being offered. In the challenging and highly competitive hospitality industry, every organization is forced to run its business in the most effective and efficient manner possible, and only this can ensure the success in the market that the business is entering (Gabbie & O'Neill, 1996).

Offering services that customers prefer is obviously a vital basis for gaining customer satisfaction. The easiest way to discover customer needs is simply to ask what services are wanted (Su, 2004; Gunderson, Heide, & Olsson, 1996).

There is clear evidence of a strategic link between customer satisfaction and company performance (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010; Anderson & Fornell, 1994). Thus, greater value deliverance is considered a key factor in business success (McDougall & Leveque, 2000; Spiteri & Dion, 2004; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). Also, Weinstein and Pohlman (1988) lay stress on the importance for the hotel to deliver outstanding customer value, especially by providing the best service, the lowest prices and the best quality for the business to be value-producing entity. The purpose of managing customer satisfaction is to attain a higher customer retention rate and boost the company's profits and market share (Gilbert & Horsnell, 1998). However, a customer who has undergone both good and bad experiences in the same area is likely to be more attentive to their quality and may therefore evaluate them as a "key" attributes (Robinot & Giannelloni, 2010).

Poon and Low, (2005) pointed out that customer satisfaction is based on hospitality, accommodation, food and beverage, recreation and entertainment, supplementary services, security and safety, innovation and value-added services, transportation, location, and appearance, as well as on the more basic concerns of pricing and payment. To differentiate hotel services between good performance that deserves to get compliments or bad performance by received complaints, Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) categorized four items into a classification model that includes criticals, satisfiers, dissatisfiers, and neutrals (See also Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2011). There is a high tendency for the critical attributes to receive compliments for good performance and vice versa. Food quality and room quietness fall within this category. Thus, critical traits at the same time provide opportunities and threats for the management. Satisfiers refer to the attributes where guests will give compliments for an extraordinary good performance. Low or average performance will normally not affect guest dissatisfaction, if it relates only to the maintenance of the hotel lobby or the amount of food in the restaurant. Hotel service qualities and physical aspects can have favorable impact on customer satisfaction (Ekinici, Dawes, & Massey, 2008; Ramanathan & Ramanathan, 2011). It is generally acknowledged that service quality is antecedent to customer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Teas, 1994; Wilkins et al., 2007).

## Hypothesis Development

There are five dimensions constructed here from prior studies regarding the hotel service industry (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). The five dimensions are

hotel ambience and staff courtesy, food and beverage product and service quality, staff presentation and knowledge, reservation services, and overall value for money. The conceptual framework that measures the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is established upon the literature. In the hotel industry, customer satisfaction and service quality is very important. This is the main challenge for the industry to confront (Chen, Yang, Lin, & Yeh, 2007; Hung et al., 2003). For example, in the hotel industry, Ekinçi et al. (2008) pointed out that both the physical and service qualities of a hotel have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Similarly, Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) found that there is a significant relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore, the hypotheses for this study are developed as:

- H1:* There is a significant relationship between hotel ambience, staff courtesy, and customer satisfaction.
- H2:* There is a significant relationship between food and beverage products and customer satisfaction.
- H3:* There is a significant relationship between staff performance and knowledge and customer satisfaction.
- H4:* There is a significant relationship between reservation services and customer satisfaction.
- H5:* There is a significant relationship between overall financial value and customer satisfaction.

## METHODOLOGY

According to Tourism Malaysia's records for year 2010, there were 2,367 hotels in Malaysia and a total of 53,130,743 hotel guests (27,534,771 domestic and 25,595,972 foreign). Accumulating data from all those hotel guests was far beyond the scope of this study. Hence, this study has been limited to hotels operating in the Klang Valley. This site has been chosen because there are three prominent cities situated in the area, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, and Shah Alam, Selangor. Furthermore, Kuala Lumpur is the capital city of Malaysia, a metropolis where most tourists stay when visiting Malaysia. A convenient sampling technique was used in this study. Most of the questionnaires were distributed among Malaysians due to time constraints. From the 250 questionnaires that were distributed, only 155 questionnaires were retrieved and able to be used for further analysis in this and future research. The response rate of 62% is considered high.

### Questionnaire Development

The instrument to measure the hotel service quality dimension (hotel ambience and staff courtesy, food and beverage product and service quality, staff

permission and knowledge, reservation services, and overall value of money) has been adapted from Mohsin and Lockyer (2010), while the instrument used to measure customer satisfaction has been adapted from Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000). Five-point Likert scales were used to measure the different categories of the dimension structures: hotel ambience and staff courtesy, food and beverage product and service quality, staff presentation and knowledge, reservation services, and overall value for money (1 = *much worse*; 5 = *much better*); and customer satisfaction (1 = *strongly dissatisfied*; 5 = *strongly satisfied*).

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Demographic Information

The majority of respondents (53%) ranged in age from 26 to 35, with the fewest respondents (1%) over 60. The respondents consisted of 48% males and 52% females. Local people comprise 90% of the chosen respondents. From the four hotel categories, which are the five-star hotels, four-star hotels, three-star hotels, and budget hotels, 50% of the respondents choose five-star hotels from the types listed on the questionnaire. This was followed by the hotels listed according to the categories. This may be due to the fact that 90% of the respondent reported a college or university background compared to 9% for secondary school and 1% for primary school. Those who had higher job positions preferred five-star hotels. The purpose of staying at the hotel centered on tourism and holidays, at 51%. This is in contrast with other reasons provided, which were 37% for congresses and conventions and 12% for business trips.

### Factor Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis has been conducted using principal components analysis with varimax rotation utilized to determine the dimensions of hotel service quality. In the factor analysis, only factors with eigenvalues greater than one were retained. As shown in Table 1, most of the items were properly loaded into their corresponding dimensions with factor loadings of greater than 0.5. Therefore, the five-dimension structure of hotel service quality instrument was acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

### Regression Analysis

As shown in Table 2 from regression analysis, the results show that there was significant relationship between service quality dimension (hotel ambience and staff courtesy, food and beverage product and service quality, staff

**TABLE 1** Factor Analysis of Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Dimension	Factor loading	AVE	$\alpha$
Hotel ambience and staff courtesy		.686	.671
The hotel has modern looking equipment	.788		
The hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing	.811		
The front desk was visually appealing	.805		
Materials associated with the service (such as pamphlets or statements) are visually appealing	.637		
The furnishings in the room	.609		
Helpful and friendly staff	.594		
I received undivided attention at the front desk	.707		
The check-in and out of the hotel	.539		
Food and beverages product and service quality		.776	.936
The hotel provides a variety of items on the menu	.798		
The overall selection of beverages	.825		
Quality of the restaurant food	.794		
Value for money of the restaurant	.783		
Prompt response from order taker	.678		
Staff presentation and knowledge		.735	.958
Employees in the hotel have the knowledge to answer your questions	.720		
The hotel employees appear neat	.668		
Employees in the hotel are always willing to help you	.660		
Employees in the hotel give prompt service	.729		
The behavior of the employees on the hotel instills confidence in you	.780		
Employees in the hotel are consistently courteous with you	.735		
The hotel has employees who give you individual attention	.766		
Employees of the hotel understand your specific needs	.785		
Employees knew about local places of interest	.769		
Reservation services		.710	.949
When the hotel promises to do something by a certain time, it does so	.709		
Receiving confirmation on reservation	.785		
My reservation was handled efficiently	.757		
My guestroom was ready as promised	.706		
Charges on my account were clearly explained	.594		
Overall value for money		.493	.941
The hotel has your best interests at heart	.471		
The services of the hotel have convenient business hours	.500		
The hotel gives individual attention	.546		
"I got what I paid for"	.414		
The hotel performs the service right the first time	.501		
The overall service quality provided by the hotel	.525		
Customer satisfaction		.465	.894
Satisfaction with reception	.725		
Satisfaction with food and beverage	.698		
Satisfaction with housekeeping	.585		
Satisfaction with price	.653		
Overall customer satisfaction	.736		



**TABLE 2** Regression Analysis

Hypothesis	Standardized parameter estimates	Sig.	Conclusion
H1	.533	0.000*	Supported
H2	.652	0.000*	Supported
H3	.665	0.000*	Supported
H4	.632	0.000*	Supported
H5	.765	0.000*	Supported

\* $p < .05$ .

presentation and knowledge, reservation services, and overall value for money) and customer satisfaction. The figures are significant ( $p < .05$ ), thus, H1–H5 are supported.

### CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this study has been to investigate the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in Malaysian hotel industry. Generally, Malaysian hotel guests are satisfied with the service quality provided by the country's hotel industry. While hotel guests are satisfied with the quality of hotel services, there is still room for improvement in the way hotel managers attract customers, especially in getting guests to pay return visits to their hotel. In this context, certain areas need to be improved, especially with respect to hotel ambience and the staff courtesy. To further enhance their hotel service quality, other critical factors are the need for improvement in staff presentation and knowledge, food and beverages product and service quality, as well as reservation services. This study is consistent with Weinstein and Pohlman (1998) and Nasution and Mavondo (2008), whose studies have found that to provide exceptional customers value, hotel managements need to take a value producing entities approach by providing best price, best quality, and excellent service. As stated by Silverman and Grover (1995), Mohsin and Lockyer (2010), if customers perceive the service quality is good, it will not have direct influence on the quality perception. Similarly, McDougall and Leveque (2000), Spiteri and Dion (2004), and Nasution and Mavondo (2008) stated that a key consideration for the business success is to meet the customer's expectations and anticipation. Interestingly, Baker and Crompton (2000), Patterson and Spreng (1997), Oh (1999), and Petrick (2002) state that if customers are satisfied, the tendency to spread their satisfaction word-of-mouth and make repeat purchases will be increased (Caruana, 2002; Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). To provide service quality that meets customer's expectation, the hotel managers need to identify the target group, so that they can discover which service areas need to be improved (Barsky, 1996; Su, 2004; Ladhari,

2009). Simply asking what the customer needs and wants is basically a comparatively easy way to discover their preference (Gunderson et al., 1996; Su, 2004). Consequently, hotel managers are well-prepared and aware that hotel employees are plays an important role in delivering services to hotel guests. Therefore, hotel managers should put emphasize to enhance hotel guests' emotion, and committed in maintaining their relationship with their guest. Training and upgrading employee skills is encouraged to develop their capabilities in facing the global market.

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