

RESTSERV: Restaurant Service Quality Model for Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed to assess the culture, cultural value, and service quality perceptions of Malaysians in the restaurant industry. The literature review revealed culture and value are separate factors, but they are related to service quality. A 32-item Likert scale questionnaire was developed and distributed to Malaysian restaurants in the peninsular and East Malaysia. A total of 396 participants responded to the questionnaires. After thorough examinations of the research instrument through SmarthPLS, findings revealed six items were dropped, and all variables met the accepted criteria. Thus, this paper has developed RESTSERV, as a tool to measure service quality in the Malaysian restaurant industry.

INTRODUCTION

Restaurants provide jobs for inhabitants and contribute to the Malaysian economy (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2022). Businesses are increasing in the Malaysian Restaurant Industry annually, which has created stiff competition for customers among existing businesses (Rashid et al., 2019). Javed et al. (2021) and Voon (2017) revealed service quality solves the problem of stiff competition within the restaurant industry. Thus, restaurateurs and managers need information about important factors that trigger customers' perceptions of service quality (Stevens et al., 1995).

Ishak et al. (2021) revealed that the restaurant industry in Malaysia is among the major industries contributing to the nation's economic growth. Abdullah et al. (2023) predicted that the Malaysian restaurant industry would have been valued 148 billion in 2023, an increase in revenue from previous statistics. Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019) revealed that the restaurant industry generated \$ 19.429 billion (RM 82.8 billion) in revenue and paid salaries of \$ 2.862 billion (RM 12.2 billion) to employees in 2017. Abdullah et al. (2023) explained that the Malaysian restaurant industry was comprised of 200,000 restaurant establishments in 2019 and employed about 1.5 million people within society. Chua et al. (2020) affirmed

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that the continued increase of new business establishments in Malaysia's restaurant industry has created stiff competition among businesses for customers.

Rashid et al. (2019) and Voon (2017) suggested service quality solves the problem of stiff competition in the restaurant industry. Rashid et al. (2019) argued that the majority of service quality provided to restaurant customers in Malaysia is tangible. Nazri et al. (2021) discovered that restaurants in Malaysia use service quality when providing services to customers. On the other hand, Harun et al. (2020) and Haq (2020) revealed that Malaysians are multi-cultural (Malay, Chinese, and Indian) and that they are of different faiths. Hence, managing service quality requires restaurateurs and managers to understand customers' cultural orientations and cultural value perceptions. Even though Kueh and Voon (2007) investigated customers' cultural orientations and the effect of service quality on each cultural category in Malaysia's Restaurant Industry, they did not consider cultural values. Chua et al. (2020) and Hasbullah et al. (2021) conducted separate studies to understand customers' perceptions of service quality, but they did not consider culture and cultural value as variables. There is a gap within the existing service quality measurements, especially in the restaurant industry. For instance, Srivastava et al. (2021) investigated items of culture variables with service quality variables, but they did not include cultural value. Rashid et al. (2019) and Hasbullah et al. (2021) also conducted separate studies to understand customers' perceptions of service quality, but they did not consider culture and cultural value as variables.

Rashid et al. (2019) explained restaurants in Malaysia are facing problems in delivering quality service. Rashid et al. (2019) denoted that some restaurant employees in Malaysia lack relevant communication skills, and the ability to interact with customers. Rashid et al. (2019) mentioned that some restaurant employees' lack of relevant communication skills makes it difficult to attract or maintain customers. Norazha et al. (2022) affirmed that some restaurant employees lack relevant communication skills and said that this problem gives a bad image to a business. Norazha et al. (2022) revealed that restaurants in Malaysia cannot measure the service quality offered to customers because they lack the ability to do so. The deficiency in measuring the quality of service has created customer dissatisfaction and harm to restaurants. Norazha et al. (2022) and Sallehudin et al. (2022) noted that nowadays, the Internet has provided instant communication, and restaurant customers are sharing information about services experienced on it. Norazha et al. (2022) mentioned that customer satisfaction evaluation on the Internet is focused on restaurant establishments and the quality of service they experience. The fact is that existing service quality instruments have gaps because researchers who submitted them did not consider culture or cultural values, which are environmental factors.

Edelheim et al. (2022) revealed that culture and value are separate factors. Frese (2015), Nayeem (2012), and Singelis et al. (1995) made the same argument earlier that culture and cultural values were two separate factors from each other. Bray (2008) construed cultural values as factors influencing consumer behaviour, while culture is actually a behaviour.

Stevens et al. (1995) mentioned that it is the customers who decide whether a restaurant's value offered is good or otherwise; therefore, service quality is their decision. Stevens et al. (1995) submitted DINESERV as a tool to measure items in restaurants, but they did not consider as cultural values. Kueh and Voon (2007) measured culture variables directly with service quality variables in the Malaysian Restaurant Industry but did not consider cultural value. This study particularly examined elements of cultural values in relationships between dimensions of culture and dimensions of service quality. Thus, this study aimed to develop a culture, cultural value, and service quality instrument to measure items in the Malaysian Restaurant Industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Service quality is the customer experience on value encountered by an organisation on its offering (Chun and Ochir, 2020; Javed et al., 2021). Rust and Oliver (1994) and Anderson and Fornell (1994) defined service quality as the customer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction experienced by a business. Dabholkar et al. (2000) described service quality as the antecedent to service. Dabholkar et al. (2000) defined service quality from the customer perspective. Dabholkar et al. (2000) developed a service quality tool called the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS) model to measure items. The RSQS model comprises physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving, and policy.

The physical Aspect- refers to tangible items that the organisation uses in its operation; Reliability- refers to the organisation keeping its promises and delivering the right service to customers at all times. Personal Interaction- refers to the relationship skills of organisations' employees, employees' communication skills with customers, employees' response to customer requests, and employees' politeness to customers. Problem-solving- refers to the organisation's handling of item returns that had been purchased, accepting products purchased for exchange, and finding unique solutions to complaints. Policy - refers to a quality factor that contains the guiding principle of an organisation on its product or service. Amongst these service quality categories, Voon (2017) and Rashid et al. (2019) argued that physical Aspect and personal Interaction are the two most important service quality factors in the restaurant industry in Malaysia. This paper has adapted these two variables for assessment in order to use these factors to measure service quality items in the Malaysian Restaurant Industry.

Furrer et al. (2000) argued that customers' service quality perception varies across the world, and they explained that the variation in service quality perception is due to culture. Edelman et al. (2022) highlighted that culture and cultural value are two different factors, and they argued that every culture has cues they value. Edelman et al. (2022) postulated that culture represents a holistic view of people, which includes attitude, thinking, and behaviour, while culture value is cue valued by cultural group. Hofstede (1984) submitted a cultural framework comprised of four variables (power distance culture; individualism/collectivism culture; masculinity/femininity culture; and uncertainty avoidance culture). Donthu and Yoo (1998), Furrer et al. (2000), Kueh and Voon (2007), Tsoukatos and Rand (2007), Sarhan et al. (2015), Srivastava et al. (2021) mentioned that Hofstede cultural framework are widely used in culture and service quality research. Koc and Ayyildiz (2021) argued that Hofstede genre culture framework is appropriate to be used for social sciences study.

Power distance culture is defined as the behaviour of inequality amongst people in society, which is generally accepted. Individualism/collectivism culture- is the behaviour of people who only think about themselves, or people's behaviour that is inclusive to think of others within society. Masculinity/femininity culture is described as the distinct role of gender in society, in which females are moderate in behaviour, while men assert themselves, by showing off their achievements, and other material possessions. Uncertainty avoidance culture is the behaviour of people in dealing with expected occurrences in society.

Medberg and Gronroos (2020) explained cultural value is a cue that brings satisfaction to people belonging to a particular category. According to Abdelali and Ngah (2019), cultural value is a factor deemed favourable to people in society, and it includes moral, tradition, religion, attitude, communication, behaviour, security, identity, politics, food, health, time, space, location, association, habit, structure, belief, knowledge, skill, recreation, relationship, and performance. Frese (2015) defined cultural value as the desire, cue, goal, and guiding principle of people in society. Frese (2015) mentioned that cultural values may be categorised into systems of thinking, like health, or such as religion. Hence, this study has formed culture value religion in reference to Abdelali and Ngah (2019), and Ibrahim and Othman (2014), as one of

the two mediating variables. This study has also formed the cultural value of health as the other mediating variable, in reference to Stevens et al. (1995).

Abdelali and Ngah (2019), and Ibrahim and Othman (2014) described culture value religion as moral cues and principles that govern members of the same faith. Ibrahim and Othman (2014) revealed cultural value religion comprised of items relevant to peoples' spirituality in society, and their faith. Cultural value religion is a factor that contains items of religious faith, important to people in society. Culture value religion has been formed as factors for assessment in this study, in order to be use as service quality instrument. Culture value religion inclusion as a measurement factor has fulfilled the quest of Abdelali and Ngah (2019) and Ibrahim and Othman (2014). Cultural value religion became a factor of concern to this study, after the review of the literature on Malaysian national culture (Haq, 2020). Haq (2020) revealed that Malaysian society is comprised of people from different races, and these people valued their various faiths. However, studies have not been performed to assess Malaysians' cultural value perceptions, especially in the restaurant industry.

Culture value health is a factor consisting of restaurant food quality items used to serve customers and trigger positive perceptions. This study has formed culture value health as a mediator for the assessment of customers' perceptions (Abdullah and Isa 2020; Zainol et al., 2022). Abdullah and Isa (2020), and Zainol et al. (2022) revealed that food forms a central part of Malaysians' tradition, and it is of significant value to them. According to Abdullah and Isa (2020), food quality is very important to Malaysians. Meanwhile, culture value health as a factor in this study is comprised of food quality items that Malaysian restaurants should use in delivering services to customers. Culture value health as a factor in this study is also meant also to obtain feedback from customers (Abdullah et al., 2020; Stevens et al. 1995). Rozekhi et al. (2016) affirmed culture value health is a factor that should be considered in Malaysian Restaurant Industry. Rozekhi et al. (2016), and Zainol et al. (2022) denoted healthy food leads Malaysians to become loyal customers. Medberg and Gronroos (2020) affirmed this latter discussion and reveal that the cultural value of health is a relevant factor that lures customers' loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire was originally formed in English and translated into Bahasa Melayu for more Malaysians to comprehend, and then back-translated into the English Language. This study used a four-item scale on each variable, to avoid unequal distribution of items, and to avoid bias in measurement of the number of content (Morgado et al., 2018). The Questionnaires were distributed to Malaysians using the Multistage Sampling method, which involved three stages (Bhardwaj, 2019). The reason for employing Multistage Sampling was due to the sample population, which was within a wider geographic location difficult to ascertain, as referenced by Bhardwaj (2019). Cluster sampling of this study's Multistage sampling Method was first used in this study, by dividing the population of Malaysia into two groups (Peninsular Malaysia; East Malaysia) to collect data. Secondly, questionnaires were randomly distributed to participants in these two regions. The last step in this study Multistage Sampling was Cluster Random Sampling, and it was employed by dividing Peninsular Malaysia into four subgroups, and dividing East Malaysia into two subgroups, before randomly collecting samples. Sampling in Peninsular Malaysia was diving into four clusters: the Northern Region of Peninsular Malaysia; Southern Region in Peninsular Malaysia; Western Region in Peninsular Malaysia, and Eastern Region in Peninsular Malaysia, before randomly collecting samples. Sampling in East Malaysia was divided into two groups: Sabah; and Sarawak, before randomly collecting samples.

A total of 396 participants completed the questionnaires. The following steps were subsequently used for this study methodology: step1- A questionnaire was drafted that comprised cultural variables (power distance culture, individualism/collectivism culture, masculinity/femininity culture, uncertainty avoidance

culture), two cultural value variables (culture value health, and culture value religion), and two service quality variables (service quality physical aspect, and service quality personal interaction). Step 2- data collected from the survey were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for normality assessment. Normality assessment revealed the unequal distribution of the datasets, hence, this situation led the researcher to use the alternative method of Partial Least Square Structural Equation Model (PLS-SEM) as suggested by Hair et al. (2018), and Ramayah et al. (2018), to perform inferential statistics analyses on the study datasets. Hair et al. (2018), and Ramayah et al. (2018) have suggested that researchers should use SmartPLS, when data analysis reveals unequal distribution, and when a study data analyses are concerned with testing a theoretical framework. Step 3- this study examined individual variables for reliability and validity by Ramayah et al. (2018), to determine the number of variables and items that should form RESTSERV. This study measured all variables with Composite Reliability (CR) values ≥ 0.70 to 0.93, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ≥ 0.5 . Step 4- this study assessed the conceptual model for "Goodness of Fit" using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) with a value ≤ 0.08 as a threshold suggested by Hair et al. (2018) and Ramayah et al. (2018). This study applied Hayes and Rockwood's (2020) direct and mediation method to examine its twenty-seven (27) hypotheses, using the Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Model through SmartPLS software version 3.3.3 bootstrapping of 5,000.

This study used the methods of Lambert and Newman (2022), who explained three steps that are best practices for construct development and validation: (a) defining the construct, (b) choosing operations that will suit the construct description, (c) obtaining empirical evidence that will be used for validation. In this paper, the researcher defined each construct and chose suited operations. This paper also used empirical data that had been validated.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Reliability

Table 1. Reliability Findings

Variable	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Power Distance Culture	0.851	0.589
Individualism/Collectivism Culture	0.942	0.801
Masculinity/Femininity Culture	0.822	0.537
Uncertainty Avoidance Culture	0.859	0.752
Culture Value Health	0.772	0.534
Culture Value Religion	0.838	0.566
Service Quality Physical Aspect	0.930	0.768
Service Quality Personal Interaction	0.916	0.732

There were eight variables examined for reliability in this paper. This paper has employed Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) as units to measure reliability. Findings for all variables shown in Table 1 met the thresholds of CR and AVE.

Discriminant Validity

Table 2. Discriminant Validity Findings (Heterotrait-Monotrait [HTMT]) Ratio

Variable	CHV	CVR	ICC	MFC	PD	SQPI	SQPA	UAC
Culture Value Health	-							
Culture Value Religion	0.560							
Individualism/Collectivism Culture	0.383	0.527						
Masculinity/Femininity Culture	0.498	0.508	0.586					
Power Distance Culture	0.313	0.612	0.625	0.608				
Service Quality Personal Interaction	0.432	0.630	0.562	0.518	0.690			
Service Quality Physical Aspect	0.431	0.603	0.500	0.479	0.603	0.749		
Uncertainty Avoidance Culture	0.442	0.601	0.683	0.725	0.778	0.603	0.749	-

Ramayah et al. (2018) explained Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio is the most appropriate Discriminant measurement unit to assess variables in a study measurement model. Ramayah et al. (2018) suggested Discriminant value between two variables should be equal to 0.85 or < 0.90. Ramayah et al. (2018) asserted Discriminant Validity value above 0.85, or 0.90 is problematic. Ramayah et al. (2018) denoted another way to use HTMT is when performing a statistical test, to assess HTMT inference. Ramayah et al. (2018) said when a confidence interval of HTMT value for the structural paths contains the value of 1, then it lacks Discriminant Validity. This study used the threshold of HTMT suggested by Ramayah et al. (2018) to evaluate all variables in the measurement model for Discriminant Validity. All variables in this study measurement model met the threshold of the HTMT ratio.

Hypotheses Findings

Table 3. Power Distance Culture is (**PDC**); Individualism/Collectivism Culture is (**ICC**); Masculinity/Femininity Culture is (**MFC**); Uncertainty Avoidance Culture is (**UAC**); Culture Value Religion is (**CVR**); Culture Value Health (**CVH**); Service Quality Personal Interaction is (**SQPI**); Service Quality Physical Aspect is (**SQPA**).

Table 3. Hypotheses Findings

Hypothesis	T-Statistics	P-Value
PDC >> SQPI	3.930	0.000
PDC >> SQPA	0.011	2.563
CVR >> SQPI	4.239	0.000
ICC >> SQPI	2.033	0.043
CVH >> SQPA	2.126	0.034
UAC >> SQPA	6.358	0.000
CVH >> SQPI	2.370	0.018
UAC >> SQPI	4.912	0.000
PDC >> CVR	3.991	0.000
MFC >> CVR	2.291	0.022
ICC >> CVR	3.021	0.003
UAC >> CRV	2.362	0.019
MFC >> CVH	3.139	0.002
ICC >> CVH	2.208	0.028
UAC >> CVH	2.254	0.025
CVR >> SQPA	3.858	0.000
MFC >> CVH >> SQPI	1.968	0.050
PDC >> CVR >> SQPA	2.698	0.007
PDC >> CVR >> SQPI	2.806	0.005
MFC >> CVR >> SQPI	2.033	0.043
ICC >> CVR >> SQPA	2.369	0.018
ICC >> CVR >> SQPI	2.554	0.011
UAC >> CVR >> SQPA	2.029	0.043

There are hypotheses findings in Table 4: Direct Relationship findings and indirect Relationship findings. All direct and indirect hypothesized relationships met the two path criteria (Pale value and T-Statistics thresholds) set for this paper. Table 4 shows the findings from the hypotheses assessment in this paper, through SmarPLS 3.3.3 data analysis software. The various hypotheses in this study's structural model have been assessed with measurement units of T-statistics Pale Value, and Confident Interval.

Model Findings

Table 4. RESTSERV Model Findings ("Goodness of Fit")

Index Name	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.069	0.078

Table 4 construed the "Goodness of Fit" index, values for the saturated model and the estimated model, after examination of this study's structural model. This study's structural model had a significant "Goodness of Fit", because its SRMR value for the saturated model is 0.069, a value within range of the acceptable threshold. Even though this study is a variance-based study that does not require this assessment, however the assessment for model "Goodness of Fit" was to determine its significance, in reference to Ramayah et al. (2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this study provide evidence that the structural model is a significant tool to measure service quality within the Malaysian Restaurant Industry, hence this paper called its structural model

"RESTSERV". Reliability findings for all variables and items within RESTSERV met the accepted criteria. The findings also revealed that all variables within RESTSERV met the accepted criteria for validity assessments. Path Coefficient assessments provided positive answers to the research objectives. These findings served as proof that the study objectives were met.

RESTSERV is an eight factors restaurant service quality tool that contains 25 items. RESTSERV is comprised of Power Distance Culture with four items; individualism/collectivism culture with two items; masculinity/femininity culture with four items; uncertainty avoidance culture with two items; culture value health with three items; culture value religion with four items; service quality physical aspect with three items, and service quality personal interaction with four items.

Practically RESTSERV should be employed in the following ways; (1) through the delivery of service to customers, and (2) as a survey tool to evaluate restaurant's customer's perceptions of the quality of service experienced. Managers and restaurant businesses can use RESTSERV items in delivering services to customers as a positioning strategic tool (Yalley and Agyapong, 2017). For instance, the findings from this study have revealed customers perceived a decent environment as quality. Now with this knowledge, managers and business organisations in Malaysia's Restaurant Industry can use RESTSERV to deliver services to customers in the following ways: by keeping the environment clean; delivering interactive services to customers; exhibiting higher hygiene practices in offering services; selling food items that are healthy and religiously certified, and giving employees training on how to respond to customers, and on how to serve customers.

Managers and businesses in the Malaysian Restaurant Industry can also use RESTSERV as a survey tool to evaluate customers' perceptions of service experienced, for necessary improvement. Restauranters can create a form that contains RESTSERV items to obtain feedback from customers, whenever they pay a visit to the establishment. The prepared RESTSERV items contained in a form can also be employed for online customer surveys (Norazha et al., 2022), and for customer surveying through telephone conversation (Stevens et al. 1995).

Managers and business organisations should offer services, and sell food items that are religiously certified, as this study findings suggested. Managers and restaurant businesses should operate in a decent environment, serve healthy food items, and introduce higher hygiene practices in offering services. Findings from this study also suggested that managers and businesses in Malaysia's restaurant industry should operate in appealing buildings, and also do business within a decent location. Another suggestion from this study's findings revealed that managers and businesses in Malaysia's restaurant industry should give employees professional training on how to respond to customers, and train employees on how to serve customers.

Entrepreneurs in the Malaysian restaurant industry can implement the contribution from this study's findings through the organisation of new ventures for a niche market. Entrepreneurs can draw confidence from this study's findings, which revealed restaurant organisations in Malaysia should consider religious and cultural cue items in offering services, and in the sale of food items. Entrepreneurs can include cultural values and religion through innovative methods in delivering services, because this study's findings revealed customers in Malaysia Restaurant Industry expect organisations to offer services that are cultural certified. Hence, the creation of a restaurant business that will offer relevant services to such a target group will yield profitable earnings (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Entrepreneurs can employ the findings from this study in other markets around the world, as a cross-culture marketing strategic tool for positioning their restaurant business, in order to attract customers (Yalley and Agyapong, 2017). See Table 5.

Table 5. Items of RESTSERV

A. Power Distance Culture
(1) It is preferable to eat in a restaurant that allows the customer to make their own decision on what to eat and drink, or where to sit.
(2) Employees of food service restaurants should show high respect to customers.
(3) It feels great to eat in a restaurant in which its employees prioritize their customers' requests.
(4) I would like to eat in a restaurant in which its employees do not hesitate to serve the customers.
B. Individualism/Collectivism Culture
(5) I like going to a restaurant with friends or family.
(6) I feel comfortable being at a restaurant with friends or family.
C. Masculinity/Femininity Culture
(7) I like to be served first in a restaurant.
(8) I like restaurant employees to give me suggestions on what to eat.
(9) I like to give my friends or family a treat when eating in a restaurant.
(10) I like contributing to the bill payment, after eating a meal in a restaurant with friends or family.
D. Uncertainty Avoidance Culture
(11) It is good for a restaurant to serve the exact dishes as portrayed on the menu.
(12) I expect the same service from restaurant employees, whenever I pay a visit.
E. Culture Value Religion
(13) I prefer a restaurant that sells halal food.
(14) I can go to any restaurant that serves good food items.
(15) I prefer to order food from any restaurant that has a halal certificate.
(16) I can eat food in any restaurant relevant to my religious beliefs.
F. Culture Value Health
(17) I usually go to restaurants because they sell home-cooked food.
(18) A fast food restaurant is a preferred place to order food.
(19) I can order any food that I want from any restaurant.
G. Service Quality Physical Aspect
(20) A restaurant should be well-structured/well-built.
(21) A restaurant should have a convenient arrangement that allows customers to move around.
(22) The interior design of a restaurant should be attractive and appealing.
H. Service Quality Personal Interaction
(23) Restaurant employees should know how to answer customers' questions.
(24) Restaurant employees should give individual attention to their customers.
(25) Restaurant employees should treat customers with courtesy.

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