

# AN OVERVIEW OF SERVICE QUALITY TOWARDS GUEST'S SATISFACTION IN HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

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## ABSTRACT

*Sustainable development of hospitality industry in Malaysia has led numerous numbers of hotels, motels and other lodging accommodation to increase rapidly. It occurs due to the increment number of international and domestic tourist boarding in Malaysia. Owing to that, it is important for lodging provider to offer a good service quality because it will lead the guests feeling pleasant and satisfied during their stay. In return, it will increase the loyalty and high tendency of tourist to revisit or recommend to their friends. Researches have shown that service quality plays important elements in determining guest's satisfaction. Guests are considered satisfied when they have the positive feeling throughout the process of evaluating the expectation and what they actually get. Due to the guest satisfaction mostly depended on the level of service quality and on how they are being treated during their stay at the lodging, it is crucial to search for a missing value in service quality towards guest's satisfaction. Aforementioned by previous researchers shows that numerous issues have been raised pertaining of primary dimension and sub dimension in service quality when measuring satisfaction in several industries as many theories, measurements and models has been deformed recently. Therefore, this paper is to discuss the sub dimension for service quality towards guest's satisfaction in Seberang Perai hotels.*

**Keywords:** Service Quality, Guest Satisfaction, Hospitality

## INTRODUCTION

Hospitality industry in Malaysia is one of the leading growing industries and considered as top contributors to the economic. With the development of hospitality and the number of hotels increased rapidly, it creates a good competitive environment so much so that each hotel operator has to come out with more competitive marketing strategies to attract guest to stay in their hotel. According to Shafiq, Shafique, Din and Cheema (2013), key to success in the competitive environment today is by the delivering of service quality as this will indirectly increase the level of satisfaction. Therefore, by providing the high level of service quality, the guest will feel more satisfied in using and experiencing the services. Guests are considered

satisfied when they have the positive feeling, that results from the process of evaluating the expected and what they actually get through the service. Due to that, it will lead to the high satisfaction, loyalty and earn a good profitability. As mentioned by Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, (1985, 1988); Jamaludin, Ayob, Sabri and Mohi, (2014) In any service organization as well as in the restaurant industry, achieving a high level of customer satisfaction and potential loyal patron has been vital to improve competitiveness. Since the guest satisfaction mostly depended on the level of service quality and how they are treated during their stay, hotels need to ensure every personnel are practicing and delivering the right service quality. Therefore, an excellent service quality by the personnel is a must to ensure the guest feel satisfied during their stay. In hospitality, providing the best service quality is very important because direct contact with guest is inevitable. Front office personnel will always have contact with the customers who want to check-in and checkout, as easily as the waiters and waitresses who need to reach the guest during dine in. All these activities required the staffs to provide their service to the guest. Thus, ensuring the personnel to deliver the high service quality is important to make the guest satisfied and have memorable experience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 SERVICE QUALITY**

Service quality is a very subjective and complex concept. The definition of the service itself may vary from one person to another. The most common definition of service quality is the comparison customers make between their expectations and perceptions of the received service (Marković and Janković, 2013). Su (2004) mentioned that service quality has been defined as how well a customer's needs are met, and how well the service delivered meets the customer's. Previous research shown that service quality has been referred to as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations. Marković and Janković (2013) stated that, the high level of service quality presented by the hotel staffs to the guest, it is more likely to increase their satisfaction. In service industries, providing and maintaining the customer satisfaction is very important to ensure the guest loyalty in using the service and do not switch to other service providers. Su (2004) stated that, the key factors in ensuring the customer satisfaction and remain loyal are service quality. Lam and Zhang (1999) added that among all customer demands, the critical factors in the success and growth of any business mostly rely on the quality service. Briggs, Sutherland and Drummond (2007), identifies eight determinants of service quality which are performance, features, reliability, conformance, durability, serviceability, aesthetics and perceived quality. Caruana, Money and Berthon (2000) as cited by Briggs et al. (2007), come out with the three column format of SERVQUAL which proposed by Parasuraman et al (1994). From the research, three-dimensional structure which is reliable, tangibles and responsiveness, assurance and empathy, which are melded into a single factor, were found. The SERVQUAL model consists of 22 items which measures five service quality dimensions, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al. 1985; Parasuraman et al. 1988; Marković and Janković, 2013). Tangibility defined as the physical characteristics of the facilities, equipment, and appearance of staffs. Then, reliability considered as the ability of the staffs to perform the promised service dependably and accurately to the guests. Meanwhile, responsiveness is the willingness of the staffs to help guests who need any help and providing prompt service. Next, assurance is for knowledge and courtesy of the staffs and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Last but not least, empathy defined as caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

#### **2.2.1 TANGIBILITY**

Tangibility is related to the physical facilities, equipment and appearance of the hotel staff. This is very important in order to create good first impressions of the hotel to the guest since they will feel satisfied as the hotel conditions meet their expectations. The concept of the physical environment as an important part of the service experience was introduced as early as in the 1970s and there is more to the customer's experience than the product or service, citing atmosphere or physical environment as possible influences in the purchase decision (Barber, Goodmanb, & Goh, 2011). Brady and Cronin (2001), found that there are many elements of service quality and the tangibility of the physical environment become one of the important elements of all. Other than that, cleanliness is one of the important elements that always been looked up by guest when they stay at certain hotels. Cleanliness is one of the factors in deciding whether they are satisfied or not in staying at the hotel. Shafiq et al. (2013), stated that the tangible service indicator consists of cleanliness of the dining area, staffs wearing the clean and neat clothes and the use of disposable gloves. The cleanliness of a hotel or restaurant, whether it is at the entrance, building exterior, or the dining/guest room, can influence the customer's perceptions of service quality (Barber and Scarcelli,2010). The ambient conditions, design, and physical factors can also be considered as the tangibility factor in service quality. The parking area and facilities should be in good condition, easily accessed and up-to-date. Dubé and Renaghan (1999); Matilla (1999) found that there is a positive relationship between guest room design, and the physical property with guest satisfaction. In other words, this means that the physical conditions of the properties or hotel are correlated with the guest satisfaction. This statement proves that the tangibility of the service itself plays an important role in satisfying the guest during their stay.

### **2.2.2 RELIABILITY**

Reliability describes as the capabilities of the staffs to fulfill promised services accurately and dependably, Ojo (2008). In another word, reliability is the professionalism of the staffs, as well as their skill in inspiring trust through delivering of all the services promises accurately. The reliability practices usually can be seen in any transaction that happened in the front office area. Rao and Sahu (2013) said that the reliability dimension refers to the front office staff's ability in providing the services dependably and accurately. Customer value their time very much. This is because the delivery time and treatment receive from the staffs are one of the factors that they always considered in making a decision. Thus, the ability of the staff in delivering the service in time promised is crucial to them (Vega and Garcia, 2008). Kandampully & Suhartanto, (2000) mentioned that the front office staffs are considered a supporting factor in determining customer satisfaction when deciding to return, to recommend the hotel, or in demonstrating loyalty to a particular hotel. This is why a front office staff should able to dominate and demonstrate the services accurately and dependably. The front office staff plays an important function in hotel industries as customers deal with them as the center of the hotel. Besides, they also provide assistance to the guests, fulfill and meet their needs and wants. Front office services have the element that is considered as the most important one. They are the one who resembled the service quality which are tangibility (how well they are dressed), reliability (the ability to demonstrate a service accurately and dependably and skills in solving the problem encountered by the guest), responsiveness (promptness of the process of check-in or checkout), assurance (safety and security of the guest) and empathy (caring and individualized attention such as remembering the guest name).

### **2.2.3 RESPONSIVENESS, ASSURANCE AND EMPATHY**

Responsiveness definition is the intentions of the firm and its willingness towards customers' help (Ojo, 2008). In other words, responsiveness is the willingness of the hotel staffs to help

customers and provide prompt service to the guests. Promptness of the staffs, convenience, and accessibility of the hotel are the items that fall under the responsiveness that usually used to measure the customer satisfaction. It is essential for hotel staffs, especially front office staffs to be able in helping customer by providing prompt service and then meet the customers' expectations (Rao and Sahu (2013). According to Fah and Kandasamy (2011), responsiveness also reflects the firm's commitment to provide its service in a timely manner, therefore it is concerned with the readiness and willingness of employees to produce or provide a service which is significant in achieving customer satisfaction. Avoiding the customer waiting for no apparent reasons could be one of the examples of the responsiveness of the service in the hotel industry. The assurance dimension refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence including competence, courtesy, credibility and security Rao and Sahu (2013). This is supported by Ojo (2008), who said assurance consists of courtesy, competence; security and credibility. Making the guest feel safe and secure while staying at the particular hotel is an excellent example of the assurance practices in service delivery. According to Shafiq et al. (2013) in order to ensure the customer feels safe in doing the financial transactions, the employees must be a trustworthy staff. Besides, the ability to communicate well with the guest has also played an important role in considering the overall service quality of the hotel. The staff skills in handling the guests with language barriers as an example, are very highly appreciated by them and thus this will lead to satisfaction in staying at the hotel. This statement is supported by Su and Sun (2007) who revealed that some related criteria of assurance are competent, courteousness, security, credibility, and effective communication skills. Empathy is usually described as caring. According to Frazer (2000), caring definition is showing an interest in the customer by paying attention to the customer and part of respecting the customer. It also can be interpreted as the individualized attention the particular hotel provides to its guest during their stay. As mentioned by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (1991), and Rao and Sahu (2013), stated that the empathy dimension represents the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers including access or approachability and ease of contact, effective communication, and understanding the customers. Berndt (2009) indicates that it is important for the hotel to provide personal care, individualized attentive services. This statement literally meant that customer's desires must be understood.

## **2.2 GUEST SATISFACTION**

Guest satisfaction is the individual or group internal feeling which either can be satisfied or dissatisfied resulting from the experiencing the services provided to them. Satisfaction is the evaluation derived from the customers, which comparing their before purchase or pre purchase expectations and what they get or receive from the product or services after they actually buy or experienced it (Rao and Sahu, 2013). As it plays crucial roles in the survival and future of tourism products and services, customer satisfaction is the most important and frequently examines in the concept of modern marketing thought and practices (Chi, Gursoy, 2009). Kotler (2000) stated that, satisfaction is a person's feeling of either pleasure or disappointment result from comparing the outcome of the product or services with their expectations. Achieving the service quality is important not only in the hotel industry, as it is actually a measurement tools in order to know the success of the service delivered. In the hotel industry, there are several ways that can be used to measure the guest satisfaction upon their stay at certain hotels. One of the common ways used by many hotels is through the guest comment card (GCC). This is supported by Gilbert and Horsnell (1998) who stated that one way of determining the customer satisfaction in the hotel industry is by using the GCC. Usually the guest comment card will be distributed and placed inside the room and also in the hotel's reception area. Through GCC, it actually helps the hotel management to know the guest

comment and problem faced by the guest during their stay at a particular hotel. Through the analyzing of GCC, the management will know the problem faster and thus they can indirectly fix this so that the problem would not occur again soon. The usage of GCC is very practical in hotel industry as the result can be viewed faster and the cost is also cheaper. The analysis will be very accurate because it will provide a true picture that the customer's satisfaction is below their expectations or above (Marković and Janković, 2013).

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A comprehensive research can only be conducted if there is a good plan or research design. Therefore, this study will be conducted as a quantitative research. Through quantitative research, the researcher is able to enhance the understanding of the issues, and answers the research questions. Prior to distribute set of questionnaires to the respondents, researcher needs to identify the constructs, then adapting all the items. In designing the questionnaire, question format, measurement and evaluation should take into consideration as it highly related to the issue of reliability and validity of the final set of questionnaire. This study will be using closed-ended questionnaires as it may improve consistency of responses and can be coded certainly in a database. Furthermore, it is relatively easy and less expensive (Hair, Money, Samouel and Page, 2007). Next, pilot test will be conducted to check validity and reliability for each item. For the purpose of the study, the guest who is occupying at any hotels located in Seberang Perai, Pulau Pinang will be the study's respondents. Thus, the researcher plans to collect the data at Ixora Hotel, Light Hotel, Sunway Hotel, Iconic Hotel, Pearl View Hotel and Grand Orient Hotel in the month of March to July 2020. Convenience sampling will be used for this study. As mentioned by Sekaran, and Bougie (2010) convenience sampling refers to the collection of information from members of the population who are conveniently available to provide. Two types of data analysis procedures will be used, preliminary data analysis (Z-score, skewness and kurtosis and respondent sample profile) and data analysis EFA. In order to answer research objective, addressing a research question and testing hypothesis will be answered through the EFA analysis. Seven (7) point Likert scale will be used since higher points used for Likert scale indicate the more precise the extent of agreement and disagreement with a statement (Hair et al., 2007). SPSS version 24 will be used to compute the statistical analyses of the quantitative data obtained from the research instrument such as perform paired t-tests at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  to see if differences existed between mean satisfaction scores for various service quality attributes.

### **4.0 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

Practically, this study is to help the hotel operators to understand any important aspects in order to deliver good services which will give an impact to their guest satisfaction. As the hospitality industry developing, the level of service provided to the guest should be excellent and the services delivered meet or exceed the guest perception. Through excellent service delivery, the guest will feel more satisfied and willing to spend while staying in the hotel. For patron, a good service quality will be seen as an appreciation from the hotel. Thus, they do not mind in spending their money in order to enjoy the best service during their stay. There are many factors that contribute and affect the customer satisfaction during their stay in hotels. Factors such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy of the service are pivotal in determining the guest satisfaction and need to be considered. Hence, the findings of this study can also give a guideline for the management to have a clear view towards patrons' satisfaction and their intention to return to the hotels. Nevertheless, there were abundance of studies regarding to the impact of service quality towards guest satisfaction, yet there are few studies have been conducted in Penang.

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