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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION FOR MUSLIM-FRIENDLY ACCOMMODATION

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Abstract:

Muslim Friendly Accommodation (MFA) is considered a new direction to capture the market among Muslim travellers. Consecutively, service quality is a significant concept related to consumer behaviour and is intertwined with behavioural intentions and satisfaction. The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is an important strategy because MFA has become an alternative way for the tourism industry to generate profit. This study examines the MFA context's service quality elements concerning customer satisfaction using correlation analysis. 150 questionnaires were distributed to budget hotel customers in Langkawi Island, Malaysia. The findings showed that SERVQUAL's elements of tangible, empathy, and responsiveness are the main elements influencing customer satisfaction in the MFA context. Thus, the hotel's physical facilities and equipment should be in perfect condition, with the staff being well-trained to attend to and be aware of customers' requests and needs in a specific time frame.

Keywords:

Muslim Friendly Accommodation (MFA), Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Muslim Travellers, Malaysia

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Introduction

The Muslim travel market will continue to contribute to the global travel business. Malaysia, a Muslim country, has established itself as one of the primary destinations for Muslim travelers worldwide (Azali *et al.*, 2021). According to Zainol and Mustafa (2021), Muslim travelers prefer to select tourist destinations that bear Islamic elements thus allowing their travelling activities to be done based on religious norms. Thus, understanding their travel preferences and spending habits is so critical. Thus, Muslim Friendly Accommodation (MFA) is one of the fastest and largest economic industries that has gotten overpowering attention worldwide (Ainin *et al*., 2020).

MFA is considered a new direction to capture the market among Muslim travellers this decade. Consequently, the Muslim tourism industry appears to be gaining positive development and is one of the nation's leading economic contributors (Awan & Hussain, 2023). On top of that, the report of the Global Islamic Economy indicated that Muslim spending on travel was roughly RM659 billion in 2016, and it is anticipated to extend by RM1103 billion by 2022. Among the main contributors was the MFA implementation in the Muslim and non-Muslim countries, where the MFA sector contributed RM727 billion, contributing to 11.9% of the global expenses. The MFA offers Muslim and non-Muslim travellers a safer and more comfortable alternative tourism option.

This study looks at the budget hotels registered under the Malaysia Association of Budget Hotels (MyBHA), specifically focusing on budget hotels in the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia. Discussions and arrangements were made based on the previous reciprocal agreement between MyBHA and the researcher’s university to label these budget hotels as Muslim Friendly Accommodation (MFA). In the MFA sector, especially in budget hotels in Malaysia, many facing difficulties maintaining customer satisfaction, and the organization's profit has decreased in recent years.

One way to solve all these issues is to incorporate service quality (SERVQUAL) in the MFA sector, by which this strategy can fulfill customer requirements and satisfaction (Jeaheng *et al*., 2020). Over a few decades, the service quality in other sectors or industries has been comprehensively improved to meet customer needs (Malik *et al*., 2020). For example, Djunaid *et al.*, 2023 showed that improved service quality in green hotels positively affects organizational performance. In addition, a study by Shresta (2021) claimed that service quality has a higher impact on customer satisfaction in healthcare, the service industry, education,and hospitality. Unfortunately, although comprehensive service quality in other sectors was demonstrated over a few decades ago, little attention has been paid to the MFA sector, especially in budget hotels, for their effectiveness in supporting the Malaysian tourism industry

There is no doubt that service quality has been associated with the service industry as it is a significant concept related to consumer behavior which is intertwined with behavioural intentions and satisfaction (Pop *et al*., 2021; Tezer & Bodur, 2020). The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction is considered a vital strategy, especially for the hotel industry, with unique preferences in MFA because MFA has become an alternative way to generate profit. Therefore, the effectiveness of service quality concerning MFA needs to be identified as a customer-orientated strategy to enhance customer satisfaction (Kanyama *et al*., 2022).

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Literature Review

Muslim-friendly accommodation (MFA) has gained the attention of many Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Mazlan *et al.,* 2023). The MFA focuses on accommodation provision, beverages, food, prayer mats, non-alcoholic drinking, qibla direction, and travelling activities (Zainol et al., 2021). Similarly, Muslim travelers have tall desires from all viewpoints namely: prayer schedule, accessibility to the prayer room, and availability of prayer mats on hotel premises (Yusof & Ramli, 2020). Regarding accessibility to halal meals, Muslim travelers place great desire on their capacity to recognize the halal of food, while at the same time expecting the ease of getting food nourishment and halal assurance wherever they go (Yusof & Ramli, 2020).

Muslim travelers select their travel destinations based on several criteria, many closely related to their religious obligations (Zainol & Mustafa, 2021). Battour *et al.* (2022) claimed that religion has influenced and sculpts the choice of traveling, particularly the goal and all exercises included for optional purposes involved for discretionary purposes. It was supported by (Mardhiah *et al.,* 2023) who found acomparable suggestion that claims to tour and travelling are exceedingly empowered by Islam and regularly associated with hospitality (Khan *et al*., 2020).

Muslim travelers decide about where they want to go based on their perceptions, behavior, and feeling (Chua *et al.,* 2021). Their primary reason for travelling would be religious (such as performing umrah or haj) or not religious (such as family visits, business, etc),which could impact their journey. These visitors must follow Islamic norms even if they are not travelling for religious reasons (Wang *et al.,* 2020).

Based on previous studies and literature review, the concept of Islamic tourism came earlier than the development of MFA (Safitri, 2020). The definition of MFA may well be determined from the behavior of the travelers, including inspiration to travel, desired destination, and service offered that includes accommodation, and halal refreshments. Moreover, Firdaus *et al.* (2020), claimed that Islamic hospitality is about serving visitors in such a manner that everything adheres to Islamic regulations, established in the Quran and Hadith. Hence, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), a unit responsible for Islamic tourism affairs under the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) defined MFA as any movement, occasion and encounter embraced in a state of travel approved by Islam (ITC, 2024).



Figure 1: The Muslim Friend Accommodation Necessities For Muslim

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Figure 1 shows that the concept of MFA is based on the Islamic tourism concept and is employed to fit with new empirical and literature studies worldwide. MFA's new tourism and hospitality segment should require more travelers worldwide. The presence of Muslim-friendly amenities is critical for meeting the demands of tourists, particularly Muslim travelers (Zainol & Mustafa, 2021). In short, this study recommended eleven variables for implementation for MFA, namely Qibla direction, prayer mat availability, Quran,halal food, a place for praying, prayer timetable, separation of swimming area and beach facilities for men and women, appropriate Muslim attire for receptionist, non-alcohol drinking, halal kitchen (Yusof & Ramli, 2020) which complies with MS ISO 2610:2015 requirements.

According to Zainol and Mustafa (2021), Muslim travellers found that Muslim-friendly accommodations must have visibility of marked prayer direction (sticker/direction of Qibla) at their premises; prayer timetable; and the hotel and restaurant personnel wear information that adhere to Islamic dress regulations. Meanwhile, Muslim-friendly products and services must include halal food alternatives, prayer areas that are easily accessible, facilities and transportation services, and lodging (Nuraini & Sucipto, 2021). Muslim travellers anticipated seeing the halal symbol of certifications, which will assistthem in determining halal meals (Yusof & Ramli, 2020). This is also a significant result todemonstrate that Muslim travellers follow Islamic norms everywhere they go, and the tourism and hospitality suppliers who can supply these sought elements will have a competitive edgeover their competitors.

Service Quality (SERVQUAL)

Customer experiences are generally based on their perceptions of hotels' products and services (Stefko *et al.*, 2020). Numerous studies found many benefits between service quality and customer satisfaction (Khan *et al*., 2020; Saraswati, 2022; Abdirad & Krishnan, 2022). Meanwhile, Moguerza *et al*., (2022) argue that there are claims that customers that request better service can return for the same service. Moreover, customer needs are one of the primary facilitators of SERVQUAL that developed from experimental studies and literature reviews (Koay *et al.*, 2022). Customer satisfaction and readiness to suggest benefits to other potential clients happen when their requirements are fulfilled (Yusra *et al*., 2020). On the other hand, hotel service providers must retain customers by providing the factors that significantly impact service performance.

Parasuraman *et al*., (1985) created SERVQUAL, a multi-dimensional research instrument, which incorporates the items namely, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, reliability, and empathy. It is a model which describes how customers perceive the quality of services and how it influences service quality. Hence, the SERVQUAL model has guided various industries and benefitted organizations, such as tourism (Moguerza *et al*., 2022) and hotels (Cheunkamon *et al*., 2022). The model was applied to measure how the hotel industry effectively delivers quality customer service. Based on the literature review on service quality, this study addresses the five elements in SERVQUAL to fulfill customer satisfaction in the MFA sector to the budget hotels in Langkawi Island, Malaysia. Table 1 describes the definition of the five SERVQUAL items.

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Table 1: The Definition Of SERVQUAL Items

Tangibles	The physical facilities, equipment, and personnel appearance are defined as tangible in service quality. For the MFA sector, the appearance of personnel is an essential manner to fulfilling Islamic rule requirements; thus, entire personnel describe tangibility in SERVQUAL as a solid dimension to access service quality (Ali & Anwar, 2021).
Responsiveness	The staff of MFA hotel is willing to assist customers and provide efficient service to their customers within a specific time. (Ali & Anwar, 2021)
Assurance	The ability of MFA staff indicates trust and confidence in the customer (Ali & Anwar, 2021)
Empathy	The MFA staff is capable of giving quality attention and understanding customer needs (Ali & Anwar, 2021).
Reliability	The staff of MFA assured promises and fulfilled the customer's request (Ali & Anwar, 2021) promptly

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be characterized as the customer's reaction to a particular consumption experience to evaluate the service (Khan *et al.,* 2020). Thus, customer satisfaction is a complex perception by the human process that can influence many factors. Kim and Kim (2022) defined customer satisfaction as the involvement of judgment that an item or benefit gives apleasurable utilization level. Though the approach and terminology are different in measuring customer satisfaction, in the MFA context, the comprehensive compliance of having Muslim-friendly necessities is necessary to receive accommodation experience (Mazlan *et al.,* 2023). Muslim travelers seek accommodation that offers unique necessities for Muslim travelers, is located in a suitable location, and chooses accommodation that offers a favorable service experience (Zainol & Mustafa, 2021).

Research Framework

In this research, the service quality of MFA is governed by the SERVQUAL elements namely, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and reliability as exogenous variables, and customer satisfaction as the endogenous variable, as shown in Figure 2. Thus, based on this service quality MFA will influence customers' satisfaction and will help to support the tourism industry.

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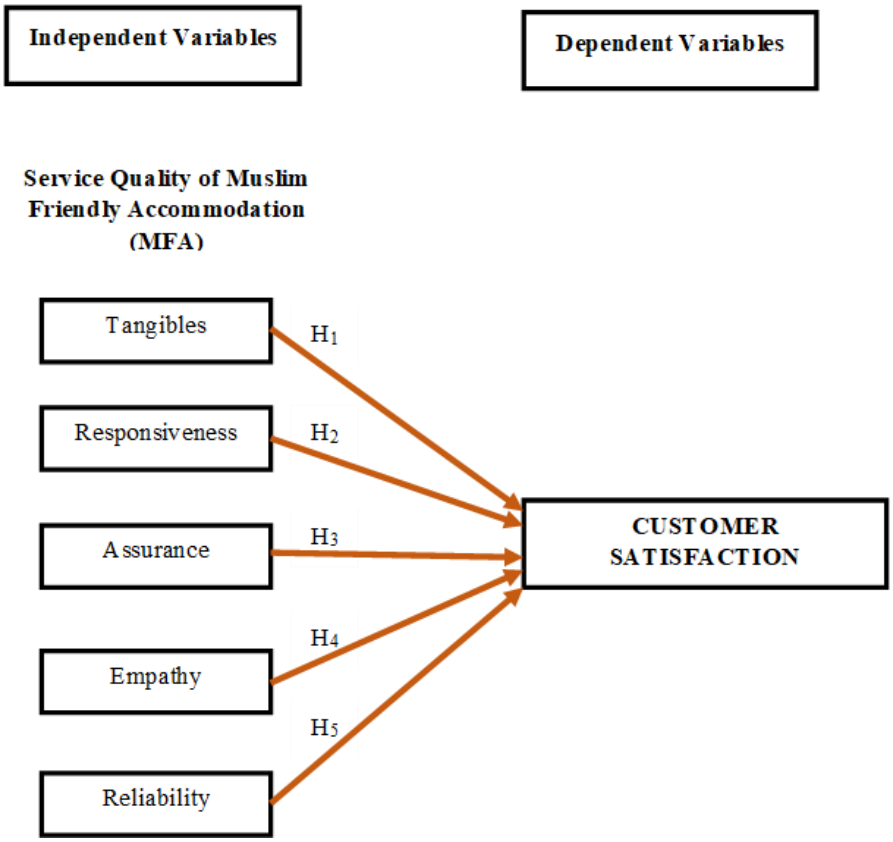


Figure 2: The Research Framework

This research uses the service quality model adapted from Parasuraman *et, al*. (1985). The SERVQUAL model measures how well the service is conveyed to the customer's expectations. Thus, based on this, the research aims to identify the relationship between the service quality of the MFA sector with customer satisfaction. Therefore, the research hypotheses of this study can be formulated as follows:

H1: The tangible SERVQUAL in MFA positively correlates with customer satisfaction.

H2: The responsiveness SERVQUAL in MFA positively correlates with customer satisfaction

H3: The assurance SERVQUAL in MFA positively correlates with customer satisfaction

H4: The empathy SERVQUAL in MFA positively correlates with customer satisfaction

H5: The reliability SERVQUAL in MFA positively correlates with customer satisfaction

Research Methodology

A self-administered survey and an adjusted adaptation of the SERVQUAL scale were utilized to measure the budget hotel guests' expectations of tourism products and service quality in Langkawi, Kedah. The SERVQUAL measures customers' expectations as recommended by previous studies (Hu *et al*., 2021). The survey instrument developed is based on the five dimensions of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction. A few alterations were made to suit the hotel industry's setting. The survey questions were categorized into three parts. The beginning part of the questionnaire contained demographic data about therespondents. The following part of the questionnaire outlined the respondents' recognition of the hotel's service quality. And final part of the questionnaire assessed the respondent's recognition of customer satisfaction.

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The study applied a five-point Likert scale which was ordered as follows: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Neutral (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5). During the data collection period, the target population selected for this study comprised tourists who stayed in budget hotels in Langkawi. The questionnaires are located at the front desk, and a total of 150 questionnaires were distributed using simple random sampling techniques, with 98 returned and validated to be analysed. The study was used SPSS program of correlation analysis to determined the relationship of each variables in this research.

Result and Analysis

The information was compiled and analyzed utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. In total, 98 questionnaires were eligible for analysis. Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents were female, with 64 respondents (65.3 percent), while the rest were male 34 respondents (34.7 percent). According to Table 3, for travelling, it was seen that the majority of respondents travel for leisure total of 65.3percent, for business a total of 30 respondents (30.6 percent), and for others, a total of 4respondents (4.1 percent). Table 4 shows the majority of 54 respondents used the Internet as a source of information when gathering information about their holiday (55.1 percent), while 37 respondents (37.7 percent) used social media; 6 respondents (6.1 percent) gathered from theirfriends and relative; and also travel agency respectively.

Table 2: Respondents Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	34	34.7%
Female	64	65.3%
Total	**98**	**100%**

Table 3: Purpose of Travelling

Purpose of travelling	Frequency	Percent
Leisure	64	65.3%
Business	30	30.6%
Others	4	4.1%
Total	**98**	**100%**

Table 4: Source of Information

Source of information	Frequency	Percent
Internet	54	55.1%
Social Media	37	37.7%
Friend/Relative	6	6.1%
Travel Agencies	1	1.1%
Total	**98**	**100%**

Table 5 shows the correlation analysis between SERVQUAL instruments in MFA. Based on the results, the tangible item has a significant correlation (r=.703**, p<0.01) and has a strong and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. This is followed by empathy which has a significant correlation (r=.639**, p<0.01), with customer satisfaction, while responsiveness also shows a significant correlation (r=.621**, p<0.01) and a positive relationship to customer satisfaction. This indicated that the tangible, empathy, and responsiveness items under MFA

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service quality are among the highest factors influencing customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, the factors of assurance and reliability are moderated and have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. (r=.562**, p<0.01) and (r=.519**, p <0.01) respectively.

Table 5: The Correlation Analysis Result Is Significant At the 0.05 level (2-tailed) **

Service Quality	Customer Satisfaction
Empathy	0.639
Reliability	0.519
Assurance	0.562
Responsiveness	0.621
Tangible	0.703

Table 6 shows linear regression analyses among SERVQUAL instruments in MFA. The result showsthat coefficient correlation (r=. 757) indicates the relationship (positive and robust) between SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, R Square (r^2=.573) indicates that 57.3%.This number shows the service quality influence on customer satisfaction, while the remaining 42.7% is influenced by the other variables outside this study or is considered as an error value

Table 6: Linear Regression Analysis Result

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate
1	0.757	0.573	0.550	0.482

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tangible, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance and Reliability.

Table 7 explains the analysis of the variance result (F=24.663) with a significance value of (0.000).Thus, it indicated a significant relationship between service quality and the effect on customer satisfaction.

Table 7: Analysis of Variance Results

Model	*Sum of Square*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Regression	28.665	5	5.733	24.663	0.000
Residual	21.386	92	0.232		
Total	50.051	97			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Tangible, Responsiveness, Empathy, Assurance and Reliability

b. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

Discussion

The MFA is considered new potential in the accommodation sector that can create a market value for customer service worldwide. According to past research, non-Muslim nations are accommodating Muslim travelers because of their spending power. As a result, Muslim countries (including Malaysia) must enhance MFA sector, which fulfills the service quality provided to attract more tourists to visit the country. Furthermore, enhancing service quality in MFA has added value to the general customer experience in the hotel sector. The results show that tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness are the factors most influencing MFA in service quality provision. These items will lead to customer satisfaction the most among the five SERVQUAL items outlined by Parasuraman *et al.*'s model.

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This signifies that MFA hotels must ensure their physical facilities and equipment are in perfect condition, with the staff being well-trained to be aware of customers' requests and needs. Staff need to be nicely attired and capable of giving quality attention, understanding customer needs, and attending to customers in a specific time frame. This enhancement in service quality will ensure customer satisfaction in MFA provision and thus support Malaysia's tourism industry by attracting more consumers, primarily Muslim travelers. Opinions supported by (Muslimin et al., 2022), that comprehensive compliance of having Muslim social necessities is necessary to receive accommodation experience. This will offer a good service experience (Zainol & Mustafa, 2021).

Recommendation

Finally, we can recommend that, while travelling, Muslims strictly follow the rules as stated in the Quran and Hadith, and it will significantly impact the hotel industry to provide MFA and excellent service to customers. This research's finding may assist hotel management and academics in understanding the demands of Muslim tourists in terms of what they anticipate from MFA concerning SERVQUAL items. By recognizing and improving these crucial traits in their marketing plan, the service provider may increase their chances of getting preferred by these Muslims. As purported by Zainol et al. (2021), tourist destinations and facilities that can provide the needs of the faith of Muslim tourists will exceed in the creation of memorable and the creation of meaningful touristexperiences.

To summarize, following Islamic norms and duties is critical for the MFA sector to attract more customers. With the inclusion of SERVQUAL items, Muslim-friendly places could consider the MFA facilities that have been recognized as critical for Muslim guests. The significance of MFA such as providing halal food and prayer facilities, and also, the importanceof variables that most affect MFA in service quality offerings, such as tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness, have been thoroughly covered by this research.

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