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Internal Measurement of Service Quality and Employees' Relation in Muslim Friendly Hotels

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Abstract

The increasing demand for Muslim-friendly products and services has led hoteliers in Malaysia to provide more Muslim-friendly hotel (MFHs) services to fulfill Muslim tourists' needs. However, previous studies have shown that there is still a lack of conformity between MFHs and their guests, which harms MFHs' service performance. It is essential to expand the discussion on improving service performance in MFHs. The data of 390 MFH employees in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor had been gathered quantitatively, and the data were analyzed using structural equation modeling and partial least squares analysis.

Keywords: Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL); Employees' Relation; Service Performance; Muslim Friendly Hotels.

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1.0 Introduction

Malaysia was the most preferred destination for Muslim travelers worldwide in 2018 and 2019, contributing over 5 million tourists annually. The positive numbers of Muslim travelers visiting Malaysia have resulted from the Malaysian tourism industry's capability to implement Muslim-friendly tourism products (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020). Muslim Friendly Hotels (MFHs) are one of the tourism products available in Malaysia. The business concept of MFHs is considered one of the most popular in Muslim tourism, not only in Malaysia but also around the globe. The Muslim-friendly-based operation offered in MFHs provides halal food and covers the whole area of service operation (Albattat et al., 2018). However, some studies negatively describe the MFHs' business in Malaysia as lacking and weak, especially in service standardization and operational requirements. Hence, the operating system of MFHs is still unstable as loopholes in the operational side of MFHs are found in several studies (Albattat et al., 2018). According to Jais and Marzuki (2018), the operating manual, procedures, implementation guidelines, quality standards, circulars, and terms of reference that are considered necessary in the MFHs are still not adequately established. The government's lack of proper service guidance and consultation also led to high uncertainty among MFHs

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administrators (Razak et al., 2019). In order to satisfy diverse customers' needs, MFHs administrators constantly shift their operating procedures. Quran recitation and Adzan are too loud and disturb the non-Muslim guest is one example of challenges that may affect MFH's service performance (Razak et al., 2019). This situation will affect guest satisfaction with hotel service procedures. Expanding the discussion around MFH service performance is crucial concerning the problems identified. Thus, this study aims to help MFHs improve their service performance by using Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL) to determine the level of service performance in MFHs from employees' perspectives. The INTQUAL model, created by Caruana and Pitt in 1997, is derived from creating an internal measure of service quality. This measure used Parasuraman et al. (1988) service quality measures on two dimensions which are (1) management of expectation and (2) service reliability, as an adopted model for INTQUAL. As this study aims to improve MFHs' service performance, the other factors that could influence service performance should also be considered. Based on the study by Biggs et al. (2016), the influence of employee relations, which consists of coworkers' and superiors' influence, could also affect the level of service performance. According to Biggs et al. (2016) and Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), coworkers' and superiors' influence can affect service performance, so they can provide information and engage in behavioral support for some activities while discouraging others, thus helping to shape a colleague's beliefs about what he or she should or should not do (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991; Kram & Isabella, 1985). This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive view of how INTQUAL and employee relations could affect MFHs' service performance. The remaining portions of this paper exhibit literature review, hypotheses development, research methods, data analysis, discussion, contribution to theory and practice, conclusion, and future research directions.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Internal Measurement of Service Quality

To meet the objective of this research, which is to assess the level of service quality from the point of view of employees, an adapted service quality model, INTQUAL (Caruana & Pitt, 1997), is derived from the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and focusing on measuring the level of service quality from the perspective of employees compared to SERVQUAL model which focuses on identifying the level of service quality from the customer's responses. This metric is used as a two-dimensional service quality measure, which is (1) the management of expectations and (2) the reliability of services as an accepted model for internal service quality measurement. According to the previous research on INTQUAL by Zailani et al. (2006), their study focuses on how internal service quality can affect performance, to investigate the influence of internal service quality measures on business performance in the Malaysia hotel industry and validate the INTQUAL model established by Caruana and Pitt (1997). According to their study, it is proven that INTQUAL is an appropriate model to measure the level of service quality from the employees' perspective. The result will be associated with the hotel's performance on Return On Capital Employed (ROCE), sales growth, and service performance by measuring the internal service quality. The dimensions of INTQUAL, which consist of management of expectations and service reliability, were implemented in this study to measure the level of service quality provided by service employees in MFHs.

2.2 Employees' Relation

Employee relationship is one of the most important relationships a person can have with his / her coworkers. Employee relationships can be interactions between individuals and their coworkers, supervisors, and organizations (Brooke, 2022). Cross (1973) measured three aspects of employee relations, and two aspects are generally characterized in the literature on leader-member exchange (LMX) and team member exchange (TMX). Leader-member exchanges emphasize the value of interactions between subordinates and managers (Xie et al., 2020). The Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is a relationship-based, dyadic theory of leadership. LMX theory strongly focuses on the idea that leaders influence employees in their team (referred to as members) through the quality of relationships they develop with them. A good quality relationship is characterized by honesty, commitment, mutual respect loyalty (Xie et al., 2020; Biggs et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the Team-Member Exchange (TMX) was first identified by Seers (1989) and originated from LMX research. High-quality exchanges are focused on confidence, loyalty, and mutual responsibility, while low-quality exchanges are bound by job contracts (Chen, 2018; Wech et al., 2009). Team-member interactions are like LMX but include coworkers rather than superiors. The idea is that high-quality exchanges are reciprocal and contribute to better results. Leader-member exchanges and TMX are essential predictors of work satisfaction, organizational engagement, and turnover intentions (Chen, 2018; Major et al., 1995). The value of LMX and TMX cannot be understated, and this research aims to draw on their contribution to employees working in MFHs. The concept established in this study is that the dimensions of the relationship between employees consist of the influence of superiors and coworkers, which influence MFHs service performance. In other words, individuals' relationships with their coworkers, their managers, and the company may affect the success of MFH's services performance.

2.3 Service Performance

Dimensions of service performance have also been subject to different itemization. Some authors considered two core elements for service performance: efficiency performance, defined as completing service within set time standards. Quality performance is defined as providing a durable solution to customer problems. Aryee (2016) and Garcia-Buades et al. (2016) classified and mentioned service performance dimensions in their works. These dimensions have also been shaped as convenience perception, customer service, and resolving complaints, putting as indicators for performance in logical sequence (Hanafi & Ibrahim, 2018; Hoang, 2016). These three dimensions have been considered critical for service performance since 1990. They have also been developed recently as factors affecting performance-enhancing customer service (Hanafi & Ibrahim, 2016; Hoang, 2016). Through the dimensions of service performance, which

consist of convenience perception, complaint resolving, and customer service, it is appropriate to predict MFHs' service performance. It is crucial to ensure that MFHs' service performance is improved as the better and higher the performance of MFHs' services than the competitors, the more optimistic and appropriate picture of MFHs' services will be formed in the minds of both Muslim and non-Muslim customers. The performance of the services offered by MFHs can be a crucial factor in attracting and satisfying customers with the services provided by MFHs. Hotels offer services, and regular and appropriate services will increase customers' positive image. On the other hand, improved service performance would make MFHs customers and guests repeat their purchasing process, leading to an improved revisit of customers' intentions.

3.0 Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Having identified the variables in the reviews of the relevant literature, the variable of interest (dependent) in this study is INTQUAL which includes management of expectation and service reliability, and employees' relations which dimensions are superiors' influence and coworkers' influence which are predicted to influence MFHs service performance. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

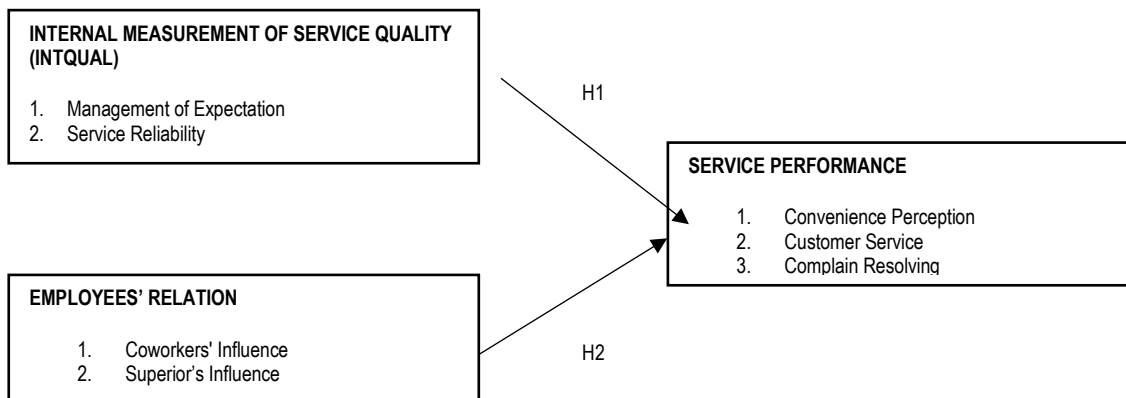


Fig. 1: Theoretical Framework
(Source: Zailani et al., (2006); Biggs et al., (2016); Hanafi and Ibrahim (2018))

3.2 Relationship between INTQUAL and Service Performance

In the context of the hotel industry, INTQUAL, which consists of management of expectations and service reliability, was used to evaluate the level of service quality from the employees' perspective (Zailani et al., 2006). It was discovered that using INTQUAL can improve the hotel's service performance. After all, a significant effort to concentrate on internal measurement of service quality can give the hotel a competitive advantage and increase service performance. Based on these reported findings, which were from research relating to the variables, it is therefore conjectured that:

- H1: There is a significant relationship between INTQUAL and service performance.
- H1.1: There is a significant relationship between expectations management and service performance.
- H1.2: There is a significant relationship between service reliability and service performance.

3.3 Relationship between Employees' Relations and Service Performance

It is worth reiterating that good employee relations, consisting of the influence of superiors and coworkers, will ensure that the employees obtain the guidance and information they need to help support the operations, services, principles, and policies of the organization. (Redmond, 2013; Dessler, 2004). Employee relations focus on managing the relationship between workers and employers to improve their commitment to service (Gennard & Judge, 2002), excitement, achievement (Hameed, 2009), loyalty, productivity (Mike, 2008), and motivation (Crandall & Perrewew, 2005) thus enhancing their level of service performance. Hence, it is conjured that:

- H2: There is a significant relationship between employees relation and service performance.
- H2.1: There is a significant relationship between superiors' influence and service performance.
- H2.2: There is a significant relationship between coworkers' influence and service performance.

4.0 Methodology

This study employed a quantitative analysis with a combination of cross-sectional research methodology since this study intends to quantify a relationship in one new conceptual framework with a one-time data collection method (Creswell, 2014). A total of 390 respondents

agreed to participate in this study, where they were selected using a convenience sampling technique, and the questionnaire was distributed using the social media platform. Items from Zailani et al. (2006) were adapted for measuring management expectation and service reliability variables. In contrast, items developed by Biggs et al. (2016) were adapted for measures of superior's influence and coworker's influence variables. This study adapted items from the Hanafi and Ibrahim (2018) research in terms of service performance variables. As for the statistical analysis procedure, the Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (i.e., PLS-SEM) estimation multivariate data technique was used since this study intends to explore the new conceptual framework simultaneously (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, the significance test in this PLS-SEM analysis was computed using the Bootstrapping method, which can be considered more robust than the conventional t-test method (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, 5000 replications of samples were computed as suggested by Hair et al. (2017) to get reliable results for empirical t-statistics and Bias Corrected (i.e., BCa) bootstrap.

5.0 Findings

5.1 Measurement Model Analysis

The measurement model analysis indicated that all items used for measuring the variables in this model were valid from the convergent validity aspect (Table 1). It is because the factor loading values were above 0.70, and then the value of Average Variance Explain, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha was also above 0.50 and 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). The HTMT ratio analysis also indicated that each variable in this model was discriminated against since the ratio value was below 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, it confirms that each variable in this model can be considered to have optimal convergence and discriminant validities.

Table 1. Convergent validity for the measurement model

Indicator	Loading	AVE	γ	α
Management Expectation				
I am confident that my hotel promotes our service with utmost responsibility on information validity (ME1)	0.826*	0.728	0.930	0.904
I believe that my hotel shows great value and cares for both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (ME2)	0.903*			
I have a good idea about what Muslim and Non-Muslim guests expect from our service (ME3)	0.908*			
I believe that regular contact with Muslim and Non-Muslim guests can enhance our understanding of customer expectations (ME4)	0.895*			
I am confident that regular contact with guests will enhance our understanding of guests' expectations (ME5)	0.720*			
Service Reliability				
I believe that in my hotel, performing the services ethically to both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests is our main target (SR1)	0.866*	0.748	0.937	0.916
I can provide service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests accurately and promptly (SR2)	0.872*			
I believe that my hotel trained me to provide quality service to both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SR3)	0.833*			
I am confident that my hotel always encouraged me to find a way to delight both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SR4)	0.860*			
I am confident that all employees are trained to be clear on their career paths through quality and excellent service performance (SR5)	0.893*			
Superior's Influence				
I am confident that my superiors always respect me and my coworkers (SI1)	0.866*	0.778	0.946	0.929
I often receive recognition and appreciation from my superiors (SI2)	0.905*			
I find it easy to communicate and work with my superiors (SI3)	0.901*			
I believe that my superior always encourage positive working relationship (SI4)	0.900*			
I am confident that my superiors did not favor certain groups or individuals over others (SI5)	0.837*			
Coworker's Influence				
I can work efficiently with the majority of my coworkers (CI1)	0.897*	0.785	0.948	0.931
I have never come into conflict with my coworkers (CI2)	0.902*			
I find it easy to work in a group with my coworkers (CI3)	0.881*			
I am confident that I have a positive working culture with my coworkers (CI4)	0.874*			
I can have a positive working environment while performing service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (CI5)	0.876*			
Service Performance				
I believe that the guests can feel safe in their transactions with me (SP1)	0.774*	0.756	0.939	0.918
I believe that my hotel has up-to-date equipment complying with Muslim Friendly Practice (SP2)	0.914*			
I believe that my hotel always tries to improvise the service procedures to ensure guests satisfaction (SP3)	0.910*			
I am confident that guests' honoring programs are good and done regularly (SP4)	0.879*			
I believe that my hotel provides high-quality service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SP5)	0.862*			

Note: AVE = Average Variance Explained; γ = Composite Reliability; α = Cronbach's Alpha; * $p < 0.05$.

Table 2. HTMT discriminant analysis for measurement Model

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1)	-				
(2)	0.812*	-			
(3)	0.792*	0.799*	-		
(4)	0.813*	0.784*	0.851*	-	
(5)	0.875*	0.861*	0.823*	0.817*	-

Note: (1) = Management Expectation; (2) = Service Reliability; (3) = Superior's Influence; (4) = Co-worker's Influence; (5) = Service Performance; * $p < 0.05$.

5.2 Structural Model Analysis

The structural analysis revealed that management expectation, service reliability, superior's influence, and coworker's influence variables could explain around 72% variance in service performance variables. The analysis also indicated that management expectations and service reliability are a medium effect on service performance. In contrast, the superior's and coworker's influence can be considered a small effect size relationship. In addition, all independent variables were found to have a positive, statistically significant effect on the dependent variable at a 5% significance level since the p-value was below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017). It is also confirmed by the BCa Bootstrapping confidence interval analysis, where the 95% confidence interval did not consist of the value zero (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Structural model analysis

Path	β	t-statistic	p-value	95% BCa Bootstrap	f^2	Remark
ME \rightarrow SP	0.258	5.604**	<0.01	(0.108, 0.412)	0.156	Medium
SR \rightarrow SP	0.259	5.641**	<0.01	(0.113, 0.425)	0.161	Medium
SI \rightarrow SP	0.184	2.015*	0.045	(0.013, 0.364)	0.025	Small
CI \rightarrow SP	0.215	2.419*	0.016	(0.095, 0.374)	0.054	Small

Note: ME = Management Expectation; SR = Service Reliability; SI = Superior's Influence; CI = Co-worker's Influence; SP = Service Performance; β = Path Coefficient; f^2 = Effect Size; The bootstrap sample was 5000 samples; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

5.0 Conclusion

Undeniably, INTQUAL and employees' relation contribute significantly to the improvisation of service performance for MFHs. By referring to the results of data analysis, it shows that if the average level of management expectation, service reliability, superior's influence, and coworker's influence were simultaneously high, then simultaneously it will increase the average level of service performance. On the other hand, the analysis also revealed that, management expectation and service reliability were the primary factors affecting service performance because both path coefficient values were approximately high. Besides that, the role of employee relations was also identified as another important factor in leading employees to provide excellent service, especially in terms of coworkers' influence and superiors' influence. Based on the above discussion, the paper offers several theoretical implications. Findings from this study will substantially expand the body of knowledge relating to the level of service performance in MFHs. As past studies relating to MFHs focus on operational challenges aspects, this study has its novelty through the implementation of INTQUAL model and employees' relation in improving the level of service performance in MFHs. Findings from this study also provide a confirmation whether the hypotheses constructed based on findings from existing literature are supported or rejected thus enables the researcher to identify similarities or differences compared to previous findings. In addition, the validated tool of INTQUAL that are used in measuring the level of service performance in MFHs will enable future academic studies to use or adapted for research on MFHs at government offices, universities, private sector and government link companies. This paper also contributes to practical implications for the MFHs segment. It is expected that this research help inform how successful has INTQUAL been in measuring the service performance of MFHs. This may be beneficial for the MFHs administrators in making improvements to encourage their service operational to improve the service quality. MFHs administrators will also have better knowledge and understanding towards the level of employees' relation through the findings of this study. The implementation and evaluation method of INTQUAL and employees' relation on the MFHs can potentially enable the Malaysia Association of Hotels (MAH) and Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in making improvements to encourage further the development of MFHs conforming to Muslim Friendly principles. Besides, these findings will also benefit in terms of better knowledge, skill, and understanding when operating an MFHs provided by agencies affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Limitation for this study serve as the analysis of MFHs level of service quality was studied during a pandemic. There is a great uncertainty whether the progress of MFHs service performance would differ looking at the progress of the outbreak. Therefore, it is useful to review the MFHs service performance after the endemic, as it might help to measure the MFHs service quality in different angle. In addition, it is recommended for future studies to be carried out focusing on top-level management of MFHs as it may provide a different insight of MFHs service performance.

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