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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 130 (2014) 400 – 408

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

INCOMaR 2013

Developing and Validating Halal Service Quality Instrument for Malaysian Food Service Establishments: A conceptual paper

Ibrahim S.^{a,*} and Othman, M.^b^a*Institute of Halal Research Products , Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang , Selangor , Malaysia*^b*Department of Foodservice and Management , Faculty of Food Science and Technology , Univeristi Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang , Selangor, Malaysia*

Abstract

Thus far no effort has been undertaken to facilitate foodservice operators to measure their performance, identify and deploy appropriate measures to improve the requirements and expectations of a Halalan Toyyiban Foodservice modus operandi. This paper looks into developing the tools to measure the Halal Foodservice Service Quality based on previous literature and in-depth interviews to be conducted among selected Muslim Clergies and the general public followed by validation process using statistical analysis. This tool could be used to minimize the occurrence of halal service failures, improve recovery efforts, increase customer satisfaction, and generate positive re-patronage behaviour at food service establishments.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of INCOMaR 2013.

Keywords: Halal ; foodservice quality; instrument; exploratory; Malaysian Halal Hub

1. Introduction

Service is in the frontier for economies in the post manufacturing era. The foodservice sector is one component of the economy which complements the intention of Malaysia to become a Halal hub. Since quality is a tenet of foodservices, evaluation to ensure a competitive advantage to remain in the forefront of the Malaysian economy is indispensable. This paper looks into developing the tools to measure the halal foodservice quality based on previous

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +603-55435672; fax: +603-55435698.
E-mail address: shahariahbrahim@gmail.com

literature and interviews to be conducted among Muslim Clergies and the general public followed by validation process using statistical analysis. Thus far no such effort has been undertaken and the promulgation of the tools would enhance service quality in the foodservice sector. It is hoped that the study would facilitate foodservice operators to measure their performance, identify and deploy appropriate measures to improve the requirements and expectations of a Halalan Toyyiban Foodservice modus operandi. The insights could in turn be used to minimize the occurrence of halal service failures, improve recovery efforts, increase customer satisfaction, and generate positive re-patronage behavior. The findings of this study will be of particular concern to many such as foodservice managers, practitioners and policy makers.

Nomenclature

- A. Halalan Toyyiban: A concept which means wholesomeness, which comprises of cleanliness, quality and safety for all
- B. JAKIM: Department of Islamic Development Malaysia

1.1. The Halal Foodservice Industry

Halal has evolved into a lucrative industry and its participants have extended beyond the circa of Muslim entrepreneurs or countries. This evolution stems from the opportunity of the world Muslim population totaling 1.6 billion (Canadian Agriculture Authority, 2011) and is expected to reach more than 2 billion by the year 2030 (The Japan Times May 2013). The Canadian report also attributed the demand to a younger Muslim population in addition to the accelerating influence by the Muslim population and the gross domestic product growth being faster in Muslim countries than the West.

In non-Muslim countries local foodservice outlets that offer halal foods have increased in number as seen in the United States of America where the number of halal restaurants has increased from a merely 2003 in 2012 to more than 6,900 in 2013 (Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America, 2013). A similar development happens in Japan, which also targets Muslim tourists (Japan Times (15/05/2013; 21/06/2013). Thus in the context of the ever growing halal food market and halal foodservice, the need for monitoring the quality of service is inevitable for business competitiveness apart from fulfilling the fundamental Islamic philosophy to embrace halal as a way of life and security.

In view of this development and the Third Industrial Master Plan for Malaysia (2006), which spins off the creation of a value chain for the halal industry (Noordin et al., 2009) the notion of a halal service quality for the foodservice sector has become imperative. The need to establish tools to facilitate the measurement of a halal foodservice quality is crucial as a complementary role to guide foodservice operators, to facilitate policy makers and implementations, and in determining the level of consumers' satisfaction. In fact Abdullah et al., (2012) had in their works found and suggested specifically the halal component to be embedded in the framework for a successful Malaysian foodservice industry. However the component thus far identified focused on the products whereas the intangible aspects of the foodservice sector with regards to the concept of Halalan Toyyiban is yet to be explored and measured, as intended for this study.

1.2. The Foodservice Industry in Malaysia

Service and service management is one but critical aspect of an organization's performance. It can be a cutting edge or an edge that cuts the establishment from customers, stakeholders and importantly profit which is the objective of most organizations. The concept of service and the concern for the quality of service epitomes any organization that interacts with society at large. This goes well for the foodservice industry too as illustrated by the fact that service is included in the industry name (Rande, 1996) and in its simplest form, customers and customers' satisfaction are the reasons for the services to be rendered. This study shall look into the constructs of foodservice quality with respect to religiosity and culture specifically in the context of Halalan Toyyiban in the Malaysian

setting.

In relation to that, as has been observed, services has an influential place in the economy especially in the post-industrial era exemplified by the United States of America where its economy has shifted from a high employability in the extraction type (in the 1800) to manufacturing (in the 1900) and now (since 1950s) to servicing (Metters, King-Metters, Pullman and Walton, 2006). This also holds true for the Malaysian economy where service offerings transpires across the economy as seen in the banking, medical, education, retail and foodservice sectors. Obviously with technology, businesses and its services have been further facilitated. In fact Lashley (1997, p. 150) quoted Cowel (1984) who identified the core features of services to include intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability which cause “some difficulties and dilemmas to manage in the delivery of services”. This cannot be said otherwise different for the foodservice industry which in itself is varied and volatile as seen in the current Malaysian scenario.

The foodservice industry in Malaysia is competitive, multi-cultural and progressive in nature that continues to increase in diversity and size as reported by the Malaysian Department of Statistics (2012) as shown in the table below for a comparison of the years 2001 and 2011 based on key indicators.

Table 1: Food and Beverage services

KEY INDICATORS	2001	2010	Compounding annual growth
Establishments (Numbers)	82,325	145,320	6.5
Value of gross output (RM Million)	6,062	38,251	22.7
Value added (RM Million)	2,694	16,848	22.6
Total employment (Number)	332,169	680,855	8.3
Salaries and wages (RM Million)	1,486	5,035	14.5
Value of fixed assets (RM million)	1,914	4,046	8.7

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia 2012 p.13

From Table 1, it can be seen that the number of establishments have increased by almost double with a compounding annual growth of 6.5%. In fact the foodservice industry provides almost 700,000 employment opportunity. It is obvious that the performance of foodservices outweighs the services from event catering and beverage services by almost eight times. However, under the circumstances, being service oriented all the three sectors would certainly rely on the quality of service to sustain and succeed in the challenging competition.

This stiff competition is further reflected by the emergence of international players in the market, enhanced by franchise system and struggle to improve the service quality in the industry. Amongst others the prevailing issues in the foodservice industry in Malaysia are also related to *halal* food, the influx of foreign workers in the foodservice industry and the current standard of hygiene and sanitation of foodservice premises.

The issue of *halal* within the foodservice is a growing concern since a majority of the Malaysian population are Muslim consumers where *halal* is a fundamental requirement that need to be strictly observed as stipulated in the Holy Quran and Hadith, the two main sources of Islamic Jurisprudence. In the advent of non-conformance would imply an un-Islamic behaviour which could in the long term result in the denouncement of the Islamic faith for the involved individual.

1.3. The concept of Halalan Toyyiban

Halal is an Arabic word which means lawful or permissible by Islamic Laws. Malaysia through agencies such as JAKIM, Department of Standards Malaysia, Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia and Malaysian Institute of Industrial Research and Standard (SIRIM) have developed a comprehensive *halal* food standard called MS1500:2004. In addition, it is the Government’s mission to position Malaysia as an International *Halal* Food Hub,

positioning it as the main halal food supply base and global halal certification center. Nevertheless, currently not many foodservice providers in Malaysia are complied with the established halal standard while some have a tendency to abuse the use of halal logo at their premises. Hence, despite the multitudes of attention given to the service provider in ensuring them the provision of 'halalan toyyiban' products and services (Syed Marzuki, Hall, Ballantine 2012), thus far, none of the efforts has been paid to consumers particularly, in capturing halal service quality dimensions for food service industry which offer a mix of goods and services. To date, no research has been carried out to develop a Halal service quality instrument suitable for the Malaysian food service industry to be used by researchers and practitioners across the country in identifying behavior and satisfaction of Muslim consumers.

1.4. Service quality

Service quality has become an important topic in business primarily during the last two decades. Unlike goods, services contain some intangible elements and the output is viewed as an activity, instead of a tangible object (Johns, 1999). In reality, it is possible to see that in services the intangible and tangible benefits are usually clustered together. Nevertheless, services have always demonstrated varying degrees of the tangible domain and the intangible domain. Service as defined by Palmer (1993, cited in Lashley, 1997: 150) is 'the production of an essentially intangible benefit, either in its own right or as significant element of a tangible product, which through some form of exchange satisfies an identified need.' There are ten general dimensions that represent the evaluative criteria customers use to access service quality was based on the earlier work of Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985. This then led to the SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Since then, SERVQUAL has been widely applied across a variety of service sector settings by researchers including the banking sector (Sangeetha and Mahalingam, (2011), hotel and restaurants (Saleh and Ryan, 1991) and public services (Ilhaamie, 2010).

In order to adapt SERVQUAL into the restaurant setting, Stevens, Knutson and Patton (1995) developed DINESERV. DINESERV was drafted using the lessons learned in developing and refining LODGESERV. Initially the instrument contained forty statements of what should happen. Responses were on a seven-point scale, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. A random sample of people was selected from telephone directories of a midsize city in the United States and DINESERV was used to conduct telephone interviews with adults who said that they had eaten out six or more times during the previous six months. The interviewers asked the respondents whether and where they had dined out in the past week. The respondents were asked about their expectations of the restaurants they had gone to whether it was a fine-dining, casual dining, or quick service establishments. DINESERV proved to have a high degree of reliability and the finding pointed out that there were no significant differences in consumers' service quality expectations across the three restaurant categories. This is because the distribution of total indexes scores suggested that consumers have only small differences in their 'expectations' of service quality across the three restaurant categories. According to Stevens et al. (1995) perceived quality is a function of the interaction among three independent variables: normative expectations, predictive expectations, and actual service quality. The lower the expectations the consumers have about what should happen, the better their perceptions of the actual service. And the higher their expectations about what will happen, the better their perception of the actual service. Hence, in their opinion marketing plays an important role in improving customers' perceptions about service, one of the ways is to improve the service, lower the expectations of what should happen and raise the expectations about what will happen (Stevens et al., 1995).

Nevertheless, critics found that the use of SERVQUAL is insufficient to cover the quality rating in retailing setting (Finn and Lamb, 1991). Thus, the claims of the SERVQUAL as the generic tool to assess quality rating in wide range of service settings is not well supported. In addition, Cronin and Taylor (1992) have questioned on the uses of five dimensions that suggested by SERVQUAL since only few researchers managed to find a five-factor pattern in their study. Most surprisingly, even Parasuraman et al., (1991) themselves were unable to replicate their own work in a later study where six factors (two apparently closed related) been identified instead of five. Thus, it can be generally concluded that the five dimensions proposed by SERVQUAL scales is not representative all service settings.

Thus in today's organization, effort need to be paid to ensure continuous improvement and breakthrough in quality in order to meet the customers' expectation and requirement. This is especially true in the foodservice organizations where service delivery is typically important to win and sustain customers. However, managing quality in foodservice industry is a challenging task as it involves the combination of service and product. In other

words, the service providers have to manage not only the quality of food but also service delivery process that involved high level of interaction between staff and guests. Hence, managers need to enhance the satisfiers that affect customers’ satisfaction and simultaneously reducing the dis-satisfiers that affect the service quality of the organizations since customers’ satisfaction is usually affected by more than one attribute. Attempts to do so may involve careful monitoring and designing of service delivery process of the organizations and most importantly the training and education provided to the staff. Interestingly, other than studies which investigate halal service quality dimension in food retailing (Nor Khalidah & Rosmimah, 2008), banking, financial institution (Taap , Siong , Kumar and Tat, 2011)) and public services (Ilhaamie, 2010), no studies have ever ventured into the halal service quality dimensions in food service.

2. Quality for the Halal foodservice sector

Service has always been associated with quality and research through two school of thoughts namely the Nordic school led by Grönroos (1984) and the American School of thought spearheaded by Parasuraman (1985). In the Malaysian scenario thus far, research had been undertaken to explore halal service quality dimensions for the Malaysian grocery retail sector. However the factors or dimensions for the food retail sector differs from the restaurant or foodservice sectors in many ways, both in terms of tangible and intangibility. Hence the works for this study shall be based on two main framework *ie.* Grönroos(1994) and Parasuraman (1985) as shown in Figures 1 and 2. The Nordic school had identified three underlying dimensions referred to as physical, interactive and functional, whilst the American school suggested ten dimensions for service quality initially in 1985. (Chowdhary and Prakash, 2007)

Nevertheless, the former model has also evolved overtime and the number of dimensions looked at has been reduced. This model has been adopted by many researches in different sectors such as banking, retailing, hospitality services, and could be described as possessing a varying degree of flexibility. Thus for this reason, the framework has been a source of great importance as a point of reference to expedite the values for the factors in halal quality service. In addition, it is the very nature of services to be culturally inclined. Gayatri, Hume and Mort (2011) had looked into the role of Islamic culture in service quality by interviewing 35 respondents sourced from airline, retail , hotel and restaurant industries where they found two main factors namely Islamic and service quality general factors. Further to that Gayatri and Chew (2013) asserts the need to investigate whether the degree of religiosity would influence evaluation of service quality. It implies that there could be varying degree of service quality evaluation from within a specific Muslim society. Hence in this case since the culture of the Muslim community is different from the non-Muslim, it is imperative that the values or factors be established in accordance to the culture of the intended community to have a good fit of measure upon the commensurate factors especially in the context of the foodservice sector. In the context of this study the models by Parasuraman as illustrated Fig 3 below serves as the point of reference.

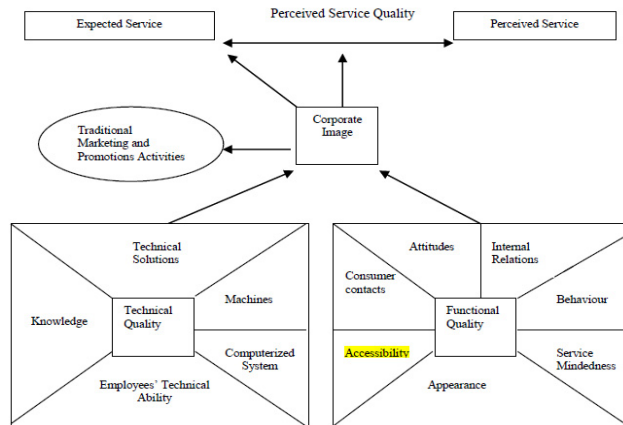


Fig.1 : Nordic–Gronroos model (1984)
 (Source: Othman (2006) p.56)

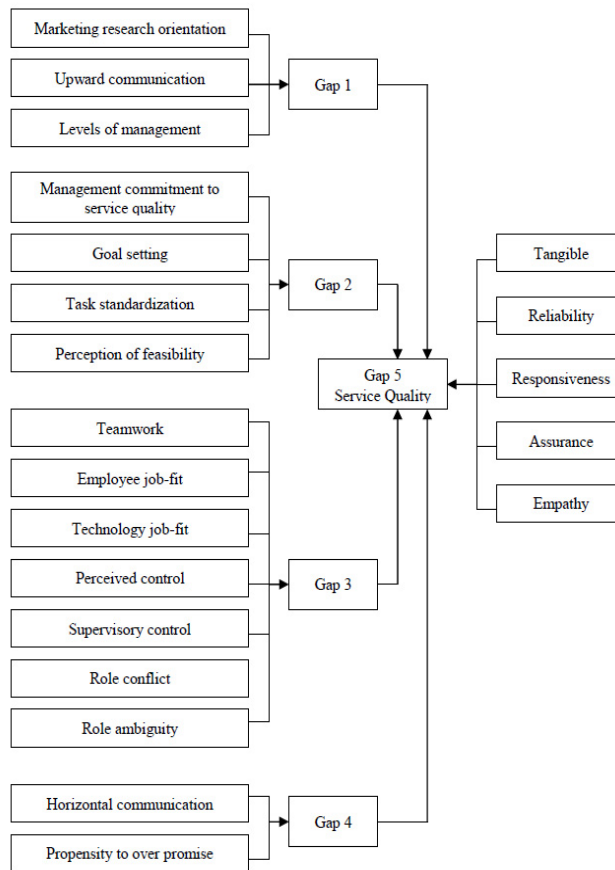


Fig 2: American -Parasuraman model 1985)

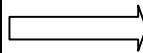
(Source: Othman (2006) p. 61)

3. Issues

In the past many studies on service quality have been conducted to look into the issues pertaining to service in various sectors such as banking, retail, hotel, including the foodservice industry. However very scarcely of the current and past measures of service quality have ever made any attempt to capture Muslim customers' perceptions of service quality for food service industry (Restaurants, Café, Fast foods and catering institutions which offer a mix of goods and services). This is the first ever attempt to investigate Halal service quality dimensions, develop and validate a scale to measure Halal foodservice quality in specific. Consequently, food service providers will be able to better understand the needs and wants of Muslim customers as well as to create a competitive advantage in the delivery of high service quality to this specific market over their competitors.

In service industry, the attention given to service quality can help the organization attaining service effectiveness since service quality is believed to be the next battle field in the business environment. This study explores the possibility of pioneering the venture into the halal service quality dimension for the Malaysian food service sector and possibly to be plausible for the international halal foodservice advantage.

	Dimension	Definition
1	Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
2	Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
3	Competence	Possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service.
4	Accessibility	Approachability and ease of contact.
5	Courtesy	Politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of contact personnel.
6	Communication	Keeping customers informed in language they can understand and listening to them.
7	Credibility	Trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider.
8	Security	Freedom from danger, risk or doubt.
9	Understanding The customers	Making the effort to know customers and their needs.
10	Tangible	Appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personal and communication materials.



	Dimensions	Definition
1	Tangibles	Physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel.
2	Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.
3	Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service.
4	Assurance	Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence.
5	Empathy	Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers.

Parasuraman et al. (1985: 47)

Source : Othman(2003) p. 60

Parasuraman et al 1988:23 (Source: Othman (2003) p. 63)

Fig 3: Development of Parasuraman’s model

4. Methodology

Data of interest for this research will be collected using a multi-method methodological approach. A combination of a qualitative and a quantitative techniques will include face to face interviews and survey questionnaires which will be carried out accordingly, in meeting the respective research objectives. The research will also seek assistance from expert opinion from JAKIM officials and other state religious department officials.

The first stage of the research shall embark on the exploring the dimensions of halal service quality using qualitative approach such as in-depth interviews which will be carried out to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of halal service quality attributes from the informants. The informants will consist of both expert opinions consisting Muslim clergies and officials as well as the general public. Each of the informants will provide indepth information based on the identified issues. In specific, a set of questions of the open-ended and un-dichotomous nature would be prepared based on Patton as quoted by Fraenkel et al. (2012), which include the following : background or demographic information of the respondents, knowledge questions of respondents’ opinions, beliefs and attitudes in relation to halal food consumption and halal foodservice, experience or behavior questions on halal foodservice in various foodservice outlets depending on the target respondents, opinions or value questions in order to elicit the respondents’ thoughts and knowledge about halal foodservice, feeling questions on how the respondents feel about halal foodservice in general which is not an opinion but rather more of an affectionate value, sensory questions which looked at what the respondent saw, hear, smelled or touched.

The interviews will be conducted in an informal, conversational manner, so the order of questions and their specific wording would vary. Interviews will average 60 minutes in length (range, 35–100 minutes), will be audio tape recorded and verbatim transcribed. All interviews will be numbered to control the quality of the data collection and process. An approximate of 30 interviews is expected, where the conduct of the interviews shall continue until saturation is achieved and verified through a final interview. The findings will also be used to develop instrument for the second stage of the research.

The developed questionnaire is to be used as a diagnostic tool in measurement of halal service quality. Questionnaires will be using 5-point Likert-type responses. Generally, a hierarchical factor structures will be used to capture dimensions important to Muslim customers based on qualitative studies and current literatures on other halal related services such as retails. Further, a confirmatory factor analysis based on partial disaggregation technique and cross validation using second sample will support the validity of the developed scale.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Contribution to knowledge

Findings of this research will make unique contributions in the area of consumer research particularly related to halal food service in the Malaysian food service industry from both the theoretical and empirical perspectives. It can serve as an additional navigator alongside the Ministry of Health of Malaysia and JAKIM guidelines to address the public concern over unethical food service practices which claimed and are often assumed to be halal. The findings will help the government agency such as JAKIM and Food Safety and Quality Division, Ministry of Health, Malaysia to introduce user friendly formats of Halal service quality diagnostic tool for the foodservice industry in Malaysia. Further to that, this study will also provide invaluable information to both public and service providers and simultaneously facilitate the relevant government agencies to further strategize and execute halal certification campaigns amongst restaurants and other types of foodservice outlets more effectively.

5.2 Specific or potential applications

It is hoped that the findings will provide valuable information to food service stakeholders, specifically the establishment managers in Malaysia in evaluating their current operations and formulating their future operational and marketing strategies as regard to halal service quality in their establishments. Nevertheless, the results definitely will be beneficial to further improve the overall Muslims consumers' satisfaction and therefore will raise consumer awareness on patronizing halal only food service establishments. Above all, the findings will also directly help the general public especially the Muslims in lobbying for the implementation of halal certification of food service establishment in Malaysia. Once established and implemented, the use of this particular tool could help in encouraging more foreign tourists to Malaysia from the Muslim countries.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to extend their gratitude to University Putra Malaysia for financing the research to be undertaken and also to University Teknologi MARA for permission and the insight to pursue knowledge.

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