MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD
SHARIA COMPLIANT HOTEL

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ABSTRACT

One of the biggest contemporary challenges of management in service industries is providing and maintaining customer satisfaction. Service quality and customer satisfaction have increasingly been identified as key factors in the battle for competitive differentiation and customer retention. Overwhelming customer demand for quality products and service has in recent years become increasingly evident to professionals in the tourism and hotel industry. Among all customer demands, service quality has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the success of any business. The purpose of this study is to examine level of service quality and level of satisfaction of MENA students in UTM. Also it investigates the relationship between the both variables stated above. Furthermore, this research tries to discover the existence of difference in the level of service quality and level of Satisfaction based on demography. By using Preferences, SERVQUAL and satisfaction questionnaire the data was collected. During the analysis several methods was used such as, factor analysis, reliability analysis, single mean t-test, correlation and regression, ONE-WAY ANOVA, independent t-test and descriptive analysis. The results of this study shows high level of service quality and satisfaction, however only two servqual dimensions that has a positive relationship with the satisfaction, furthermore only nationality has make a difference in terms of level of satisfaction. This study provides hotel professionals with an assessment of current methods of measuring and managing customer satisfaction in Sharia Compliant Hotel.

ABSTRAK

Salah satu cabaran terbesar bagi pengurusan kontemporari di dalam industri penyediaan perkhidmatan dan mengekalkan kepuasan pelanggan. Kualiti perkhidmatan dan kepuasan pelanggan telah semakin dikenal pasti sebagai faktor utama dalam pembezaan persaingan untuk yang berdaya saing dan pengekalan pelanggan. Permintaan pelanggan yang besar untuk produk-produk berkualiti dan perkhidmatan di dalam tahun-tahun kebelakangan ini telah menjadi semakin jelas kepada para profesional dalam pelancongan dan industri hotel. Antara semua permintaan pelanggan, kualiti perkhidmatan telah semakin diiktiraf sebagai satu faktor penting di dalam kejayaan mana-mana perniagaan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji tahap kualiti perkhidmatan dan tahap kepuasan pelajar MENA di UTM. Selain itu ia juga ia menyiasat hubungan antara kedua-dua pembolehubah yang dinyatakan di atas. Tambahan pula, kajian ini adalah untuk menemui kewujudan perbezaan dalam tahap kualiti perkhidmatan dan tahap kepuasan berdasarkan demografi. Dengan menggunakan Keutamaan, SERVQUAL dan kepuasan data soal selidik yang dikumpulkan. Dalam analisis, beberapa kaedah yang digunakan adalah seperti, analisis faktor, analisis kebolehpercayaan, single min ujian-t, korelasi dan regresi, ONE-WAY ANOVA bebas, ujian-t dan analisis deskriptif. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan tahap kualiti perkhidmatan dan kepuasan, namun hanya dua dimensi SERVQUAL yang mempunyai hubungan yang positif dengan kepuasan, tambahan pula hanya mempunyai kewarganegaraan yang menjadikan perbezaan dari segi tahap kepuasan. Kajian ini menyediakan profesional hotel dengan penilaian terhadap kaedah semasa mengukur dan mengurus kepuasan pelanggan dalam Patuh

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LIST OF ABREVIATION

ANOVA	Analysis Of Variance
PSS	Preferences, SERVQUAL And Satisfaction
MENA	Middle Eastern And North Africa
SCH	Sharia Compliant Hotel
SPSS	Statistical Package For Social Science
UTM	Universiti Teknologi Malasia
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
CHERS	Center For Higher Education Research And Studies
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
S&T	Science And Technology
NEAC	National Economic Advisory Council

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The internationalization of higher education is a significant matter which requires extraordinary efforts. These efforts claimed in the beginning of the 21st century. Because of this, the demand for higher education is generated by many students who are more concentrated on human development in comparison with their countries' economic development. The concept of the internationalization of higher education is not recent for developed countries like European countries, United States and Canada, which have been practiced for several years essential.

However, many students from developing countries such as Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries appear to have an interest and important development in the number of students to study overseas as there are limited entrance for education in their countries (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). They argued that the unstable environment motivated students to search for education internationally. That's why, the host countries play an important role in attracting the attention of the coming students.

On the other hand, the World Bank (2007) stated that the MENA region would comprise the highest youth population with both groups aging 0-14 years and 15-24 years making 45 percent and 21 percent respectively. This majority of the population would initiate demands for higher education as these regions put more attention to develop their human capital than developing economy. Nevertheless, the number and growth percentage of higher-education institutions in the MENA region will not be adequate to serve the existing high demand. For these reasons, the large youth population in MENA had to search for other countries in pursuing of higher education.

Since 2005, studies about international student travel got some impulse in Malaysia and in all over the world. Ronnie and Josephine (2002) have discovered that the growing trend in international student travel not only had a positive impact on the domestic economy of the country. In addition it led the production a socio-cultural consciousness among the locals. Moreover, Aaron (2006) notes that the large number of international students pursuing a higher education resulted in the prosperity of the local tourist market segment.

Nowadays, the tourism industry is admitted as a "global industry," with an extension of producers and consumers all over the world. The provision of hotel amenities like: room, restaurant, bar, nightclub or health club; is not viewed as their luxury. For lots of people, these services have become an essential element of lifestyle. Previously, demand for and the supply of hospitality services apart from the traditional services, have fostered the enlargement of the hospitality industry globally, heading to fierce competition in the market-place. One of the biggest obstacles facing hotel operators today is "the ever-growing volume and pace of competition. Competition has had great hints for the customer, offering an upgraded choice and better services' level (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000).

At the present time, hotels have moved from the basics of hospitality; accommodation, leisure and the like, needs, and upgraded their services to taking care of the customers' personal needs.

Therefore, hospitality managers believe that firms can better their gains by "satisfying customers." Research indicated that just satisfying customers is not sufficient, because nothing ensures that satisfied customers will have a repurchase intention. Now clearly customer loyalty is meaningfully more significant than customer satisfaction in a hotel's success (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000).

The growing world of customers' demands resulted together with the increasing market competition in a new obstacle to hotel managers. Consequently, Hotel managers started looking for ways to comprehend the most dominant factors in customer satisfaction. Finding these factors can be very helpful for the managers in executing strategies.

In order to improve the competitiveness of the tourism industry in Malaysia, financial support has been assigned to enhance tourism's infrastructure, vary tourism products and ameliorate the home-stay program as well as to accommodate more international conferences and exhibitions (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2007).

In Malaysia, the economy is enduring a systemic modification from being a manufacturing based to a service-oriented economy. During the period from 1997 to 2007, as the service industry grew bigger, more jobs were created. In forwarding to a high-income economy, The Malaysian government prioritized the development of the service sector to its full potential. The sector has the potential to add more than half of the GDP, as sculptured by developed countries such as Germany, Japan, the United States and the United Kingdom (Ministry of Finance, 2010).

Since 2009, the number of tourist arrivals kept increasing, mostly because of the offering of appealing travel packages by travel agencies. The main three sources of tourists in Malaysia are Thailand, Singapore and the Middle East (Ministry of Finance, 2010).

1.2   Backgrounds of the Study

According to Fache´ (2000), one of the most important developments in the tourism industry is the growing attention to service quality from the customer's perspective.   If service quality is to be improved, it must be reliably assessed and measured.

The key to sustainable competitive advantage in today's competitive environment   lies in delivering high-quality service which results in customer satisfaction (Maritz, 2003).   Indeed, because service quality is positively related to customer retention and customer loyalty, service quality has a direct effect on company profits (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Zeithmal and Bitner, 2000). It is therefore   apparent   that tourism enterprises   need to focus on service quality continuously (Girzinc, 2007). As such, hotels with good service quality will therefore improve their market share and profitability (Oh and Parks, 1997).

In a highly competitive hotel industry, individual hoteliers must find ways to make their products and services stand out among the others. They have to find a way to make their services and products different from the others. To achieve this, hoteliers must understand their customers' needs and wants – and then set their services in a way to meet these needs or go beyond their needs.

As Sundaram and Richard (1993) stated, in order to improve service quality, the hotel industry needs to know which service attributes might affect choice intention of customers. Failure to give necessary attention to those attributes might result in a customer's negatively evaluating the hotel services and may ruin the chance of that guest returning to the hotel. Since a customer's satisfaction is influenced by the availability of customer services, the provision of quality customer service has become a major concern of all businesses (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991)

1.3   Problem Statement

According to Jones (2011), the Muslim population is growing double from 1.1 billion populations now and that contributes to 24.6% of the world's populations of 8 billion in 2030. Hence, it is time to look into the possibility of providing a hospitality environment that complies with the practices according to the Islamic values and practices.

Heyer (2008) argued that the demand for Sharia Compliant Hotel (SCH) is increasing and as it represents 10% of the world tourism market. Furthermore, the Middle Eastern countries provide SCH due to the stringent law that must be complied (Henderson, 2010). Meanwhile, countries or nations that don't have a strict Sharia law also provide SCH to target the Muslim's population.

Furthermore, a study by Ariffin and Hasim (2009) has shown that Middle East tourists in Malaysia demanded a very high level of service during their travel experiences. Ariffin and Hasim (2009) stated that The Middle Eastern tourists prefer five-star hotels and high quality service apartment even amongst young people. Moreover, they prefer to stay in suites or inter-

connecting rooms which allow convenient access to their other family members (Visit Britain, 2009).Middle Eastern tourists were more detailed. And they emphasized more on services facilities attributes offered by the hotel.

Malaysia has the potential of providing SCH because the majority of its population are Muslim and Islam is the official religion of federation that as written in Malaysian Constitution. With, the switch of De Palma hotel to Sharia compliant as well as PNB Darby Park Executive Suite that has dedicated in complying to Sharia requirements. It is obvious that Malaysia is looking forward to invest in SCH (HalalMedia, 2011 and Sunday Mail, 2005). As revealed by the upcoming 'wakaf' hotel in Terengganu that provides separate facilities for male and female and it will be managed by JAKIM (Wan Najemudin, 2008). Moreover, Sharia compliant accommodations (SCA) has also be developed in Europe for example, Brighton Marina House Hotel has been listed as one of the 1060 Muslim friendly and Halal hotels around the world (HalalTrip, 2011).

Previous literature on SCH illustrated that for some countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia, hotels are obliged by law to endure by specific regulations (Henderson, 2010), and also Sharia complaint is not a choice neither for hoteliers or travelers. Moreover, the alcohol ban is a common policy in many hotels in the Arab country region and other Muslim countries (Henderson, 2010). However the new trend in the hotel industry is compounded commercial interest in more total compliance in projects where there are no strict regulations or more flexible laws (Henderson, 2010). Henderson (2010) affirmed that chances for developing SCH in Europe was acclaimed by Almulla group which a Middle Eastern hotel chain. Since Paris and London are frequently visited by Muslim travelers. Not only Arab countries are interested in these hotels also Turkey is taking this path of investment by offering SCH and taking care of Muslim customers as an important segment (Kuverturk, 2011).

Rosenberg and Choufany (2009) stated that, SCH concept is developing into a unique niche market that is quickly becoming highly attractive throughout the Middle East. Some of the major drivers identified behind the success of this concept are the increasing availability of Sharia compliant funds and the rise in intra-regional within the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region. The concept is not new, as most hotels developed in Saudi Arabia are Sharia compliant – Sharia being the legal framework adopted by Islam. However, the introduction of the concept elsewhere has drawn much attention and growing interest.

Study conducted by Kuwait hotels company(2009) showed that there are different variations of the concept out there, ranging from dry' hotels that do not serve alcohol on their premises, to hotels that provide a few more Islamic amenities‖ for their clientele (such as Halal food, prayer rooms, Qurans and prayer rugs in each room, and separate facilities for men and women), to hotels that are considered fully fledged Sharia- compliant and have Sharia governing all its operations from its design & interiors down to the Hotel's accounts. The concept itself gives room to different interpretations, as no written requirements or classifications for such a hotel class currently exist. SCH are relatively a new concept that has become attractive in recent years especially throughout the Middle East. Sharia-compliant hotels commonly features like a family-friendly environment and culturally enriching experience, also design and interiors to reflect Islamic culture as well financial operations based on Islamic regulations and Operations, services, and amenities in line with Islamic values and regulations.

Many researchers stated that hospitality organizations are actively receptive to service quality initiatives, such as the British Standards Institute, the European Quality Award, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, and the Edwards Deming prize. In addition, the hospitality organizations pay close attention to raising service quality through investment in human resources development (Narangajavana, 2007). The hospitality industry simply

cannot survive without delivering satisfied quality of their services.

Based on academic literature, Wuest (2001) reported similar impacts of service quality in tourism, hospitality, and leisure businesses which were improving guest convenience; enhancing service provider's image; ensuring customer security; generating traffic linking to profits, saving costs, and higher market share; and establishing a competitive edge, and customer demand.. However, Hospitality services are a harmonious mixture of three elements-material products, behavior and attitude of employees and the environment (Reuland et al, 1985). Many studies have been conducted on the service quality issues of hotels, but very few have been conducted about SCH in Malaysia.

However, the obscurity of the term Sharia compliance itself gives different interpretation as it has not yet come with an absolute standards and requirements (Rosenberg and Choufany, 2009). Apart from the differences of interpretation, the negative publicity that is given by the Western media in certain issues that involve the Muslim community worldwide has contributed to the misconceptions to the non Muslim (Mokhtar, 2011)

In this study, the researcher will address the need to test the demand for Sharia Compliance Hotels in Malaysia .the findings of this research will look into the receptiveness on having a hotel that spares the common industry practices to a Muslim values and practices.

Furthermore, this study will investigate the customers' expectations and perceptions of service provided by SCH in Malaysia and to highlight how the service factors were related to customer satisfaction.

1.4   Research Objectives

The main goal of this research is to determine the perception and expectation MENA students in UTM from the service quality in SCH in Malaysia. Therefore the objectives of this study are:

a- To determine the level of service quality of the SCH.

b- To determine the level of satisfaction of MENA students

c- To study the relationship and the predictive capabilities of SQ dimensions and satisfaction of MENA students.

d- To investigate the differences in the level of SQ and satisfaction based on demography.

e- To determine the service that contributes the most to the MENA students' satisfaction.

1.5   Research Questions

According to the objectives explained previously, this research answered to the following research questions.

1) What is the level of service quality of the SCH?

2) What is the level of satisfaction of the respondents?

3) What are the relationship and the predictive capabilities of SQ dimensions and satisfaction of MENA students?

4) What are the differences in the level of service quality, and level satisfaction based on demography?

5) What are the services contributing to the respondents' satisfaction?

1.6   Scope of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine the services provided by a hotel that are perceived as important from the customers' perceptive, customer perception, customer satisfaction and level of service quality. We considered very limited examples so as to obtain detailed results as we determine our purpose. The scope of this research is SHC in Malaysia. The targeted population is the MENA students in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

1.7   Assumptions and Limitation of the Study

For this research several assumptions have been made. First one is the authenticity of the participant's answers to the questions. The second is the participant's full grasp of the questions asked participants. The last assumption is the unbiasedness and the objectivity of the answers given.

In doing this research, it has been found that most of the previous researchers such as Henderson (2010) Rosberg and Choufany (2009) have focused on the definition and defining the attributes for Sharia Compliance or

analyzing the attractiveness of SCH from the hotel perspective and ignoring the customers' perspective.

In this study, only a few populations among the international students in the Malaysian research universities, which is represented on MENA students in UTM, has been chosen. As a result the findings from this study cannot be generalized to all the MENA students in Malaysia.

1.8   Significance of the Study

The result of the study gave a clear picture about the different factors that can attract MENA students to SC hotel. First of all, knowing the relation between customer attractiveness and hotel industry shows that the attractiveness is based on three main points which are; first, satisfying customer needs, second, the creation of the relationship between the customer and the hotel (Scliele, Veldam and Huttinger, 2010), finally, meeting the need and expectation of the customer (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). Therefore, this study served as advice to the managers to identify the MENA students' needs.

Secondly, finding out the definition of SCH and its dimensions brought a clear image of this new concept especially in the Malaysian market of hotel industry. This innovation can be in the form of using Sharia as a marketing tool, giving a careful consideration to MENA students customer segment's needs and wants or promoting Malaysia as a new destination for Islamic tourism.

Figuring out the relationship between the service quality and customer satisfaction elucidated the gaps between the hotels in their offers and the MENA travelers' demand.

Lastly, managers would know that certain visitors whatever Muslim or non Muslim can be interested in this kind of hotels. Also exploring the non Muslim among MENA students' segments would bring a long list of attributes to the SCH, helping the improvement of the hotel's services.

The significance of this study is bringing the awareness to all the hotel managers, societies, guests and Muslim visitors about SCH. Because according to Choufany and Rosenberg (2009), there are no clear written requirement and guideline for SCH. Simultaneously, this study will help to determinate a clear perception of SCH from the MENA students' view by developing a conceptual framework explaining the relationships between the service quality, customer satisfaction.

This study attained the following assumptions:

1) It is anticipated to find out the level of service quality within the MENA students in UTM.

2) It is expected to discover the level of satisfaction towards SCH among MENA students in UTM.

3) It is predicted that this research will find out the relationship between service quality and satisfaction based on the MENA student preferences.

4) It is anticipated to discover if there are any differences in levels of service quality and satisfaction based on gender.

5) It is predicted to investigate the services contributing to the respondents' satisfaction.

1.9   Definitions of Key terms

In this research, there are several terms that represent the key words. They will be frequently used.

SCH: Sharia compliant described as a hotel that offers services in granting to the Sharia principles.(Shamim,2009)

Service Quality: the service quality can be measured by determining the gaps between what customers expect of the service to be provided and what they perceive in the real functioning of the service.(Parasauraman et al.,1994)

Customer Satisfaction: customer satisfaction is a business philosophy leading to the establishment of value. For customers, expecting and controlling their anticipation and showing ability (Dominci and R.Guzzo, 2010. Minghetti ,2011).

MENA region: The expression MENA, designs "Middle East and North Africa," is an abbreviation frequently used in academic or business, matters. The word veils a widespread region, starting from Morocco to Iran, involving the majority of both Middle Eastern and Maghreb farmlands. The term is approximately similar to the Greater Middle East. MENA region's population is about 381 million individuals, representing about 6% of the whole world population (El-Erian and Fischer,1996).

Customer Perception: The process by which people translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them (businessdictionary.com, 2013).

1.10   Plan of the Thesis

This thesis is devised into five chapters. Chapter one presents an introduction and the background of the study. Besides that it searches into the problem statement, research questions and the scope of the study. Chapter two concentrates on reviewing previous literature related to the context of the study, related theories, models and presenting a modified framework. Chapter three identifies the methodology, the sampling and the instruments that were used to conduct the research. Chapter four presented the finding of this study. And finally chapter five presents the study conclusion and the recommendations.

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