Quality Service: A Benchmark Setting for Customer Satisfaction in Food Catering Services in Kuala Lumpur Region

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Abstract: Intense competition pressures have been brought on by rising customer demand for quality in the food service industry. As a result, they are focusing their strategies on delivering the best possible service, which encourages client satisfaction and loyalty by raising the level of service. In this study, the perception of service quality and its effect on customer satisfaction was investigated by surveying consumers of two distinct catering services in the Kuala Lumpur region. In the study, SERVQUAL was utilized as a questionnaire for the data collection method that was designed to quantify service quality. On 100 instances of valid survey data, regression analysis was performed as part of the analysis. The result shows neither of the two catering services reaches a significant impact on quality service and customer satisfaction. However, the overall mean score is indicative of the fact that caterer A is considered better than caterer B in terms of service quality. The findings demonstrate that customers have the freedom to exercise their right to obtain the services they desire and to choose to do so in order to fulfill their intentions. As a result, ensuring client satisfaction in this tough market where all Malaysian restaurants strive to maintain and retain their services is a high priority for the food service business.

Keywords: Service quality, customer satisfaction, gap analysis, SERVQUAL model, food catering services

1. Introduction

As a result of globalization, the hospitality industry is now experiencing intense competition, especially in the food and culinary sectors. Also, globalization demands individuals follow every development, and it has the potential to make people's lifestyles different, making them more consumer-oriented than they were in the past. In the context of their engagement in consuming activities, many individuals enjoy food with an eye toward experiencing satisfaction and pleasure. Because of this, there are now a lot of services and foods on the market, and each one has its own set of benefits and things that make it stand out.

The Growth in Malaysia's food service sector has been significant during the past decade or so. In the hospitality sector, catering services are classified into numerous categories, including restaurant services, contract catering, booking catering, and transportation and mobile services. (Norain et. al 2014). According to Malaysia's Department of Statistics, there were, 12,318 catering services registered in 2010 that contributed RM3.6 billion to Malaysia's GDP (2018). RM5.8 billion was generated in 2015 from 16,348 units, a 32.7% increase over the previous year. Catering services in the country are in high demand, subsequent in significant growth in the number of caterers (Norain et al. 2014). Therefore, the functioning of businesses in this industry by implementing quality systems has contributed to consumers' preferences for those businesses that offer this kind of service more extensively.

Unfortunately, it seems that many catering companies, particularly in the Klang Valley, could not retain their operation and many had to close down (Saad et al, 2020). It was simple to start a high-quality catering service firm, but maintaining one was difficult because of the erratic nature of product prices, patron loyalty, and public opinion. Many around the nation reportedly reduced their pricing since consumers are always searching for cuisine that is both good quality and reasonably priced. Customers often prefer to eat at hygienic places where they will not get any food-borne illnesses (Al-Shabib et al, 2016; Baur, et al, 2017; Young & Waddell, 2016) A restaurant's disregard for cleanliness would spoil any possibility of a repeat customer and have a negative influence on the eating experience. According to several studies (Boo, 2017; Jeong & Jang, 2018; Kim et al, 2017; Sudhagar & Rajendran, 2017), these clients would, in some manner, attribute their negative experiences to obtaining poor service experience. Hill and Alexander (2017) claim that the expense of acquiring a new client is ten times higher than the expense of maintaining an existing client. Also, around 90% of consumers will not return to the restaurant when the service is very bad. Dissatisfied consumers destroy a company, whereas satisfied customers boost it (Cai & Chi, 2018; Pizam et al, 2016). In conclusion, it is critical that customer satisfaction at these caterers be tracked and constantly controlled.

Every caterer that wishes to succeed and increase its market share must focus on providing superior customer service (Oh & Kim, 2017; Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). The ability to deliver outstanding service to clients would provide catering owners a significant edge over their competitors in keeping customers and achieving survival and expansion due to the fierce competition in the service sector (Abu Khalifeh & Som, 2016). The idea that improving performance quality will bring in more customers and allow the companies to grow is implicit in this assumption. To determine if service quality influences customer satisfaction in catering service is the primary goal of this study. If it does, which dimension of service quality has contributed the most?

1.2 Research Objectives

a. To determine the differences between two caterers in terms of their performance in reaching customer satisfaction through quality services.
b. To determine the influence of quality services on customer satisfaction.

1.3 Literature Review

In the hospitality industry, service quality has always been critical since it is one of the most effective means of creating a competitive edge and improving organizational performance. It is a targeted evaluation that reflects the customer's perception of specific aspects of services, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurances, empathy, and tangibility, as opposed to satisfaction, which is more general because it is influenced by perceptions of service and product quality and process, as well as situational and personal factors (Kasiri et al, 2017; Kiran & Diljit, 2017; Lemy et al, 2019).

In order to compare customer perceptions and expectations, the service quality gap model was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) with 10 general components of service. These elements included competence, respect, credibility, security, accessibility, communication, customer knowledge, tangibles, dependability, and response. As a result, they developed the SERVQUAL scale, which consists of 44 propositions in 5 dimensions, it is further divided into two parts which are consisted of 22 expectation items and 22 perception items. The Servqual model has been utilized successfully for many years to evaluate the quality of various services in countries with varying degrees of economic development (Jonkinsz et al, 2021) In other words, utilizing the SERVQUAL model as an "old new" served as justification for why the model has been used up until this point (Jonkinsz et al 2021) This is supported by a substantial body of research indicating that it is a trustworthy and effective tool for evaluating the quality of services in a diverse range of industries. (Javed et al, 2018, Fraihi et al , 2016).
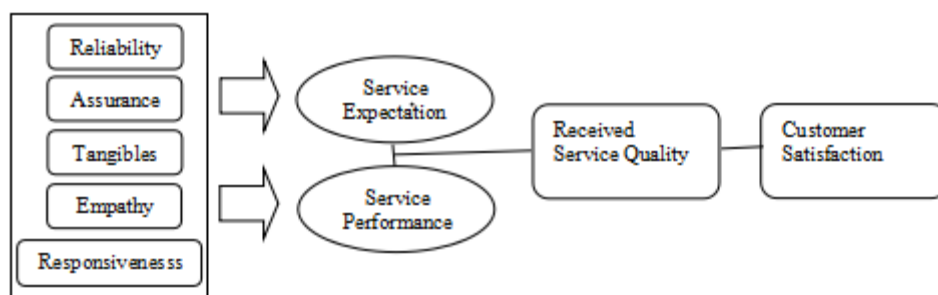

Fig. 1 - Dimension of service quality - SERQUAL Model (Parasuraman et al, 1988).

The 22 elements on this scale, which represent the five service quality aspects "tangibles," "reliability," "responsiveness," "assurance," and "empathy," operationalize service quality by quantifying the gap between expectations and perceptions. Both customer expectations and service quality are explicitly assessed in SERVQUAL in

order to determine the "gap" between the two. When customers compare their pre-service expectations with their actual service experience, they are able to determine the quality of the service they received. The service will be deemed excellent if perceptions exceed expectations; it will be deemed good or adequate if it meets expectations; and it will be categorized as poor, inadequate, or deficient if it falls short (Vázquez et al., 2001).

The idea of customer satisfaction is made up of several elements from various sources (McColl-Kennedy & Schneider, 2006). Clear, practical definitions from the consumer and the company are the first step in achieving customer satisfaction. The significance of precisely describing the fundamental ideas and components of satisfaction serves as a framework for gathering data on what is and is not effective. This comprises both the hard measures, those that are more obvious and tangible (e.g., number of complaints, average wait time, product returns, etc.), and the soft measures, those less obvious characteristics (Hayes, 1998). These definitions often begin with the broadest generalization before moving on to more specific and exact instances. The bottom line is that one must be aware of what to look for in order to understand client satisfaction (Mitchell, 1999). The company must look both internally and externally for this information.

The dimensions of satisfaction are derived from the previously specified needs. These are the particular elements that comprise the requirements. For instance, if a customer and organizational need is for customer service, the dimensions of satisfaction may include interactions, timeliness, and responsiveness. These are the required clusters. (Hayes, 1998). Another crucial source of knowledge is the procedures, elements, and standards that the client considers crucial. A firm must be aware of the requirements and desires of its customers in order to satisfy their needs and desires. This knowledge is essential for a flourishing organization as well as for comprehending and raising consumer satisfaction. This crucial element contributes to the establishment of criteria for measuring consumer satisfaction (Hayes, 1998).

1. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used in this research to collect data across various demographic structures of consumers. The survey questionnaire was the primary tool for data collection in this study to fetch primary information from the customers pertaining to different dimensions of service structure. These responses will be tested by regression analysis and present the retrieved observation according to the researcher's understanding. The quantitative approach will help the researcher to analyze primary data scientifically by means of statistical tools and then merge it with secondary data to present the conclusion to the research questions.

2.2 Primary Data & Secondary Data

In the current research work, the researcher is going to collect primary data from one source only, which is the survey questionnaire. For the aim of supporting the core outcome of the present study activity, the secondary data is gathered by employing a variety of sources. These sources include a number of offline sources like magazines, newspapers, and periodicals. Besides, a number of electronic sources are also utilized, which include online libraries, previously published journal articles, and research work in the same context as the current research work is carried out.

2.3 Instrument

The researcher utilized the SERVQUAL model and developed all the statements of a based survey questionnaire around the service quality dimensions as projected in the SERVQUAL model. The survey questionnaire will be presented to the customers of two selected catering services in Kuala Lumpur.

2.4 Sample

Researchers have used a simple random technique to guarantee the validity of the survey and prevent sample selection biases. The sampled population for this study consisted of patrons of two catering services in Kuala Lumpur. This group entailed both local and international clients, cutting across all ages, including males and females. Moreover, this group consisted of both the current clients of each of the restaurants and those initially visited. A database of customers' information was retrieved from the caterers' administration. An online questionnaire was distributed through customer's email retrieved from both caterer's databases. Permission for retrieving customers' data had been made to both companies prior to this research. Overall, 358 emails were distributed consisting of 128 respondents from catering service A and 230 respondents from catering service B. Out of 128 respondents for catering service A, 68 respondents gave their feedback which further reduce to 50 respondents who answers all the questionnaires completely. While for catering service B, 92 respondents gave their feedback and further reduce to 50 respondents who answers all the questionnaires completely.

2.5 Profiles of Companies

a.   Catering Service A is a start-up company with four years of experience in the industry. It is a moderate-priced Malay restaurant in the suburbs of Kuala Lumpur. The restaurant is popular majorly because of its bursting authentic Malay flavor and authentic ambiance maintained by the restaurant's management. The restaurant small number of Malay dishes just to deliver superior quality and authentic taste to its customers. The restaurants also provide catering services for events such as weddings, conferences, birthday parties and etc.

b.   Catering Service B is considered as being well-established catering company in Kuala Lumpur which is popular for its authentic Malay taste. With an experience of almost 17 years in the industry, it is considered well-known not only in the Kuala Lumpur region but in other states as well. Despite the restaurant's customers majorly comprises locals, some portion of international customers also catered to this restaurant for their international events.

2.6 Data Analysis

Using Cronbach's Alpha, the data were analyzed in order to establish the degree of dependability detected in the survey respondents' responses. Cronbach's Alpha is an internal consistency measure that evaluates the dependability and reliability of study participants for a sample of test subjects (Andrew et al., 2011). In this study, regression analysis was utilized to help the researcher test the study's hypothesis and achieve its objectives. Regression analysis would further establish the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables of service quality and customer satisfaction.

3. Results

3.1 Analysis

The overall Cronbach value of 0.787 is suggestive of the fact that the responses provided by the respondents are highly reliable which ensures the authenticity of the findings of this research study. See Table 1. In addition, it also indicates that the findings of this study contain fewer amounts of variations, and consistency can be observed in the responses provided by the respondents.

Table 1 - Reliability analysis

Dimensions	N of Items	Alpha Values
Tangibility	5	0.898
Reliability	5	0.845
Responsiveness	3	0.856
Assurance	6	0.907
Empathy	3	0.889

3.2 Demographic Findings

At Catering Service, A, the majority of the respondents, i.e., 22 respondents, belong to the age group of 25–35, whereas another 16 respondents belong to the age group of 18–25. Moreover, only 4 respondents belong to the age group of over 45, and 8 respondents fall into the age bracket of 35–45 years. Gender-wise, 23 respondents are female and 27 are male. At Catering Service B, 21 respondents represent the age group of 25–35 and 17 respondents represent the age group of 18–25 years old. Therefore, 8 respondents belong to the age group of 35–45 years, and only 4 respondents are aged over 45 years. Out of 50 respondents at Catering Service B, 28 are female and 22 are male.

3.3 Analysis of Mean Differences

To determine the differences between two caterers in terms of client satisfaction in relation to service quality this research uses mean differences analysis. The idea of taking a constant value for expectations is inspired by the previous research carried out on a similar system of research work. The researcher examined the work of Moses and Nurita (2010), who utilized a constant value of expectation, to determine the significance of SERVQUAL for improving the quality of services in Indonesia's banks. It has been found that to calculate the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality, they have assumed the average value of customer expectation as four (Moses and Nurita,2010). Another study conducted by Ilyas et al (2013) in evaluating business school service quality found that the expectation value fall between four and five. In addition, Parasuraman et al (1988) proposed the SERVQUAL instrument to measure consumers' perceptions of service quality in retail settings using a set of constant perception values. Therefore, to find the gap between customers' expectations and perceptions, the researcher has taken a constant value for customers' expectations towards two selected caterers in Kuala Lumpur, as five considering the nature of expectation among customers towards food service is always high especially in a big city such as Kuala Lumpur.

The mean score analysis would help readers to understand the gap between customers' expectations before they availed of the services at Caterer Service A and Caterer Service B and their perception of the service quality after they availed of the services at these two restaurants. If we take a look at the tangibility section, we will find that this dimension of caterer A's service structure is better performing than caterer B's. Similarly, Caterer A's service structure is better in reliability, responsiveness, and empathy dimensions of service structure than Caterer B's. But the difference between both restaurants' different dimensions is very low, which is suggestive of the fact that both restaurants are close competitors. From the review of mean scores in each dimension, it is also noticeable that both restaurants lack the ability to respond to customers' requirements timely and as expected. A gap of mean score of -0.35 scored by Caterer A and -0.38 by Caterer B suggests that these restaurants need to improve their responsiveness to the service structure. Although all the mean score gaps identified indicate that customers' perception is less than customers' expectations from these two caterers, it can still be asserted that Caterer A has a slight advantage over Caterer B in terms of performance in service delivery to the customers. See Table 2.

Table 2 - Gap analysis between two caterers

Variables	Tangibility		Reliability		Responsiveness		Assurance		Empathy	
Caterers	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Average Value	3.83	3.91	3.98	3.91	3.65	3.62	3.78	3.83	3.99	3.95
Expectation	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Gap	**-1.17**	**-1.09**	**-1.02**	**-1.09**	**-1.35**	**-1.38**	**-1.22**	**-1.17**	**-1.01**	**-1.05**

3.4 Regression Analysis for Catering Service A

The other objective of this analysis entailed determining how service quality relates to customer satisfaction. The following regression model was applied to achieve this objective. Based on the research findings, the five dimensions have a 42.5% contribution to satisfaction (see Table 3). This percentage gets based on the R^2 representation. Additionally, this is a clear indication that the remaining factors only make a 57.5% significance towards customer satisfaction.

Table 3 - Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	425[a]	.180	.991

The ANOVA analysis (see table 4) indicated that the significance (F) = 1.936. Therefore, since it is higher than the P-value (0.05), it's a clear indication that the model was statistically insignificant. Due to its statistical insignificance, the developed model cannot be applied to prediction scenarios.

Table 4 - The one-way ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	9.508	5	1.902	1.936	107[a]
Residual	43.212	44	.982		
Total	52.720	49			

By testing the regression coefficient (see table 5), it can be observed that tangibility, reliability, and assurance have an influence on customer satisfaction and help the customer meet their expectations. On the other hand, the responsiveness and empathy of the service structure negatively influence customer satisfaction. Overall, it has been found that all these dimensions do not have a significant relationship with any of the service dimensions because the values of all five service dimensions are greater than 0.5, which indicates a low level of relationship between customer satisfaction and the dimensions of the service structure.

Table 5 - The coefficient table of the regression

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.130	1.518		.744	.461
Tangibility	.155	.244	.140	.637	.527
Reliability	.182	.200	.126	.911	.367
Responsiveness	-.016	.165	-.014	-.098	.922
Assurance	.526	.338	.333	1.557	.127
Empathy	-.135	.257	-.085	-.525	.602

3.5. Regression Analysis for Catering Service B

Based on the research findings, the five dimensions have a 38.6% contribution to satisfaction (see table 6). This percentage gets based on the R^2 representation. Additionally, this is a clear indication that the remaining factors only make a 62.4% significance towards customer satisfaction.

Table 6 - Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.386[a]	.149	1.030

The ANOVA analysis (see table 7) indicated that the significance (F) = 1.543. Therefore, since it is higher than the P-value (0.05), it's a clear indication that the model was statistically insignificant. Due to its statistical insignificance, the developed model cannot be applied for prediction scenarios.

Table 7 - The one-way ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	8.180	5	1.636	1.543	.196[a]
Residual	46.640	44	1.060		
Total	54.820	49			

From the regression analysis, it can be asserted that the tangibility and responsiveness dimensions of the service structure have a negative influence on customer satisfaction, whereas reliability, assurance, and empathy have a positive influence on customer satisfaction. However, all five dimensions do not possess any significant relationship This factor is because their P-values were higher than 0.05.

Table 8 - The coefficient table of the regression

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.243	1.176		1.056	.297
Tangibility	-.365	.342	-.290	.-1.069	.291
Reliability	.255	.232	.189	1.097	.279
Responsiveness	-.058	.177	-.051	-.328	.744
Assurance	..754	.487	..450	1.548	.129
Empathy	.114	.315	.068	364	.718

4. Discussion

From the findings of regression analysis, it is evident that all five dimensions have an insignificant impact on customer satisfaction for both caterers. There could be several reasons that lead to insignificant results, one of which is the influence of other factors such as customers' characteristics, their perceptions, emotional factors and customer loyalty that are not included in this study can play a significant impact in creating customer satisfaction (Zamani et al,

2020). Although the factors used in this research are representative of a restaurant's perspective, the consumer's perspective also affects customer satisfaction to a great extent (Zamani et al 2020).

Although research highlighted the lower levels of service values based on the factors which are responsible for customer satisfaction. This research uses mean score differences to identify which factors of quality services give a significant impact on customer satisfaction on each caterer. Caterer B is lacking behind caterer A in assurance, responsiveness, and tangibility attributes of its service quality. Similarly, caterer A is lacking behind caterer B in reliability and empathy. But the overall mean score is indicative of the fact that caterer A is considered better than caterer B in terms of service quality even though by looking at the length of experience caterer B is much more well-established and experienced.

The regression analysis of the research has found that the SERVQUAL model underlines a lower impact on a caterer's service quality compared to the expected level of service values. The results indicate that neither restaurant meets the level of customer satisfaction, but then again, the study using mean score differences reveal that caterer A is much more dependable and effective in providing quality services to its customers than caterer B.

The researchers also found out that the dimensions of the service quality factor such as responsiveness need to be focused on by both caterers. Researchers interpreted this result after critically evaluating the gap mean score. This revealed that Caterer A and Caterer B need to enhance their systems of service delivery and increase the rate of responsiveness towards their customers. This finding in line with the study by Fida et al (2020) indicates that in service industries, responsiveness is more important than other variables. However, they should not neglect the importance of other variables such as reliability, assurance, and tangibles because mean ratings suggest that the respondents agree on the provision in these three dimensions.

This research also identified an issue based on the result analysis which is customers have the right and choice to fulfill their demand and intent to have a great experience with the services provided in the restaurant. Thus, to fulfill customer satisfaction is a critical challenge for the food service industry in this competitive market where all the restaurants in Malaysia struggle to maintain and sustain their services in the market (Razak, 2020). With those issues mentioned, it gives strong indicators to both caterers involved in this study to deliver high service quality to customers.

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study highlight some practical implications useful to management. Managers should maintain the service quality to increase customer satisfaction and thus encourages customers to frequently use their services. In addition to that, another main implication of the study is it provides managers with a scientifically-based means to ascertain the service quality, food quality, and ambiance of their own operations in a realistic and highly practical way. The expenditures in employee training and improving food quality should be regarded as necessary investments. The service providers should thus pay close attention to training and empowering their service employees to enhance the experience to an impressive one for their customers.

The research work has helped the researcher to conclude the results and answer the defined research questions. Consumer behavior is affected by the dimensions of services provided; to balance the argument and to provide a realistic approach to understanding the topic, the cases of Caterer A and Caterer B are analyzed by the researcher. Researchers conducted a survey in order to study the level of customer satisfaction regarding the services provided by both caterers. They were able to identify the consumer market's strengths and weaknesses by studying the effects of service quality on customer satisfaction levels.

It has been learned from the review of the literature that customers want assurance that they will receive true value for their money. When deciding to choose catering services in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur, a customer would want to taste authentic Malay food presented in a cozy local environment. In addition, customers would want the service staff to be clean and the ambiance properly maintained. In this scenario, restaurants need to maintain an environment and service quality that pleases the highly conscious customer base of Kuala Lumpur.

Using the SERVQUAL model, the general performance of the many parts of service quality is measured. The empirical evidence demonstrates that the SERVQUAL model is an effective and viable instrument for measuring service quality. Knowing and comprehending the customer's expectations is essential. The findings of the current study also suggest that both caterers need to utilize and upgrade their resources extensively to keep their customers satisfied through their service structures. Thus, this will ensure the sustainability of the catering services companies to be operationalized in the long run.

5.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Since quantitative methodology was adopted to conduct this research and the survey was conducted over the sample with the help of a questionnaire, the researchers recommend that any future studies on the same topic should be conducted following a qualitative method scheme and must include various companies. When more than two companies are discussed and analyzed in the research, then it will give the readers an overview and understanding of the subject and that the quality-of-service standards can be altered with the help of improving various dimensions. Moreover, this will provide an overview for policymakers to revise the code of conduct so that the catering industry can

follow and consider them while providing services to their customers. Furthermore, selecting more than two catering companies will also make it easy for the researchers to understand and identify the services that are available to the customers through the continental food experience and what they think can be done to improve the service delivery standards.

5.2 Recommendations for The Management

The customers that are found slightly interested should be the major focus of the caterers. The management should plan strategies that shall include services for such customers who belong to a certain age bracket. Training and development marketing sessions should be practiced by the management of the caterers. The implementation of such training sessions will ensure better sales through the effectiveness of their workforce. The workforce should be trained so that they can effectively welcome the customers and can easily solve their problems

An online service portal for customers will ensure a better quality of customer service. A free online portal that will inform the customers regarding the presently available items will aid the dining experience of customers Last but not least, the factor of ethnicity should be brought into consideration by such restaurants. Since there are diverse preferences and needs of different ethnic classes, therefore, this consideration is quite essential for effective customer service. Since Kuala Lumpur is home to numerous ethnic groups, therefore this consideration will help the caterers to cater to the needs of its customers as per their religion, requirements, and cultural diversity

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