

## Customer Satisfaction Towards Three Star Hotels in Kelantan, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** The primary objective of this study is to examine how perceived quality, value and trust affect consumer satisfaction among three star hotels in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. This study used a cross-sectional design and self-administrated questionnaire to collect data from the consumers of three star hotels including; tune hotel, crystal lodge habib hotel, crown garden hotel, sutera inn prima and royal guest house. Findings of this study noted a significant model fit and revealed that perceived value and trust have a significant positive effect on consumer satisfaction. Besides, providing investment tax allowance to encourage domestic and foreign investment to build new luxury hotels, the ministry of tourism, Malaysia should, therefore also focus on designing a framework for continuous assessment of customer satisfaction and provide a supportive environment for three star hotels to upgrade their quality up to four or five star hotels.

**Key words:** Perceived quality, value, trust, consumer satisfaction, three star hotels

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### INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, tourism has become one of the largest and most dynamic economic sectors of the Malaysian economy. Precipitously, the growing tourism sector and its substantial positive contribution to the economy have gained the attention of the government of Malaysia. Today, as a result of various promotional efforts implemented by the Malaysian government, tourism has become the second major income earner for the country after manufacturing. As noted in the annual report of the Economic Transformation Program-Tourism (ETP, 2012), the tourism industry in Malaysia is an important foreign exchange earner, contributing to economic growth, attracting investments and providing employment. Malaysia is visited by over 25 million tourists a year, contributing to over RM60 billion (ETP, 2012). As hotel industries are closely connected to the success of the tourism industry (Nyer, 2000), the government of Malaysia has implemented several tax incentives to encourage investment and to support the growth of the hotel industry. As noted in the ETP (2012), under the 2012 budget announcement, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) approved investment tax allowance and pioneer status for new hotels. Finally in order to survive in today's competitive business environment, hotels in Malaysia have to continually assess the level of satisfaction of their guests and upgrade the quality of their services as required.

Guest satisfaction is essential to long-term hotel business success and one of the most frequently

researched topics in marketing (Jones and Suh, 2000; Pappu and Quester, 2006). As guest satisfaction has been considered a fundamental factor of long-term business success, many researches on guest satisfaction look into its impact on consumers' post consumption evaluations, such as attitudinal and behavioural loyalty toward the hotel business (Cooil *et al.*, 2007). It is broadly accepted that when guests achieve satisfaction after their stay at a hotel, the satisfied guests are habitually less sensitive about the price, less influenced by competitors offers and will continue being loyal to the hotel longer than the dissatisfied guests (Dimitriades, 2006). Nonetheless, satisfaction does not come directly to guests. Instead, there are certain factors that lead to guest satisfaction. The factors of guest satisfaction are commonly perceived quality of the hotel, valuable experiences in terms of perceived value and safety and security in the hotel which creates customers trust towards the hotel.

Studies have examined many different relationships involving the construct of satisfaction or factors contributing to a more satisfied customer base across a wide variety of industries (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Sirdeshmukh *et al.*, 2002; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). In order to retain customers, hoteliers must acknowledge the customers perception regarding the perceived quality, perceived value and trust. Usually, customers will look at the appearance when they want to choose a certain hotel to stay. This pattern is common because customers would expect great things, meaningful experience and worthy trust over their safety and security that suits the ranking star of the hotel.

The focus of this research is directed towards all three star hotels in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. The customers face with the problem of whether or not to stay in three star hotels. This is due to some hotels claiming to be three star hotels but unfortunately, the products and services offered are lower than the expected three star hotel levels. Briggs *et al.* (2007) noted major inconsistencies in service quality performance across the sector in both high and low ranking hotels. The main difference between excellent and poor service relates to the absence of a personal touch and how staffs deal with customers complaints. Tsang and Qu (2000) found that tourists perceptions of service quality provided in the hotel industry were consistently lower than their expectations and the managers over estimated the service delivery, compared to the tourists perceptions of service quality. Along these lines, it is noted that several studies of service quality in hotels continue to be undertaken in different parts of the globe.

With growing competition within the hotel industry, the inability to offer products or services at the standard level of three star hotels and the increased pressure to develop strategic relationship marketing efforts, there is an important need for individual hotels and/or corporations to assess guests perceptions of the products and services rendered (Gordon, 2004). This study, therefore aims to examine how perceived quality, value and trust, affect consumer satisfaction among the three star hotels in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

**Literature review:** Studies on consumer satisfaction towards hotel industry have identified the key factors contributing to consumer satisfaction. The association between the selected key factors and consumer satisfaction are illustrated.

**Guest satisfaction:** Guest satisfaction is defined, as the cognitive state of the buyer about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the reward received in exchange for the service experienced (Howard and Sheth, 1968). Customer satisfaction is frequently included in many business philosophies which relate to the creation of value for customers, anticipating and managing their expectations and demonstrating ability and responsibility to satisfy their needs. Qualities of service and customer satisfaction are critical factors for the success of any business (Gronroos, 1990; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). As Valdani (2009) noted, enterprises exist because they have a customer to serve. The key to achieve sustainable advantage lies in delivering high quality service that results in satisfied customers (Shemwell *et al.*, 1998). Service quality and customer satisfaction are key factors

in the battle to obtain competitive advantage and customer retention. Customer satisfaction is the outcome of customer's perception of the value received in a transaction or relationship where value equals perceived service quality, compared to the value expected from transactions or relationships with competing vendors (Blanchard and Galloway, 1994; Heskett *et al.*, 1990). In order to achieve customer satisfaction, it is important to recognize and to anticipate customers needs and to be able to satisfy them.

The confirmation-disconfirmation theory defines customer satisfaction, as a post-purchase evaluative judgment concerning a specific buying decision (Homburg and Giering, 2001). According to the theory, customers assess their levels of satisfaction by comparing their actual experiences (perception) with their previous experience (expectation). The three possible outcomes following the evaluation process are:

- Confirmation a situation where expectation meets perception, neutral situation exists
- Positive disconfirmation it occurs when perception exceeds expectation, leading to satisfaction
- Negative disconfirmation it occurs when expectation exceeds perception which leads to dissatisfaction

Although, there are many ways of defining satisfaction, the underlying conceptualization is that satisfaction is an attitude-like judgment following a purchase act or a series of consumer production interactions (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2004).

**Perceived quality:** As noted by Zeithaml (1988), quality is seen as the superiority of a certain product or service in a broad sense. This is because perceived quality is defined as consumers judgment about products excellence. Antony *et al.* (2004) reported that service quality is an intangible product because it cannot be seen. Consequently, this will make objective measurement impossible to be conducted. As a product and service provider, it is important to narrow the gap between appearances of products or service with customer perceptions. As a solution to alleviate this deficiency, it is essential to consider both functional and technical quality as they both affect the overall service quality. Several major developments over the past few decades have assisted in performing certain measurements of customer satisfaction. One particular development is serqual, a measurement tool covering the areas of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Kang *et al.*, 2004). Through, the usage of serqual, it is believed that assessment of service quality

and customer-contact can increase the expected value provided to the guest. Thus, those who successfully provide high quality service will also indicate that they have successfully gained the high expected value from the guest. This will lead to the generation of guest satisfaction.

Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) proposed that perceived service quality is determined by the difference between expected services and perceived services. The recipients of prominent rewards determine customer satisfaction levels, indirectly, this will change the perception of customers about the quality received. Hereby, perceived quality is defined, as the evaluation that a consumer makes about the excellence or superiority of a product (Zeithaml, 1988). Therefore, reward represents the characteristics of the products that fulfil the customer's requirements and that best satisfy their desires. Logically, this perception of the quality of a service should positively affect the customer's level of satisfaction given that the greater the reward received, the better a customer's overall evaluation would be about the purchase and consumption experience (Iglesias and Guillen, 2004).

**Perceived value:** In earlier studies, value was simply considered as a trade-off between quality and price (Zeithaml, 1988). According to Dodds *et al.* (1991), consumers perceived value represents a trade-off between quality and benefit that they perceive from the product and the sacrifice they perceive by paying the price. However, recent studies have claimed that consumers perceived value should be explained not through a trade-off between price and quality but through a multidimensional construct. It means that one of the most powerful ways to understand consumers is to understand their perceived values and value systems constructed by product and service provider (Durgee *et al.*, 1996). Besides that, it is vital to understand the value results from the consumers' belief or behavior (Carlson and Kacmar, 2000). Based on that idea, Sweeney *et al.* (1999) classified perceived value into 3 dimension; emotional, social and functional value. The emotional value is derived from the feelings and emotions that the product or service generates in the consumer and the social value increases social self-concept derived from the product. Lastly, the functional value is defined as a good value for the price and the outcome or the quality of the product.

From a measurement standpoint, Bojanic (1996) asserted that a firm's value can change if the firm changes what it is doing, if a competitor changes what it is doing or if customers needs or preferences change. When it

comes to pricing, Danziger *et al.* (2006) stated that many firms establish prices based on internal costs. They further added that the concept of cost incurred vs. price offered measurement does not assist hotels in attracting customers. A final pricing strategy should combine a supply side focus with the value customers place on its offerings. This is based on the evaluation of strategic assets (corporate affiliation, brand name, hotel size). By conducting this evaluation, Gordon (2004) and Danziger *et al.* (2006) believed that firms may signal strategic assets to target audiences to justify a reason for paying a premium price, to generate above average returns and to form the basis of sustained competitive advantage.

**Trust:** The foundation of any positive consumer/firm relationship is the construct of trust. While the first-time consumer may not have preconceived attitudes toward the service or service provider, the consumer can form these attitudes after a number of consumptive episodes. As a result, the consumer develops an attitude demanding that the provider meets his/her expectations in the service delivery process. This is the essence of Morgan and Hunt (1994)'s definition of trust as the confidence in the exchange partner's reliability and integrity. Repeated consumer experiences with a provider that delivers the service with reliability and integrity may lead to a customer base that is more loyal in both the attitudinal and behavioral sense.

Garbarino and Johnson (1999) explored the relationship between satisfaction, trust and commitment related to high and low relational customers in an off-broadway theater setting. The researchers found that for low-relational customers, satisfaction was the primary mediating variable between theater attributes and future intentions while commitment and trust were the mediating constructs between the theater attributes and future intentions for high relational customers, despite the absence of relationship building strategies advocated by Barry and Crosby (1996). Garbarino and Johnson (1999) posited that the development of trust and commitment for the high relational customers might be a result of intrinsic rewards or self-gratification received by these high relational consumers by patronizing the hotel (Clark and Maher, 2007).

According to Maghzi *et al.* (2011), one of the main aspects of hotel selection is linked to the consumers awareness of the hotel features and standards. Given the fact that potential customers are unfamiliar with the location, it can be suggested that they are unaware of the hotel's presence in that location or its quality. Existence of unfamiliarity and unawareness in the consumers makes

them rely on other cues to select their accommodation. In such a situation, the option of brand can be extremely sizable (Krishnan and Hartline, 2001). Brand trust is defined as an efficient and undeniably significant factor (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003) in the hotel experience, particularly in unfamiliar locations that always feature uncertainty over the quality of the accommodation.

Moreover, according to Krishnan and Hartline (2001), products, such as hotels and restaurants with simultaneous and inseparable production and consumption which involves high levels of experience effects can only be appraised during and after the consumption process. This demands external cues to assist in the formation of judgment on the likely levels of satisfaction to be anticipated in the consumption process. In addition, the subject of perceived risk in a purchase, precedes the anticipated value and willingness to buy (Sweeney *et al.*, 1999). For this reason, consumers often base their hotel choice on their beliefs about a brand (Jiang *et al.*, 2002).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study aims to examine how the selected factors affect satisfaction among the consumers of three star hotels in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. This study employed a cross-sectional design and self-administrated questionnaire to collect data from the consumers of three star hotels in Kota Bharu. Questionnaire was distributed to the guests while they were in the hotel. Complete data was collected from 100 guests staying in tune hotel (27%), crystal lodge (19%), habib hotel (18%), crown garden hotel (16%), sutera inn prima (11%) and royal guest house (9%).

**Research instrument:** The type of instruments that was used in this research was the five-point Likert scale questionnaires. Likert scale is the easiest way to build based upon the supposition that each statement on the scale has an attitude value, importance or weight in reflecting the attitude towards the issue in question (Kumar, 2005). There are also multiple-choice questions in this questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was divided into 2 sections. The first part of the questionnaire includes demographic questions based on personal information such as gender, age, ethnicity, income and highest education. The second part of the questionnaire tested the independent and dependent variables. The five-point Likert scale of 1-5 points (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree) was used for the independent and dependent

variables. Questionnaires were given to the respondents and they answered it based on their own preferences. A total of 19 statements with a five-point ordinal scale were used to measure guests satisfaction (5 statements) and the selected variables, namely; perceived quality (4 statements), perceived value (5 statements) and trust (5 statements).

After the data is collected, it was analyzed and summarized in an easy-to-understand format for interpretations and tabulations. Data analysis was facilitated using the computer software package, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 19.0 to ensure relevant issues are examined in a comprehensive and cost effective manner. Analysis starts with the descriptive analysis, followed by the reliability analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Respondents demographic characteristics:** This study collected data from a total of 100 respondents, out of which 41 are male and 59 are female. The majority of the respondents are aged from 20-30 years (69%), followed by 16% in the age group of 30-40 years, 10% under the 20 years age group and the respondents from the 40 and above age group accounted for the remaining 5%. This shows that teenagers and young adults are frequent guests of three star hotels in Kota Bharu, Kelantan. With regard to nationality, 89 out of the 100 respondents are Malaysians (Malay, 55%; Chinese, 20%; Indian, 15% and Others, 10%) whereas the rest of the respondents are foreigners. In terms of education, findings of this study showed that 51 out of the 100 respondents have a bachelor degree, followed by 19 who have completed high school, 12 who have a diploma, 14 who have completed their masters and 4 who have completed their PhD. In reference to the income of respondents, 54% earn >RM3500, 20% earn between RM3500-6500, 21% of the respondents income is between RM6500-10000 and 5% of the respondents income is >RM10000.

**Reliability analysis:** The interim consistency of the data collected was measured. The result indicates that the Cronbach's alpha of the perceived quality measure is 0.903, perceived value measure is 0.918, trust measure is 0.914 and satisfaction measure is 0.923. Thus, the internal consistency reliability of the measures used in this study can be considered as being in the range of very good (Table 1).

**Exploratory analysis:** As presented in Table 2, findings indicate that the skewness of the distribution for all

variables is normal, as skewness values ranged within -1.0 to 1.0. The mean and standard deviation are also presented in Table 2.

**Correlation analysis:** The Pearson correlation test was employed to examine the association between variables. Pearson correlation coefficient also checks if multicollinearity exists among the independent variables. As noted in Table 3, it shows that all the variables have moderate significant positive correlation with satisfaction which is perceived quality ( $r = 0.486$ ), perceived value ( $r = 0.663$ ) and trust ( $r = 0.659$ ). As none of these values are  $>0.9$ , it eliminates the multicollinearity issue and this study, therefore continued with the multiple regression analysis.

**Multiple regression analysis:** The  $R^2$  value, as presented in Table 4, determines the amount of the explained variation (variance) in guest satisfaction (dependent variable) from the 3 factor variables on a range of 0- 100%. Thus, the study is able to state that 49.1% of the variation in guest satisfaction is accounted for through the combined linear effect of the predictor variables.

The total variance is partitioned into the variance that can be explained by the independent variables

(regression) and the variance which cannot be explained by the independent variables (residual). Therefore based on the ANOVA in Table 5, the sum of squares is the total variance (95.381) which includes regression (46.806) and Residual (48.575). The p-value for F test is 0.00 which is less than the chosen 5% level of significance, indicating a good model fit. These indicate that the 3 selected independent variables which are perceived quality, perceived value and trust can be used to predict customer satisfaction.

Findings in Table 6 indicate that perceived quality, perceived value and trust are significant factors contributing to consumer satisfaction, as the p-value is less than the chosen 5% level of significance. The perceived quality coefficient is unexpectedly negative (-0.053). As for the perceived value, the regression coefficient is positive ( $B = 0.433$ ) and statistically significant ( $\text{sig.} = 0.003$ ). Here, the study finds that the perceived value, such as affordable room rates and bargain vacation packages, improve guest satisfaction. In regards to trust, it has a positive (0.424) and significant effect on customer satisfaction. The result explains that hotels with strong security generate a higher level of satisfaction among their customers.

Table 1: Reliability analysis

Variables	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items
Perceived quality	4	0.903
Perceived value	5	0.918
Trust	5	0.914
Satisfaction	5	0.923

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of variables

Variables	Satisfaction	Perceived quality	Perceived value	Trust
N	100	100	100	100
Mean	3.4140	3.6175	3.6000	3.5820
Median	3.6000	3.5000	3.8000	3.6000
Mode	3.60	3.50 <sup>a</sup>	4.00	3.40 <sup>a</sup>
Std. deviation	0.98155	0.91319	0.92682	0.85663
Variance	0.963	0.834	0.859	0.734
Skewness	-0.479	-0.432	-0.423	-0.249
Kurtosis	-0.329	-0.256	-0.446	-0.414
Minimum	1.00	1.25	1.40	1.40
Maximum	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Table 6: Regression coefficients

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		Sig.	95% confidence interval for B		Collinearity statistics	
	B	SE	Beta	t		Lower bound	Upper bound	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	0.529	0.330	-	1.603	0.112	-0.126	1.185	-	-
Perceived quality	-0.053	0.117	-0.050	-0.458	0.648	-0.285	0.178	0.451	2.217
Perceived value	0.433	0.143	0.409	3.033	0.003	0.150	0.717	0.292	3.429
Trust	0.424	0.136	0.370	3.119	0.002	0.154	0.694	0.377	2.651

Table 3: Pearson correlations coefficient

Correlation	Satisfaction (DV)	Perceived quality (IV1)	Perceived value (IV2)	Trust (IV3)
Pearson correlation	1.000	0.486	0.663	0.659
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
N	100.000	100.000	100.000	100.000
Pearson correlation	0.486	1.000	0.735	0.636
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	-	0.000	0.000
N	100.000	100.000	100.000	100.000
Pearson correlation	0.663	0.735	1.000	0.784
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	-	0.000
N	100.000	100.000	100.000	100.000
Pearson correlation	0.659	0.636	0.784	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	-
N	100.000	100.000	100.000	100.000

Table 4: Model summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>
1	0.701	0.491	0.475

Table 5: Analysis of variance

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	46.806	3	15.602	30.835	0.000
Residual	48.575	96	0.506	-	-
Total	95381	99	-	-	-

## CONCLUSION

This study had addressed the satisfaction level of consumers of three star hotels in Kota Bharu. Findings showed that perceived value is the most influential factor of guest satisfaction and trust is an important factor of guest satisfaction of three star hotels around Kota Bharu, Kelantan but not perceived quality. According to the research that had been done by numerous researchers and academicians, it can be concluded that guest satisfaction is very important in accessing the factors that need to be considered in ensuring a high level of satisfaction because it is seen as a key performance indicator within the hospitality industry. Therefore, to increase guest satisfaction toward three star hotels, they must improve their products and services which include the types of products and services offered.

Findings of this study can benefit three star hotels in designing better services to ensure customers trust and value which will lead to highly satisfied consumers. By comparing the findings of this research study with the results from the satisfaction assessment, it can be determined whether the marketing and advertisement efforts effectively provide the desired guest responses and thereby, boost guest satisfaction. As for the policy makers, besides providing investment tax allowance to encourage domestic and foreign investment to build new luxury hotels the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia should also focus on designing a framework for continuous assessment of customer satisfaction and provide a supportive environment for three star hotels to upgrade their quality to four or five star hotels.

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