



# SUSTAINABLE SERVICE QUALITY MODEL (SSQ) AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY: MUSLIM-FRIENDLY HOSPITALITY SERVICES (MFHS) IN MALAYSIA

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## Abstract

The growing hospitality industry poses more challenges to competition that leads towards the importance of expanding customer base. One of the segments in the industry is Halal tourism which is tremendously developing. The sector should realize the importance of being aware of Muslim market' needs and religious sensitivities by offering them quality products and services. Providing sustainable quality services is indispensable for the success of companies in the long run and enable them towards strong positioning strategy in the context of Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) companies. Although service quality is one of the most researched area in marketing because of its impact on success factors but most service quality measurement models have been developed in a western context and may not be suitable for generalizing to non-western, particularly Islamic contexts. Despite the awareness of importance on sustainable service quality, only few studies on sustainable service quality appear in the literature. Therefore, the research's main objectives are to investigate factors of sustainable service quality in influencing satisfaction and loyalty in MFHS sector in Malaysia. The interview and survey will be adopted. The SPSS and SEM AMOS will be used for data analysis. The findings will be prepared and reported.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Service Quality (SSQ); Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS); Hospitality Industry

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## 1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is growing which cause more challenges to competition that leads towards the importance of expanding customer base (Jeaheng et al., 2020). Global tourism sector has few sub-segments to meet the demand of tourists coming from different background. Halal tourism becomes one of the segments which is tremendously growing that created more competition in the market (Arasli et al., 2021). Accordingly, Global Muslim Travel Index GMTI (2018) has shown a total of approximately 130 million travellers every year indicating the importance of Muslim market globally (Jeaheng et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to be aware of Muslim market' needs and religious sensitivities by offering them appropriate products and services (Han et al., 2019). Service quality is the tourists' assessment and evaluation towards the expected service that is important in the hospitality industry (Irama & Abror, 2019).

Generally, service quality is one of the most researched areas in marketing study (Ahmad et al., 2019; Ali et al., 2018) because of its impact on success factors, for example customer satisfaction (Lee et al., 2019). However,

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most service quality measurement models (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1988) have been developed in a western context and may not be suitable for generalizing to non-western and particularly Islamic contexts because of the differences in culture (Lari et al., 2019). Accordingly, providing quality services is indispensable for the success of service providers in the long run (Owen et al., 2001), and enable companies to differentiate themselves by maintaining higher quality sustainably (Kotler et al., 2001).

Despite the awareness of importance on this topic, only few studies on sustainable service quality appear in the literature (Stamenkov & Dika, 2015). Based on the gaps, the research objectives are proposed: 1) to investigate the influencing factors towards the satisfaction of Muslim Friendly Hospitality Service (MFHS) companies. 2) to investigate the sustainable service quality (SSQ) towards the satisfaction of Muslim Friendly Hospitality Service (MFHS) companies. 3) to investigate the relationship of satisfaction and loyalty of MFHS certified companies. 4) to develop the framework of sustainable service quality (SSQ) model for MFHS service companies.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Sustainable Service Quality*

Quality service has been understood as an ambiguous concept where the majority of scholars have conflicting views to define the concept (Van Hoof, 2002). One of prominent scholars in service research has described service as a collection of acts that occur in the relationship between the guest and the organization's staff, products and other physical resources, systems and/or setups demonstrating the service provider and possibly containing other guests, where all these acts' objectives are to help customers' daily activities (Grönroos, 2006). Stamenkov and Dika (2015) exerted that a sustainable service quality is the capacity to provide uninterrupted services with exceptional sustainable quality over a long period of time. Despite the awareness of importance on this topic, only few studies on sustainable service quality appear in the literature (Stamenkov & Dika, 2015). In addition, the behavior and response of Muslim guests toward staying and experiencing the services offered by Muslim-friendly hotels remains largely unexplored ((Jeaheng et al., 2020).

### *2.2. Satisfaction*

Satisfaction is the fulfillment of the customer's desire arising out of the customer's aspiration to own or utilize a service (Oliver, 1997). Satisfaction is the resulting feeling or the judgment that the customer makes when they get a specific level of enjoyment and pleasure from the features of a product or the service itself (Hadi et al., 2019). Satisfaction has been implied as customer's appraisal of a service vis-à-vis clients' needs and expectations so as to judge whether that service has fulfilled their needs and expectations (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003).

### *2.3. Customer Loyalty*

Customer loyalty is defined as a client's commitment based on a very positive outlook to a brand, a service provider, or a particular sales outlet (Sheth et al., 2004). As a result, there will be regular and recurring purchasing of the product and service. Prominent scholars have set the pattern by elaborating the major indicators of customer loyalty which is repeat purchase denotes that customer displays preference to the purchase of a particular service; retention which signifies sticking to the brand and resistance to change despite negative influence or perception of the product or service; and referral which implies recommending and providing reference to others for the purchase of specific products and services (Kotler & Keller, 2006).

#### *2.4. Perceived Risk*

Sweeney et al., (1999) define perceived risk as the subjective expectation of a loss that include financial and performance risk. They further exerted that Each risk dimension can be viewed as an expectation of a future cost that contributes to a good's perceived value for money at the time of purchase. Other scholars believe that different types of perceived risk influence decisions of tourists to participate in tourism such as medical tourism (Wang, 2012).

### **3. Methodology**

The cross-sectional survey research design using self-administered questionnaires will be applied. Measurement items are adapted and adopted from past studies. Target population focuses on consumers who are from Selangor and Federal Territories, consuming services from Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) certified companies in Malaysia. Sampling will be selected by using purposive sampling method where only customers who have experienced of consuming services from MFHS service companies will be selected.

### **4. Findings**

Quantitative data analysis will be done according to two-step approach: (1) estimating the measurement model; (2) analyzing the model and estimating path coefficient. The analysis will be done by using SPSS and SEM AMOS. SPSS is for data entry and basic analysis. The findings and recommendations will be reported.

### **5. Conclusions**

The growth demand for Halal service among Muslim market due to its purity and quality standards, the significance of this empirical research to the Halal hospitality industry is undeniably important. The uniqueness of this study exists in the fact that it is the first known to integrate the sustainable service quality with Muslim Friendly Hospitality Service (MFHS) standard that contribute towards sustainable Halal service quality model development.

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