Regression modelling analysis of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction: a case of tourist agricultural farm

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Abstract: The study investigates the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction of a popular tourist agricultural farm cafeteria. The five dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL) were used to measure the customer’s satisfaction level at KHM Strawberries and Jam Cafe. These include tangible, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance. Multiple regression analyses were used to examine these relationships based on sample from 420 customers of the café. The results indicate that all SERVQUAL dimensions except responsiveness were important for increasing the level of customer’s satisfaction. Assurance and empathy were found to be the most important dimensions for customer satisfaction, which in turn can influence the sale of the business. The findings provide evidence that service quality plays an important role for increasing the level of customer satisfaction, and helps scholars and managers to better understand the effect of service quality through which customer satisfaction benefits business sale. Finally, this study discusses managerial implications and highlights future research directions.

Keywords: customer satisfaction; service quality; SERVQUAL; tourist agricultural farm cafeteria.


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1 Introduction

Research on customer’s satisfaction has steadily building up its pace in the literature as customer’s satisfaction is perceived as one of the key areas for a business to be successful (Cho and Fjermestad, 2015; Chu, Lee and Chao, 2012; Kanji and Wallace, 2000). Despite vast varieties of research in this area of interest, one topic yet to be fully addressed in the literature is the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction within tourism agricultural farm industry. This study was investigating the relationship between the service quality (SERVQUAL) dimensions and customer’s satisfaction of KHM Strawberries and Jam Café. Specifically, this study examines the perception of service quality of the strawberry café in its services to customers who came to visit the farm. The motivation for conducting this research was two-fold; both being able to measure the customer’s perception towards the service quality of the food served in the cafeteria, and strategically to recommend plan of actions in relation to the service offered for improving the business performance.

KHM Strawberries and Jam is situated in Cameron Highlands and involves in the production of fresh strawberry and final products of strawberry such as jams. These products are locally distributed to the designated hypermarkets and market outlets. The farm is also open to the public and a small cafeteria operated near the vicinity of the farm known as KHM Strawberries and Jam Café served to provide food service and drinks to the customers who came to visit the farm. KHM Strawberries and Jam Café provided food service and drinks based on fresh strawberries as well as other products such as their famous homemade jam and topping, concentrated strawberry juice, ice-cream, sweets, candies and dried strawberry. KHM Strawberries and Jam Café had a great potential to receive many tourists daily especially during weekends, school holidays and festive seasons. The tourists were from both local states and foreign countries. However, in terms of sales profit of the café, the sales of year 2012–2015 proved inconsistent (Refer to Table 1 for the sales revenue of the café). Accordingly, the sales for KHM Strawberry and Jam café were targeted to 35% increase in 3 years’ time from 2013 to 2015. Unfortunately, the company had failed to achieve it.

Table 1 Sales revenue of KHM strawberries and Jam Café

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sales revenue (RM)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>174,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>188,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>134,200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 (June)</td>
<td>87,000.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: KHM strawberries and Jam Café annual report (2012–2015)

Previous studies showed that customer’s satisfaction of the business outlet needs to be investigated to establish a more thorough area of service quality to be improved on or invested in (Khan and Fasih, 2014; Murali, Pugazhendhi and Muralidharan, 2016; Pantouvakis and Bouranta, 2013). Hence, it was our focus to investigate the service quality of KHM Strawberries and Jam Café in relation to customer’s satisfaction to provide areas of service quality to be highlighted. Failing to address customer’s satisfaction to service quality could affect the image of the company and reduce customer
loyalty in future. It would also have negative effects on long-term profit margin for business as a whole. It therefore calls for service provider to get the service right by raising the quality of service delivery to meet customer expectations. The outcome of the study could aid in improving customer’s satisfaction through the measuring of service quality of the cafeteria.

2 Literature review

Past studies have indicated the significant relationship between service quality and customer’s satisfaction. For example, Han and Hyun (2015) suggested that service quality and customer’s satisfaction had a positive impact on customer’s retention. Both service quality and customer’s satisfaction played a vital role in business sustainability and development. Service quality had extensively been investigated in numerous business industries such as banking (Shanka, 2012; Siddiqi, 2011), restaurants (Chin and Tsai, 2013; Ryu, Lee and Kim, 2012), healthcare (Lee, Lee and Kang, 2012; Zaim, Bayyurt and Zaim, 2013), hotels (Cheng and Rashid, 2013; Shing, Koh and Nathan, 2012) and tourism (Chen et al., 2011; Turan Katircioglu, Mehtap-Smadi, Kilinç and Ünlücan, 2012). In those studies, reliability, assurance and empathy were found to be important in customer’s satisfaction. This study proposed that identifying the ‘right’ dimensions of service quality could increase the customer’s satisfaction. This has implication for the hotel industry within Malaysian context. Finding and matching the right service quality dimension with company’s policy could secure customer’s satisfaction.

Shannaq and Alexandrov (2010) suggested similar to service quality, customer should be treated as a multidimensional construct where it should be operationalised alongside service quality at multi-levels in an organisation. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) suggested that increase in perceived service quality will lead to increase in customer’s satisfaction. This is supported by later studies conducted by Lee (2004) and Saravana and Rao (2007) who agreed that customer’s satisfaction depends on the level of service quality provided by the company.

In elaborated studies in this context of relationship between service quality and customer’s satisfaction, Negi (2009) in his study on the relationship between customer-perceived service quality and overall customer’s satisfaction, in the context of mobile telecommunication services, identified that reliability and network quality are main factors in evaluation of overall service quality. He also stressed upon the inclusion of other factors such as tangible, empathy and assurance in evaluating service quality towards customer’s satisfaction. Although his study focused on mobile telecommunication services, the identification of the factors proposed to evaluate service quality should not be ignored in the study of quality and customer’s satisfaction.

Past and recent studies further found that service quality and customer’s satisfaction have positive impact on customer retention stressing further that both service quality and customer’s satisfaction play a vital role in business sustainability and development (Han and Hyun, 2015). Suuroja (2003) not only found out that increase in service quality leads to increase in customer’s satisfaction. From their study, they also suggested that service quality is more abstract than customer’s satisfaction. Their argument was that while customer’s satisfaction reflects customers’ feelings towards services provided by a firm, service quality is subjective to customer’s perception on the value of the service (i.e. in terms of cost) or based upon other customer’s experience which may not be accurate.
Within the tourism industry, Zaim, Bayyurt and Zaim (2013) conducted a study to develop an indirect effect of service quality on customer’s satisfaction and customer loyalty in Malaysia rural tourism. Their findings revealed that customer’s satisfaction had significant and positive partial mediating effect on service quality and customer loyalty in Malaysia rural tourism. The findings implied that the relationship of service quality, satisfaction and customer loyalty would lead to rural tourism operators’ profitability. Therefore, service quality and customer’s satisfaction played a crucial function within the Malaysia rural tourism industry. Both studies justified the importance of the investigation on service quality and customer’s satisfaction in business industry.

2.1 The SERVQUAL model for service quality satisfaction

The SERVQUAL model was first developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) to make a comprehensive understanding of service quality. The model has gone through revision in later years. Originally, the authors identified 10 elements of service quality (i.e. competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, knowing the customers, tangibles, reliability and responsiveness), but later works have resulted in the elements reduced to five factors (i.e. reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness). The newer version is given a new acronym, RATER which represents the five factors.

The authors added that the five dimensions could be applied across industries (Wilkins, Merrilees and Herington, 2007). Business sectors have in fact been using SERVQUAL to measure and manage service quality using survey questionnaire to measure both customer expectations of service quality based on the five dimensions and their perceptions on the service they received. Service quality is deemed low if customers’ expectations are higher than their perceptions of service quality.

According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990), the five dimensions of service quality are as the follows:

2.1.1 Reliability
Reliability covers the company’s ability to provide and perform service as promised in a dependable and accurate manner with consistency. For instance, the manner a company meets its promise services as scheduled and ensuring tasks and outcomes are met. It also includes correct accounting such as bills are free from errors.

2.1.2 Assurance
Assurance encompasses competence, courtesy, credibility and security. This would involve staffs are properly trained to apply tools and knowledge appropriately to service processes and customers’ needs with the perception that the service is competent and safe from any harm. This is important for branding and reputation of a company. Customers will subscribe to a certain brand to get certain services or products. For example, customers would prefer food products sourced from ‘Nestle’ brand or would expect a lot when they come to Hilton Hotel.
2.1.3 Tangible

This dimension encompasses physical evidence of the service, e.g. the physical facilities, equipment and personnel. This includes, for instance, the cleanliness of the service premises, staff appearance, communication devices or other equipment used.

2.1.4 Empathy

This includes access, communication and understanding between the firm and the customers. This involves the communication channels and styles used by an organisation through its personnel with the customers which, for instance, may include the use of brochures, leaflets, instructions and people management. Jing and Han (2011) stated that empathy includes the importance of the organisation in using the language that the customer could understand and their effort to understand customers’ needs.

2.1.5 Responsiveness

Responsiveness dealt with the readiness and willingness of the employees to aid customers in providing prompt services when needed. This may include customisation of customers’ needs in altering aspects of delivery process, change in delivery times and making sure customers being communicated at all times until completion of required task.

In short, based on SERVQUAL model, service quality is about closing the gap between customers’ expectation and their perceptions of service or product received. Metters et al. (2008) argued that SERVQUAL measuring tool remains the most complete tool to conceptualise and measure service quality (p.101). They stated that the tool has been used widely in numerous service industries such as financial services, banking, education, tourism and healthcare. As this model dominates the literature as the most common model used to measure service quality, this study adopted the SERVQUAL model to evaluate the service quality of KHM Strawberries and Jam Cafe.

2.2 The relationship between SERVQUAL and customer’s satisfaction

Kumar, Tat Kee and Taap Manshor (2009) in their study on banking sector in Malaysia used SERVQUAL to identify critical factors in delivering quality service for banks. They added another dimension, ‘convenience’ to SERVQUAL five-dimension model which comprises 26 statements. Based on these statements, the banking customers were elicited to investigate on their expectations and experience with the banking services. Their findings indicated that four critical factors were dominant in establishing service quality: tangibility, reliability, convenience and competence. These variables had significant differences between expectations and perceptions with tangibility having the smallest gap and convenience has the largest gap. As a recommendation, Kumar, Tat Kee and Taap Manshor (2009) suggested that banks need to focus on providing their services competently, giving assurance to the customers, and improve on convenience.

In another study, Curry and Sinclair (2002) used SERVQUAL model to assess the quality of physiotherapy services in Dundee, Scotland. The quality gap was measured with five dimensions through a 22-item survey instrument. They found out that customers highly appreciated the services despite a slight negative gap in perception. Their studies evidently suggested that assurance and empathy were very important. Despite their
criticism on the model, Curry et al. agreed that SERVQUAL model has the potential applicability in measuring service quality in the public sector.

Negi (2009) applied the model to determine customer’s satisfaction through perceived quality in the telecommunication industry. His findings revealed that reliability, empathy and network quality significantly contributed to the overall service quality and overall customer’s satisfaction with use of mobile devices. Liu et al. (2015) integrated fuzzy set theory with SERVQUAL model to analyse service quality in certification and inspection industry in China. They conducted their study on 405 randomly selected participants who are customers of China certification and inspection company. The outcome of the study showed that tangible dimension has the biggest gap between service quality expectations and perceptions. Thus, the company needed to invest in tangible aspects to improve their service quality.

In this study, SERVQUAL was applied to measure the service quality and customer’s satisfaction. This enabled us to identify the gaps in service quality by determining the dimensions where consumers are satisfied with.

3 Research questions

In order to suffice the aim of the study, the investigation was guided by the following research questions:

What is the relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions in relation to perceived tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy and customer’s satisfaction in the operation of a cafeteria?

4 Research hypotheses

Aligned with the research questions, five hypotheses were tested for this study:

\( H1: \) There is a relationship between perceived tangibles and customer’s satisfaction in the operation of a cafeteria.

\( H2: \) There is a relationship between perceived reliability and customer’s satisfaction in the operation of a cafeteria.

\( H3: \) There is a relationship between perceived responsiveness and customer’s satisfaction in the operation of a cafeteria.

\( H4: \) There is a relationship between perceived assurance and customer’s satisfaction in the operation of a cafeteria.

\( H5: \) There is a relationship between perceived empathy and customer’s satisfaction in the operation of a cafeteria.

5 Research methodology

This study was intended to measure the level of service quality provided by the KHM Strawberries and Jam Café to meet customer’s satisfaction. KHM Strawberries and Jam primary data and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data were obtained
through company data and survey questionnaires that were distributed randomly to 420 respondents at KHM Strawberries and Jam cafeteria situated in Cameron Highlands. Secondary data were based on recent literatures from journals, articles and books, for instance, in designing survey questionnaires and theoretical framework was based on the selection of appropriate methodology.

In terms of the design, the customer survey was designed based on SERVQUAL Model to investigate the service quality of cafeteria in relation to customer’s satisfaction. This study adopted Parasuraman’s SERVQUAL dimensions to measure service quality. The dependent variable in this study was the overall customer’s satisfaction that is measured via the overall satisfaction with KHM Strawberries and Jam Café service. The independent variable in this study was the service quality in KHM Strawberries and Jam Café which was used to measure the level of satisfaction with KHM café service performance. The dimensions which were included in this measurement are tangibles, assurance, responsiveness, reliability and empathy. The relationship between the variables discussed here is summarised in Figure 1. This formed the research framework of the study.

**Figure 1  Research framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Quality (IV)</th>
<th>Dependent Variable (DV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangible</td>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman, 1990*

In this research, we applied SERVQUAL five dimensions of service quality to determine the overall satisfaction of customer towards the company. For instance, tangible aspects refer to the physical environment in the company, equipment and personnel (Lenka, Suar and Mohapatra, 2009). Reliability is the company’s ability to fulfil its commitments and the service is to be carried out correctly from the beginning (Eisingerich, Auh and Merlo, 2014). Responsiveness means carrying out the service punctuality, quickly and willingness to help customer in other ways (Zaim, Bayyurt and Zaim, 2013). Assurance refers to the customer’s contact and relation with the staffs and empathy refer to how well the company provides more attention to the customer personally (Lenka et al.). Empathy involves the communication channels and styles used by an organisation through its personnel with the customers which, for instance, may include the use of brochures, leaflets, instructions and people management (Zaim et al.). These dimensions were used to frame the questionnaire for the sample study (customers) in our investigation.

### 5.1 Data analysis and findings

Multiple regression analyses were used to test the five hypotheses for this research. Also Table 2 shows the reliability result for the survey questionnaire. The alpha coefficients values exceeding 0.7 over the threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1978)
indicating that each of the scales possessed a high level of internal consistency. Thus, it can be concluded that the survey instrument for measuring variables under investigation was valid and reliable.

Table 2  Reliability test result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>0.768</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>0.734</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>0.750</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer’s satisfaction</td>
<td>0.741</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis among all the independent variables and dependent variable (customer’s satisfaction). The result confirmed that all four independent variables were significant as all the values were below the cutting point of 0.05 (Coakes and Ong, 2011) except responsiveness which was 0.86. The result interpreted that an increase in tangible, reliability, assurance and empathy led to an increase in customer satisfaction by 0.098, 0.175, 0.471 and 0.234%, respectively. This indicated that tangible, reliability, assurance and empathy are the predictors that can influence the customer satisfaction towards service quality of a cafeteria.

Table 3  Multiple regression analysis result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>Standard beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangible</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.098</td>
<td>2.273</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>0.208</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>5.063</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>-0.009</td>
<td>0.051</td>
<td>-0.008</td>
<td>-0.178</td>
<td>0.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>0.431</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.471</td>
<td>10.515</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>0.243</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.234</td>
<td>5.215</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ R^2 = 0.598, F = 117.195 \]

The \( R^2 \) value can be used to show the coefficient of determination measure for the proportion of variation in dependable variable which is explained by the independent variables in regression model fit. Based on Table 3, \( R^2 = 0.598 \) or 59.8% of the customer satisfaction can be explained by tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Assurance, empathy, reliability and tangible except responsiveness were significant variables that could influence customer satisfaction. The level of significance of each dimension can be measured through the \( t \)-value. The highest \( t \)-value was for assurance (10.515), which is then followed by empathy (5.215). Next, the \( t \)-value for the third dimension, reliability indicated 5.063 and finally tangible at 2.273.
6 Discussion and conclusion

This study developed a conceptual model for examining the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. The results indicate that SERVQUAL dimensions of tangibles, reliability, assurance and empathy are important predictors for customer’s satisfaction. Among these dimensions, assurance and empathy were found to be the most important in their relationship with overall customer’s satisfaction compared to other aspects.

These findings are consistent with past studies in this area. For example, Curry and Sinclair (2002) in their adoption of SERVQUAL model to assess quality of physiotherapy services in Dundee, Scotland, concluded that assurance and empathy were very important in determining customer’s satisfaction. In Agbor’s study, he also found that assurance and empathy were two most important dimensions or aspects in their relationships with customer’s satisfaction for all three service sectors that he investigated. However, there were other past studies which pointed out other dimensions as more important. For example, Arasli, Turan Katircioglu and Mehtap Smadi (2005) pointed out that reliability dimension of SERVQUAL but not assurance had the highest impact on customer’s satisfaction. However, this claim was in the context of banking service sector.

Recalling to its definition, assurance refers to the degree of confidence and trust that the service provider is able to engender in the customer, based on the interactions between the parties (O’Neill and Palmer, 2003; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). Accordingly, when customers trust a business, those customers are willing to form a buying intention towards the business, which in turn influence long-term loyalty and profitability. Thus, increasing trust and confidence is crucial for the success of the relationship between customer and the business. Although customers may benefit satisfaction, quality and value from this relationship, the business or the café may gain long-term profitability and loyalty. Since the majority of the respondents were Malays (n = 366, 91.5%) and by definition they were also Muslims, their patronage to the cafeteria (which was also owned by a Muslim) could practically owed to their feeling secured and trust to dine there. As Muslims, they were very concern with the ‘halal’ (food lawful to be consumed) status of the cafeteria especially when it concerns about food and drinks. Thus, assurance is an important variable or factor to be considered by cafeterias in gaining customer’s satisfaction. The questionnaire items for this aspect included the sub-aspects of knowledge and competence of the staff, security in dining at the cafeteria, trust, product and price. Thus, in order to develop customer’s trust and confidence for loyalty, the cafeteria owner should emphasise on the importance of cleanliness, source of food and drinks, as well as reasonable prices. Besides, cafeterias should also place competence and credible staffs to ensure good service quality for their successful daily operations.

Empathy was another important variable in its relationship with customer’s satisfaction. Empathy refers to the customers being treated in such a way that they feel important to the service provider (O’Neill and Palmer, 2003; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). The reason that empathy was an important factor in this study is justifiable. If in the case of a university, whether students as customers felt that the staffs welcomes them or not is less relevant as once the students enrolled to study at the university, he or she has to commit to complete their study.

Thus, how the staff treated them should not be an obstacle or a factor to stop the student from attending and completing their studies in the university. However, in the
case of cafeteria as food service sector, ‘welcoming staff’ is compulsory and essential because unlike the university context, if the customers of the cafeteria are not well treated or if the customers have any negative feelings about the staff, they would not return to the cafeteria once they leave the place. They can always dine elsewhere.

Reliability was another attribute of SERVQUAL that was applicable in measuring customer’s satisfaction. The definition of reliability suggests that the company’s ability to provide and perform service as promised in a dependable and accurate manner and with consistency. Since reliability has important relationship with customer’s satisfaction, cafeteria should ensure prompt and competence service to its customers. This includes the staff’s ability to handle customers’ orders and complaints accurately and competently. The staff’s sensitivity to customers’ requests with professionalism would also ensure reliability for good service quality (Zaim, Bayyurt and Zaim, 2013). This finding is also consistence with past studies conducted by Osman and Sentosa (2013) and Ryu, Lee and Kim (2012).

The perceived tangible was also found to be an important predictor for a long-term cafeteria operation. The attribute of tangible includes physical facilities, equipment and staff appearance (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). Although it is less important than assurance and empathy, Negi (2009) cautioned that tangible should not be ignored in evaluating service quality. In this aspect, to gain high tangibility, cafeteria owner should improve the physical appearance of the cafeteria, such as comfortable seats and tables for dining, attractive decoration, interesting menu display and others (Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002; Zaim, Bayyurt and Zaim, 2013).

In short, these dimensions (i.e. assurance, empathy, reliability and tangible) importantly relate service quality with customer’s satisfaction. This result relates to the theory that higher levels of quality will lead to higher levels of customer’s satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2015, p.185). The outcomes of the study also confirmed the theory that perceived service quality is an important component of customer’s satisfaction (Saravanan and Rao, 2007).

However, among all the dimensions applied in this study, responsiveness was found not important in its relationship with customer’s satisfaction. Responsiveness refers to the willingness on the part of the service provider to deliver assistance to the customer (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985; O’Neill and Palmer, 2003). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988) defined responsiveness as the readiness of staff members to help in a pleasant and effective way. The outcome of the study for this dimension means that the degree that customers felt towards how pleasant or effective the service provider in delivering their services is not important in their customer’s satisfaction. This finding supports Agbor (2011) in his study on three service sectors in Umea University. Similar to the finding of this study, his findings indicated that responsiveness was not a valid variable to measure customer’s satisfaction of two out of three service sectors in financial institutions. However, in his study, responsiveness was only valid and had important relationship with customer’s satisfaction in education service sector (i.e. university).

The findings of the study showed that the attributes in the SERVQUAL dimensions related importantly to cafeteria for their successful operation and long-term profit. The findings could guide the service operator to help them to upgrade service quality and increase performance sales too. If the customers were satisfied with the service, the cafeteria operator would have better likelihood in achieving returning customers (Shannaq and Alexandrov, 2010).
Customer’s satisfaction is a key factor in sustainability of a service provider. Gaining and retaining customers should be the core business of a business operator. However, based on past studies and the findings of this study, there are not one but a few factors needed to be considered in attaining customer’s satisfaction. Based on SERVQUAL model introduced by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), the dimensions or factors for service quality include tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

The findings of this study suggest that the dimensions such as assurance, empathy, tangible and reliability were important in the relationships with customer’s satisfaction. Nevertheless, responsiveness was found to be unimportant in the relationship and invalid as a variable to measure customer’s satisfaction particularly in this study. However, this does not mean that responsiveness should be ruled out indefinitely as a variable in SERVQUAL to measure customer’s satisfaction. Previous studies indicated various findings in identifying the prominent dimensions or factors that influence customer’s satisfaction. Another conclusion which could be made is researchers have yet to come to a consensus on which particular dimensions are more important in customer’s satisfaction for a specific service sector.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that information on which dimension or factor that is important in gaining customer’s satisfaction is important for a service provider in launching and sustaining their business. Lack of information in this regard would have detrimental effects on the business if the service operators would invest in the inappropriate factors as discussed earlier. For example, as shown in this study, the cafeteria manager should invest more on the aspects of assurance, empathy, reliability and tangible for a long-term loyalty and profitability. The findings of the studies also could inform the government or relevant authorities such as Tourism Ministry and agencies in initiating appropriate strategies to provide suitable service quality in vital tourism sectors for the country’s economic gain.

Hence, it is recommended that in determining which dimensions or factors that influence customer’s satisfaction for a particular company or service provider, a dedicated study specifically for the company needs to be conducted. The company or the service provider should not rely solely on previous studies on similar sector.

As a way forward for this study, there are a few suggestions for future research. Firstly, the study could be replicated to be conducted nationwide to assess the service quality of foodservice in the country to provide better food service to attract tourists. Secondly, comparative studies could also be conducted among foodservice quality in tourist agricultural farm cafeteria operators in Cameron Highlands to investigate into the similarities or differences in the dimensions which could affect customers’ satisfaction in different farm locations. This would offer more data into the important dimensions which significantly related to customers’ satisfaction in tourist agricultural farm cafeteria to provide findings which could be generalised.

Thirdly, the study could also be extended to investigate the customer’s satisfaction in service quality in other tourist areas in the country such as tourists’ spots on islands, along the coastlines, high hills and others. Comparative studies could then be conducted to investigate the customers’ satisfaction among different cafeterias on different types of location to see whether the cafeterias share common or different attributes in customer’s satisfaction.
References


