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A STUDY OF REVISIT INTENTION TO BOUTIQUE HOTELS IN MELAKA

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Abstract

The competition in the hospitality industry in Melaka has increased due to the high demand of accommodations in Melaka. Boutiques hotel can be defined as a unique accommodation with less than 100 rooms, without a large chain and emphasised on personal services. This study is adopting SERVQUAL model to study the factors affecting customer revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka. A total of 200 guests with experience visited any boutique hotels in Melaka are selected as the targeted respondents. From the multiple linear regression analysis results, it showed that 51.9 % of total variation in the dependent variable (revisit intention) can be explained by all the five independent variables. The hypothesis analysis result also showed that tangibility, reliability and responsiveness have relationship towards revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka. Service quality plays a significant role in managing a hotel organization that a good service quality helps the hotel to create a positive image and maintain a good customer relationship within consumers who visited the particular hotel. Therefore, a combination of good service quality and unique theme can be a very strong competitive advantage that helps boutique hotel have a sustainable business in this stiff competition market in Melaka.

Keywords: Revisit intention, boutique hotels, SERVQUAL, service quality.

1. Introduction

In this era, having a vacation has become a very common thing no matter spending holidays with friend and family or their own. The well-developed transportation system encourages people to travel to different places to spend their leisure time abroad or at local tourist attractions. As a consequence, the robust growth in tourism has resulted in the rapid growth of hospitality industry. The tourism industry is the component of clearly defined firms that are perceived to be primarily in the business of selling to or serving tourists Davidson (1998). The tourism sector has become the third largest foreign income in Malaysia and Melaka is one of the beneficiaries (Farhana, 2013). Being nominated as a World Heritage City makes Melaka have a strong competitive advantage and foundation to develop heritage tourism and this advantage has become the main propeller for Melaka GDP growth (Zerafinas, Mohd, & Faizah, 2014). Besides that, Melaka as a World Heritage City also pulls visitors' intention to explore and experience the tourism resource. The government spent a lot of money to enhance culturally and support tourism activities in Melaka in order to promote tourism Melaka and attracts more tourists. The tourism industry in Melaka have a huge potential growth and has generated more income for businesses and firms in Melaka, more career opportunities and raise the living standard of local residents.

Repurchase intention is defined as the individual's judgment about buying again a specific service from the same company while considering his likely circumstances or current needs and wants (Lacey, Suh & Morgan, 2007). Revisit intention refers to the same meaning with repurchase intention which revisit intention is mostly adapted in the lodging industry.

Bolton (1998) stated that customer satisfaction is the key point of customer retention. Customers will only repeat their purchase intention when the specific products or services fulfil their needs and wants and satisfy their expectations. Customers' perception of value will influence the determination of customer satisfaction and the possibility of returning to the same hotel (Sim, Mak & Jones, 2006). A hotel that provides better service and value that are able to satisfy guests has the competitive advantage against other (Stevens, Knutson, & Patton, 1995). Customer satisfaction is the most significant indicators which impact consumers repurchase and revisit intention in both market-oriented and service-oriented company. This is supported by Gilly and Gelb (1982) which they found that customers who satisfied to the responsiveness of a gas and oil company to their complaints have slightly higher repurchase behaviour. Getty and Thompson (1994) had studied the relationship between quality of lodging satisfaction and the recommending behaviour in the lodging industry to customers. They found that lodging firm who provides higher service quality which results higher customer satisfaction makes customers have higher intentions to recommend the hotel to others. Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000) suggested that performance of reception, food and beverage, pricing and housekeeping are the essential elements used to determine customers repurchase and recommend intention. However, they suggested that the core benefit of the hotel which is housekeeping is the most important factors that affect customer revisit intention.

Besides that, create and maintain a good customer relationship also will influence customers' loyalty and revisit intention. By satisfying customers, they are more likely to spread positive word-of-mouth, establish loyalty and repurchase (Fornell, 1992). The harsh competition in hospitality industry makes managers pay more attention to their attributes, service quality and features that provide by hotels in order to provide the best service so that customers will revisit to the accommodation or recommend it

to their friends, family and social circles. As service quality is the key point of success in hospitality business, hotels who fail to pay attention to their attributes and service quality may lead negative evaluation to the hotel (Choi & Chu, 2001). Customers will more likely to spend more and revisit the hotel if hotel improves the core and auxiliary attributes (Wong, 2013). Peng, Zhao, and Mattila (2015) conducted a study to examine how core product and auxiliary attributes of hotels influence customer experiences. In the study, they considered the hotel's room, room cleanliness, bed and facilities as a core product of a hotel while the auxiliary attributes are breakfast menu, internet access and transportation convenience.

2. Problem Statement

Hospitality is a very important sector in developing a tourism destination. Hospitality infrastructure plays a significant role in the tourism industry as it provides lodging, food and beverages, laundry services and etc. for tourists who leave their home and visit any tourist destination. A comfortable and spacious hospitality infrastructure which satisfied consumers make them feel like home and it will highly increase the revisit intention of consumers. On the other hand, accommodation facilities that cannot fulfil consumers' basic needs and wants may put them in a very awkward position so that they will never visit the place in the future. According to the statistical data by Tourism Malaysia, there were 4,072 registered hotels supplying 262,021 rooms in Malaysia in 2014 and the number rose to 4,799 hotels which supplying 304,721 rooms in the next year. This includes 256 registered hotels in Melaka in 2014 and the number increased to 315 hotels in the next year. In 2014, there were, 4,432,963 foreign and domestic guests visited Melaka hotels the number of hotel guests in the next years increased by 154,672. Meanwhile, Melaka hotels average occupancy rates has increased to 63.3% from 62.2% in 2015.

In view of the different income level of consumers, various types of accommodation facilities such as luxury hotel, budget hotel, homestay, boutique hotel have emerged to adapt the different needs and wants of consumers. Joan (2011) has defined the boutique hotel as a unique accommodation which less than 100 rooms, without a large chain and emphasises personal services. Aggett (2007) described that boutique hotels are modern, well design hotels with up to 100 rooms, which offer unique levels of personalised service and completed infrastructural facilities. The boutique hotel can be defined as a small hotel which offering luxurious furnished room, friendly reception and personalized services to tourists in short term periods by combining the definition of boutique and hotel (Răbontu & Niculescu, 2009). There were approximately 271 hotels in Melaka including 240 boutique hotels between 1 to 3 stars according to Melaka Tourism Promotion Division in 2014.

Boutique hotels try to differentiate themselves from their competitors by placing themselves in a market niche through their distinctive design, lifestyle and image (Forsgren & Franchetti, 2004). In order to emerge from fierce competition, boutique hotels should emphasis on providing best service to their customers so that customers will revisit to their hotels in the future. The importance of service quality in the success of hotel business should be an emphasis on identifying the expectations of customers, expected service qualities for different customers' segments would help managers to improve their service quality to encourage customers' revisit intention (Akbaba, 2006). Hence, SERVQUAL model was

adopted in this study in order to study whether service quality will affect customers' revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka.

3. Research Questions

As result from the rapidly increasing demand for accommodation, the competition in the hospitality industry of Melaka has become stiff. Hence, the research question of this study is whether the five key elements of SERVQUAL model affecting customers' revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka?

4. Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the factors that affecting customers'' revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka. Furthermore, the boutique hotels' management also may benefit from the result of this study in order to improve their services.

5. Research Methods

5.1.SERVQUAL model

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) defined service quality as the gap between customer's expectation of a service and the customer's perception of service perceived. Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1988) defined service quality as the comparison between customer expectation to specific service with the actual experience and performance after experiencing that particular service. The unique characteristics of quality in the service industry which are intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability of production and consumption make it become difficult and challenging to be measured. Service quality is an important factor of success in attracting repeat business for contemporary accommodation industry (Saleh & Ryan, 1991). As Caruana (2002) suggests that service quality is related to customer satisfaction, customer satisfaction can be considered as the key criteria to determine the quality of service that delivers to customers through the product or service (Ganguli & Roy, 2011). A service organization must be able to meet customer expectation, providing satisfactory service quality for customers to prevent being eliminated from a competitive market. Superior service quality not only increases customer satisfaction, improves customer retention, enlarge market share but also increase the profitability and establish strong competitive advantage against other competitors (Han, Kwortnik, & Wang, 2008). The higher the customers' perception of service quality, the higher probability that they will revisit to the hotel, spreading positive word-of-mouth and increase brand loyalty (Keith & Simmers, 2013). Therefore, it is a tough challenge to maintain a high quality of service, awareness of customer expectations while improving the products and services (Pizam, Shapoval, & Ellis, 2016).

There was no uniform method to measure service quality until Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed the SERVQUAL model as a generic service quality measurement scale to measure the gap between customers' expectation to a service and the actual service they received of different service sectors. There were ten original dimensions which were tangible, reliability, competence, credibility,

responsiveness, access, understanding/knowing the customer, security, communication and courtesy. Later on, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) modified the original ten dimensions and created the five-dimensional SERVQUAL Model which consists of tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

5.2. Tangibility

Tangibility refers to the equipment, appearance of personnel and physical facilities (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Kandampully (2007) suggests that tangibles elements refer to the appearance of physical facilities and equipment utilized, perceived quality of materials by the service provider.

Physical assets and environment have directly impact on the employees of the hotel and the quality of service delivered (Jones, 2002). Tangible assets such as condition and suitability of hotel facilities, grounds, and cleanliness of buildings not only used to improve service quality but also adding value in order to gain competitive advantage (Penny, 2007). According to Jones (2002), as guest rooms are the core business benefit provide to customers, redecoration and refurbishing are the most common way to improve building appearance and visual impact. Cleanliness of room and level of comfort of beds are the most significant features that will affect the perceptions of hotel service quality according to Min, Min, and Chung (2002). Hotel managers should consider tangibles dimension in order to satisfy customers' needs (Dortyol, Varinli, & Kitapci, 2014). They mentioned that physical environment will be more attractive through indicating all hotel areas with signage, providing the pleasing visual appearance of building and layout. Cooper (1998) indicated that enhancing hotel environment quality can keep a clean and environmentally-friendly environment that benefits for both employees and guests' health while enhancing company's image (Mensah, 2006).

H1: There is a significant relationship between tangibility and customer's revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka.

5.3. Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Kandampully (2007) defined reliability as the dependability, accuracy and consistency by the service provider to perform the service. Morgan and Hunt (1994) stated that only when one party has confidence in the other party's reliability and integrity, the trust will be established between the two parties. Doney and Cannon (1997) further discussed that the party must be able to continue meeting its obligations towards their customers so that customers will believe the desired outcome will continue in the future. Hess (1995) stated that trust is related to the combination of company and service or product attributes such as integrity, quality and reliability. Service quality is measured by its reliability which is the possibility of predetermined service standard can be met (Boronico, 1997).

Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1994) stated that reliability is the core element of service quality as consumers will not rely on a firm that frequently making mistakes, fail to deliver their promises service hence consumers will lose their confidence to the firm and cast doubt on the company's ability to perform their promise dependably and accurately. For instance, a hotel customer needs the basic service

that they expect such as clean room, secure environment and the reliability of service provider to keep their words but not empty promises. Iacobucci, Ostrom, and Grayson (1995) stated that reliability, consistency and timeliness are three important factors in evaluating services as service is the real-time process happening between the service provider and customer. Chowdhary and Prakash (2007) study found that reliability is the most important dimension in a service as consumers expect service process to be reliable and match with their expectations.

Trust is the indispensable elements in building and maintaining the long-term relationship between firm and consumers as consumers will not have the intention to revisit the company that they do not trust (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Trust is the important bridge between satisfaction and personal connection to create a close relationship (Mojtaba, Seyed, & Mahnoosh, 2012). They stated consumers' satisfaction with their previous purchasing experience have a positive impact on their trust to the firm thus trust to a firm is established a base on customers' overall satisfaction and prior buying experience. Customers who have the consistent satisfaction to the firm when it meets or exceeds their expectations will strengthen the reliability of service provider and develops trust (Ganesan, 1994).

H2: There is a significant relationship between reliability and customer's revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka.

5.4.Responsiveness

Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined responsiveness as the willingness of service provider to help consumers and provide quick service for them as well as Kandampully (2007) defined responsiveness as the willingness of service provider to aid their customers in time with efficient manners, friendliness and warm attitude. Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990) indicated that slow service is a general problem faced by hotels due to lack of understanding employees had to customers' needs and expectations. Hence, it is important for employees to understand customers' needs and serve them as soon as possible. In Min and Min (1996) study, the hoteliers' ability to handle customers' complaints is a crucial sector which can affect customer satisfaction and experiences. Briggs, Sutherland, and Drummond (2007) argued that the only difference between decent and poor service is the lack of personal touch and the skills of staff deal with customer complaints. Result from this, Pallet, Taylor, and Jayawardena (2003) suggested to solve the staff issues through training and empowering employees, develop corporate quality and benchmarking.

H3: There is a significant relationship between responsiveness and customer's revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka.

5.5.Assurance

Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined assurance in SERVQUAL model as the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence. Besides that, Kandampully (2007) defined assurance as for the trust and confidence among consumers towards the service provider.

Hotel staff members is a significant sector that will affect customer satisfaction. Employees are responsible for the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of guests as they are the people who deliver service to their customers (Presbury, Fitzgerald, & Chapman, 2005). Hotel employees play a significant role in the satisfaction evaluation process of every customer as the interaction between a guest and a hotel staff is a chance for guests to examine them (Presbury et al., 2005). According to Juwaheer and Ross (2003), the behaviour of manager and staff of a hotel while interacting with customers is an important factor that will affect customers' experience thus Kessler (1996) suggested that ensuring the frontline employees to perform a high level of service to customers in order to better satisfy customers. Personality traits of frontline employees of the hotel have a significant impact on the customers' perceived service quality (Chang, 2006). Min et al. (2002) found that the courtesy of employees is an important sector that may influence perceived service quality of a hotel as Berry et al. (1994) stated that one of the basic expectation of a hotel customer is to be treated like a guest. Therefore, providing training for employees in order to enhance their serving behaviours and attitudes will contribute to service quality of a hotel (Garavan, 1997). Vijayadurai (2008) stated that train employees' personnel to ensure they deliver polite and friendly service and provide a standardized, structured and simplified delivery process can better satisfy their customers.

H4: There is a significant relationship between assurance and customer's revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka.

5.6. Empathy

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), empathy is defined as the caring and individualized attention provided by the service provider to their customer. Kandampully (2007) suggested that empathy is the caring personal attention towards customers and the understanding of customer needs and wants.

Dortyol et al. (2014) found that guests of hotels expect hotel staffs to have enough knowledge to solve customers' inquiries and pay individualized attention to them. Kim and Lee (2006) stated that sharing knowledge with each other can be a competitive advantage of a firm which they can enhance the ability to meet various customers' demands thus Mohsin and Lengler (2015) mentioned that educating employees through interactive discussion helps employees to gain more knowledge while Ballantyne (2003) suggests implementing firm's mandate to encourage employees to communicate with each other and share their opinions. Grougiou and Pettigrew (2011) mentioned that service providers should appreciate frontline employees that provide satisfactory service experience for elder customers. Providing more attention to older customers not only can fulfill their different needs and wants but also increase their satisfaction experience.

H5: There is a significant relationship between empathy and customer's revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka.

5.7. Sampling

The sample size of this study targeted 200 respondents including both males and females and they are either local tourists or foreign tourists. The targeted respondents of this study will focus on all guests with experience visited to any boutique hotel in Melaka. Respondents are required to answer a set of questionnaires for data collection purpose. The items in the questionnaire was adopted from Ooi (2009).

5.8. Measurement

The questionnaire of this study is divided into two parts. Demographic information of respondents which is first part of the questionnaire will be measured by using the nominal scale. In this section, respondents are given a list of different category selections and requests to pick the one that they think is suitable. Second part of the questionnaire consists of the measurement items for the variables in the conceptual model framework that were measured by the Likert scale. Likert scale is the most popular measurement approach which it uses scaling options to measure the question in a survey. Respondents are required to rate the questions in a five-level Likert scale option. The five-level Likert scale determines the level of agreeing by giving the score of 1 to 5 which includes strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree and strongly agree respectively.

Next, reliability analysis and multiple regression analysis were performed in order to analyse the data that have been collected. Reliability analysis was used to measure the consistency and stability of a scale. In this study, Cronbach's alpha value was used to measure the reliability statistics. Cronbach's alpha coefficient has a range of value from 0 to 1 and the alpha value above 0.7 is considered at an acceptable level while the value below 0.7 is considered to be questionable.

Table 1 showed the reliability analysis result for the six variables which are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and revisit intention. All the Cronbach's alpha value of the six variables ranged from 0.8 to 0.9. Hence, the result of six variables are considered in the acceptable range. On the other hand, the revisit intention and empathy scored the highest and the smallest Cronbach's Alpha value at 0.933 and 0.817 respectively.

Table 01. Reliability analysis for independent and dependent variables

Variables	Cronbach's alpha
Tangibility	0.869
Reliability	0.857
Responsiveness	0.867
Assurance	0.854
Empathy	0.817
Revisit Intention	0.933

6. Findings

6.1. Respondents profile

There are 107 female respondents and 93 male respondents participated in this study. Among the 200 respondents, Chinese respondents give the greatest response to this survey (82.5%) while Malay and Indian contribute to 10% and 7% response rate respectively. Most of the respondents are Malaysian (95%) while another 5% are foreigner respondents which come from Singapore and Peru.

6.2. Result of hypotheses tests

Multiple regression analysis was carried out in this study in order to study the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. The R^2 – value of the model is 0.519 which can be defined as there is 51.9% of the total variation of revisit intention to a boutique hotel in Melaka can be explained by the five independent variables of this study.

Table 2 summarises the multiple regression analysis result of this study. As shown in Table 2, tangibility, reliability and responsiveness showed significant relationship toward customer's revisit intention due to the p -value of that three independent variables are smaller than the alpha value of 0.05. On the other hand, both assurance and empathy have no significant relationship with the dependent variable as their p-value is 0.799 and 0.122 respectively which are larger than 0.05. This result showed assurance elements and empathy elements do not influence the intention of guests to revisit to Melaka boutique hotel.

Table 02. Multiple regression analysis result

Variables	p - value	Hypothesis result
Tangibility	0.007	Supported
Reliability	0.015	Supported
Responsiveness	0.004	Supported
Assurance	0.799	Not supported
Empathy	0.122	Not supported

$R^2 = 0.519$

$\alpha = 0.05$

The first hypothesis testing is to determine whether tangibles affect customers' revisit intention. Based on result that listed in table 2, it indicated that the significant of tangibility is 0.007 which is smaller than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between tangibility and customers revisit intention. The result of this research is consistent with Tsaur, Chiu, and Huang (2002) and Akbaba (2006). Tsaur et al. (2002) stated that tangibility influence service quality that will affect customer revisit intention. According to Akbaba (2006), tangibility is the most important factors in that study that will affect guests' service quality evaluation which customers revisit intention will impact by their service quality evaluation.

The second hypothesis testing is to determine whether reliability will influence customers' revisit intention. The significant value of reliability variables is 0.015 which is lower than the alpha value of

0.05. This showed that reliability has a significant relationship towards customers' revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka. The result of this research is consistent with previous research that was conducted by Dortyol et al. (2014). Their study has stated that reliability is an important variable that has huge influence towards attractiveness of hotel environment such as indicating hotel area with signs, maintaining high-quality service image so that the satisfied customers will more likely to revisit in the future.

The third hypothesis testing is to determine whether responsiveness will influence customers to revisit intention. The significant value of empathy variables is 0.004 which is smaller than the alpha value of 0.05. So, there is a significant relationship between the empathy and revisit intention. The result is supported by Tsaur et al. (2002) where they have stated that responsiveness is an important aspect that will influence revisit intention in their study.

The fourth hypothesis testing is to determine whether assurance will influence customer's revisit intention. The significant value of empathy variables is 0.799 which is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. So, there is no significant relationship between the empathy and revisit intention. However, this result is inconsistent with the previous study such as Lin (2005) and Akbaba (2006). Both of these two studies have proven that empathy has positively related to revisit intention. The inconsistent result of this study compared to the previous study may be due to as most of the customers who have visited to the boutique hotels in Melaka is seeking for basic accommodation service at a lower price therefore they are less likely putting emphasise on the image of the hotel staffs.

The fifth hypothesis testing is to determine whether empathy will influence customers' revisit intention. The significant value of empathy variables is 0.122 which is greater than the alpha value of 0.05. So, there is no significant relationship between the empathy and revisit intention. However, this result is inconsistent with the previous study such as Lin (2005). Lin (2005) has proven that empathy has is positively related to revisit intention. The focus of this study is the boutique hotels in Melaka and Melaka is a small state. Tourists who have visited to Melaka usually will have a short trip and they will stay in hotel for 1 night only. Therefore, customers who have visited to the boutique hotels do not get to feel the personal care and services that provided by the hotel staffs within a short trip in Melaka.

7.   Conclusion

The objective of this study is to identify factors affecting customer revisit intention to Melaka boutique hotels. Previous studies proved that the five variables in SERVQUAL model which are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance will influence customers' revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka. The multiple regression analysis result showed that tangibility, reliability and responsiveness have significant relationship towards customers' revisit intention to boutique hotels in Melaka. In conclusion, boutique hotels in Melaka should have pay more attention to their service quality in order to better satisfied the needs and wants of the customers and make them more likely to revisit the hotels in the future. By improving service quality, customers will have better service experience and feel like they are being cared which they will more likely to recommend this hotel to their family members and friends

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