

# The relationships between service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty of spa customers

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## Abstract

Post pandemic era, spa has been evolved in a rapid growth with a high demand services in Malaysia. Therefore, the customer of hotel and resort spa have a high expectations of services in this wellness industry. However, due to some deficit in this service quality affect the customer's service expectation. The aim of this paper is to the determine the relationship between spa service quality and customer satisfaction and loyalty among hotel and resort spa customers. A cross-sectional study will be conducted among spa customers in Kelantan. Convenience sampling method will be applied as sampling method and a set of online questionnaires will be used for data collection. From customer perspective, the service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty will be measured. Multiple linear regression analysis will be performed to determine the relationships between variables. The expected findings will be there are significant association between the service quality and customer satisfaction and loyalty among hotel and resort spa customers. This information will be useful to contribute to the body of knowledge on spa services quality. Moreover, it also beneficial for spa managers to redesign the strategies to improve services quality in hotel and resort spa.

## Keywords:

*Hotel And Resort Spa Customer, Services Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty*

## 1 Introduction

In 2020, Asia-Pacific was the major area for wellness spending at \$1.5 trillion. Moreover, Asia-Pacific was also one of the fastest-growing wellness markets from 2017-2019. During pandemic (2019-2020), wellness industry in Asia-Pacific shrank the least. However, spa sector is one of the wellness sectors that were most badly affected by Corona virus disease (COVID-19) outbreak (Global Wellness Institute, 2021). This phenomenon could be due to travel bans, movement control orders and business shutdowns. There were industries had improved business activities by implementing online business, but spa industry faced different situation. In spa industry, online or virtual is a poor alternative for a physical presence and full immersion (Global Wellness Institute, 2021).

In post pandemic era, more customers are expected to be health-conscious and wellness would be one of travellers' priorities. As more customers integrate wellness into lifestyle, there are many chances for all businesses to embed wellness elements in the products or services (Liberato et. al., 2021). Furthermore, an increasing trend of individual's vacation time and income accelerate the expansion of spa industry (Al-alak & El-refae, 2012). In a similar vein, Global Wellness Institute also projected average annual growth rate, 2020-2025 for spa sector was 17.2%, the third highest after wellness tourism and thermal or mineral springs sectors (Global Wellness Institute, 2021).

As the spa industry becomes a high demand emerging niche market, both industry players and researchers should pay special attention on the issues of service quality. According to National Tourism Policy 2020-2030, Malaysia's tourism industry is trapped in a comfort zone and low service quality is one of the issues must be improved to break out of the comfort zone (Ministry of Tourism, Art and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC), 2020). The absence of service culture leads to an actual or perceived weakening service quality. Spa services or products is also one of the important tourism products for wellness tourism sector. Limited number of skilled staff and discomfort ambiance could result in dissatisfaction towards service quality and reduce the customer satisfaction level in spa industry (Suria et. al., 2020).

Good service quality is crucial to meet customer satisfaction. Customers' perspective on spa service quality should be examined to enable spa industry players in redesigning strategies to improve current service quality. Many studies had assessed the customers' service quality, satisfaction, and loyalty. However, little study conducted to investigate the relationship between services quality and customer's satisfaction as well as loyalty among hotel and resort spa customers post pandemic COVID-19. Therefore, this study is designed to determine the relationship between service quality and customer's satisfaction as well as customer loyalty in the spa industry during post pandemic COVID-19.

Main research questions were stated as below:

- 1) Is there any relationship between any five service quality dimensions and spa customer satisfaction?

2) Is there any relationship between any five service quality dimensions and spa customer?

The significance of this proposed study could be both, not only in knowledge generation but also professional application. Finding of this study could contribute to the body of knowledge on relationship between spa service quality and customers satisfaction as well as customer loyalty. Based on useful finding of this study, industry players such spa managers could redesign the strategies to improve spa service quality.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Definition of spa and spa categories**

Global Wellness Institute defines spa as establishments that encourage wellness via the provision of therapeutic and other professional services designed at renewing the body, mind, and spirit. There are variety of services and products offered by spas such as massage, facial and body treatments. Spas can be categorised into day/club/salon spa, destination and health resort spa, hotel/resort spa, thermal/mineral spring spa, medical spa, and others spa (Global Wellness Institute, 2021). Different type of spas provides different type of services. For instance, medical spa offers medical spa treatment. Nevertheless, all type of spas shared a same goal, which is improve customer wellness status. In Malaysia, spa provides both modern and traditional therapies. For traditional therapies, the signature therapy for example *Urutan Malaysia* therapy is offered for customers. For the spa to be rated as high star rating, one of the requirements is the spa should has trained and certified therapist for *Urutan Malaysia*.

### **2.2 Definition of service quality and domains of service quality**

Service quality can be defined as a measure of how well the service level delivered matches the customer's expectation (Lewis & Booms, 1983). In contrast, other scholar suggested that service quality could also be referred to the differences between performance and ideal standards (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Some scholars describe service quality as the gap between technical and functional qualities and as the gap between process and output qualities (Gronroos, 1983; Lehtinen, 1983). Assessments of service quality not only measure the outcome of service, but also measure the process of service (Parasuraman et al., 1988). What the service delivers is assessed after performance is also known as outcome quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985) dan technical quality (Gronroos, 1983).

Service quality has five generic domains, and these five domains were: (1) tangible; (2) reliability; (3) responsiveness; (4) assurance; and (5) empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). For instance, based on customer's perception, if the implementation of quality dimensions meets the customer's need and expectations, this phenomenon could be resulted in positive customer behaviour.

### 2.3 Service quality, customer satisfaction and customers loyalty

Customer satisfaction is broadly defined as a gap between expectations and performance experienced by the customer after using a service and or product at a certain period (Azman, Ilyani Ranlan et al., 2016; Mosahab, Mahamad & Ramayah, 2010). Whereas customer loyalty can be described as the readiness of the customers to repetitively utilizing a product or service that is linked by emotional connection and preferable attitudes toward a product or service.

Previous study conducted in Portugal in a pandemic context (COVID-19), revealed that respondents' socio-demographic profile associated with the utilization of wellness services and the selection of wellness destination influenced the degree of customer satisfaction. It also found that overall satisfaction with wellness destination significantly correlated the loyalty to the wellness destination (Liberato et al., 2021).

A local study conducted among spa customers revealed that there was significant relationship between service quality, namely tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy with customer satisfaction and customer's loyalty (Ismail & Yunan, 2016). A recent local study conducted in 2020, during COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, found that there is a significant association between staff service quality as well as ambiance with spa customer satisfaction (Suria et al., 2020). Spa industry need to resituate itself due to the unexpected outbreak of COVID-19. However, limited number of studies done to investigate the current spa service quality post COVID-19 and its relationship with the customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### 2.4 Research Framework

Proposed research framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 1:

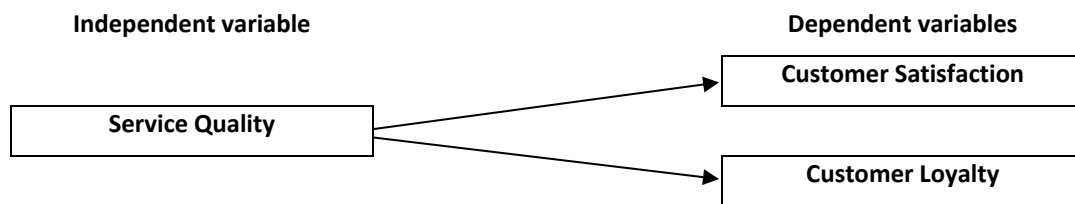


Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework

Based on the proposed framework in Figure 1, the hypotheses of this study were:

H1: There is a positive relationship between service quality (i.e., tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and customer satisfaction.

H2: There is a positive relationship between service quality (i.e., tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) and customer loyalty.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study design and sampling method.**

A cross-sectional study design and convenience sampling method will be used as study design and sampling technique respectively in this study.

#### **3.2 Study instrument**

A set of online questionnaire comprised of four parts; (1) Section A: measure socio-demographic characteristics of respondents; (2) Section B: service quality features, namely tangible had 3 items, reliability had 7 items, responsiveness had 10 items, assurance had 5 items and empathy had 4 items that were adapted from service quality literature; (3) Section C, customer satisfaction had 7 items which were adapted from the quality related customer satisfaction literature and; (4) Section D, customer loyalty also had 7 items that were adapted from service quality related customer loyalty.

#### **3.3 Data analysis**

For pilot study, reliability analysis will be performed to measure the internal consistency of the study instrument. Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 and above is considered good internal consistency. This analysis is important to make sure that study instrument is reliable.

At the beginning of data analysis, data cleaning will be performed. Following that, descriptive analysis will be conducted to describe the sociodemographic characteristics distribution among respondents. For continuous data, such as age, will be presented as mean and standard deviation, whereas, for categorical data, such as gender, the data will be presented as percentage (proportion).

For bivariate analysis, Pearson correlation analysis will be performed and for multivariate analysis, multiple regression analyses will be used to investigate the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality (i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) on spa customer satisfaction and spa customer loyalty. The data will be analysed using SPSS.

### **4 Conclusion**

As a conclusion, this proposed study is urgently needed. The unexpected outbreak of COVID-19 badly affects spa industry in Malaysia. The current service quality of spa in hotel and resort should be measure and the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction and loyalty must be determined. This useful information will be beneficial for spa manager to redesign strategies in improving spa service quality.

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