

The Relationship Between Service Quality and Memorable Tourism Experience at Giant Panda Conservation Centre in Zoo Negara Malaysia

Poh Yee Thoo, Shazali Johari, Mohd Hafizal Ismail, Lai Ling Lee, Muhammad Luqman Hasan

Abstract: Service quality has always been the highlight in service-based sectors especially in the tourism sector where experience is their primary product. However, to be successful in this highly competitive tourism industry, bestowing visitors with great service quality and increase their positive memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) are essential as satisfaction alone is proven to be insufficient. Zoo Negara is the oldest zoo in Malaysia, but it is one of the latest additions to the panda zoo around the world as it has been chosen to house a pair of giant pandas named Fu Wa (Xing Xing) and Feng Yi (Liang Liang) for 10 years. Therefore, this exploratory research examines whether service quality is an antecedent of MTEs for GPCC in Zoo Negara Malaysia. Many studies have been done at GPCC but none have linked service quality with the MTEs in their studies. This study seeks to increase their understanding of their service quality and MTEs, and nevertheless covers the gap between the two dimensions for zoo setting. Quantitative method has been used, and a purposive sampling approach has been employed. The data gathered were analysed using multiple regression analysis. Results indicated that service quality is an antecedent of MTEs where both technical quality and functional quality have positive relationship with MTEs. This has bridged the gap for current literature. Hence, it is necessary for the management of Zoo Negara to enhance their service quality of GPCC so that more people will have positive MTEs that will eventually increase the possibility of a person to revisit it.

Keywords: service quality, memorable tourism experience, Zoo Negara Malaysia, technical quality, functional quality

I. INTRODUCTION

Service quality in the field of tourism is defined as an overall assessment of a destination on the quality of opportunities available there, and it is also considered mostly to be related to a visitor's quality of experience. Service quality has proven will lead to visitors' satisfaction and resulting in visitors' loyalty (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin & Zeithaml, 1993; Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014). However, some researchers have found that there are more than 55% of consumers identified themselves as satisfied but switched to another company (Keiningham & Vavra 2001; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Reicheld, 1993).

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According to Kim (2014), visitors' experiences are very crucial as it is a more potent driver of future behaviour such as destination loyalty because these experiences form the visitors' satisfaction and memorable experiences. In recent years, researchers have highlighted memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) as being absolutely essential for destinations to provide to their visitors in order to achieve success in this highly competitive tourism world (Kim, 2014; Kim, Hallab & Kim, 2012). Service quality has been proven to be one of the antecedents of MTEs in several studies (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015; Kim, 2014).

The emergence of service marketing has significantly contributed to the visitors' satisfaction through the delivery of service quality (Lee, 2013; Gummesson & Grönroos, 2012). In most literature, service quality has been found to be a competitive tool for many tourism destinations. The service quality's concept has led to the subject of marketing and service management for businesses' sustainable competitive advantage with visitors' retention (Ganesh & Haslinda, 2014). In the tourism sector, the growth and survival of business highly dependent on visitors and visitors is the people who create the value from the consumption of the services or products. Visitors are the main focus of any successful tourism business as the need to attract and retain visitors is definitely important to face the concept of quality, productivity, efficiency, growth and survival challenge in this field. In addition, quality of service plays a major role on MTEs and revisit intention (Chi & Qu, 2008; Oliver, 1980; Rahman, Khan & Haque, 2012).

The study of linking between service quality and memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) is still considerably new in this tourism industry context (Sipe & Testa, 2017). Kim (2014) had studied on the antecedents of MTEs where the results showed that the quality of service is one of the important destination attributes that are most probably to facilitate a visitor's MTEs. Rajaratnam, Munikrishnan, Sharif and Nair (2014) mentioned that visitors with previous experience would have different perceptions of the destinations' service quality. Sipe and Testa (2017) found that in the perspective of visitors, the difference or contrast between service quality and memorable experience are clear and precise where memorable experience goes beyond technical and functional quality in their minds. Their findings showed that service quality passes beyond just satisfying needs efficiently, and pointed out the great significance of both scholars and practitioners should give attention to both service and experience constructs that form the visitor's MTEs.

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The review of previous research findings regarding the relationship between these two constructs remains scarcity. Therefore, more research related to this relationship should be established in order to better understand it and how it can help destinations' managers in this fast evolving hospitality and tourism industry. Although zoos have always been an important tourist destination, they are remarkably under-researched (Cohen & Fennell, 2016; Mason, 2000; Reade & Waran, 1996). Tomas, Scott and Crompton (2002) investigated the relationships between quality of service performance, benefits sought, satisfaction and future intention to visit among visitors to a zoo where their findings confirmed that there is a strong relationship between overall quality of service performance and visitor satisfaction. However, they suggested that managements' evaluations should concentrate on the service quality performance rather than visitors' satisfaction level. In Malaysia, Zoo Negara is the oldest zoo, but it is one of the latest additions to the panda zoo around the world as it has been chosen to house the giant pandas named Fu Wa (Xing Xing) and Feng Yi (Liang Liang) for 10 years. A Giant Panda Conservation Centre (GPCC) was built in Zoo Negara to cater the two giant pandas. Recently, there are several studies have been done specifically at GPCC in Zoo Negara which include effects of preference and nutritional values of local bamboo towards growth performance of captive giant pandas (Ishak et al., 2016), visitors' attitudes (Ashaari & Johari, 2016) and awareness of domestic visitors (Nurul Afifah & Siow, 2016) towards Giant Panda Conservation Programme, visitors' satisfaction towards facilities (Thoo & Johari, 2016), performance of services and facilities (Nuraisah & Siow, 2016), motivation to visit (Fatin & Ramachandran, 2016), wildlife value orientations (Wan Ainnur & Kunasekaran), types of MTEs (Chan & Kunasekaran, 2016) and visitors' evaluation of service quality (Yee, Ramachandran, Shuib, Johari & Afandi, 2018). Despite that, none of the studies has linked service quality with the MTEs in their studies. Therefore, this study is to help GPCC in Zoo Negara to increase their understanding of their service quality and MTEs, and at the

same time covers the gap between the two dimensions for zoo setting.

II. METHOD & MATERIALS

Study Area

Zoo Negara is the national zoo of Malaysia. It is only 5 kilometres away from the centre of Kuala Lumpur. It is located in Ulu Klang, near Taman Melawati, in north-east Kuala Lumpur on an 110 acres (45 ha) of land. This zoo was officially opened by our first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, on 14 November 1963. It is managed by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) called Malaysian Zoological society. It is established to start the first local zoo for Malaysians. According to Zoo Negara official website, they have a total of over 5137 specimen from 476 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish. The zoo has been transforming over the years to an open concept zoo where the animals will be kept in spacious enclosures that have natural landscape. The zoo has five stands which they are emphasising. There are the education, conservation, research, recreation and training.

Giant Panda Conservation Centre (GPCC) is located inside Zoo Negara. For the meantime, GPCC is the main attraction at the Zoo Negara as it is a new product. It was opened to the public on 27th June 2014. The entrance of GPCC is near to the Savannah Walk and took about 15 minutes' walk from the main entrance of Zoo Negara. This study was conducted here at GPCC's resting area located at the last part of the centre.

Study Framework

In order to categorise and examine the relationship between service quality and memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), a conceptual framework was developed. A number of studies have proven there are a positive relationship between the quality of service and MTEs (Kim, 2014; Rajaratnam, Munikrishnan, Sharif & Nair, 2014; Sipe & Testa, 2017).

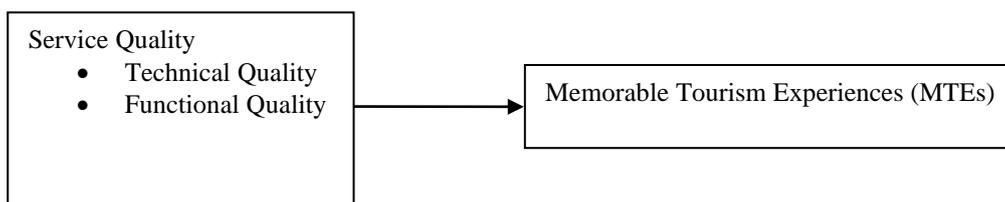


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of this study

The left section of the model illustrates the independent variable by Service Quality. The Service Quality is adapted from Grönroos (1984). A total of 18 items were used to measure both dimensions where technical quality contained 5 items and functional quality contained 13 items. The right section of the model illustrates the dependent variable by Memorable Tourism Experience (MTEs) adapted from Kim et al. (2012) model. A total of 7 dimensions with 24 items were used to measure MTEs. The 7 dimensions are Hedonism, Novelty, Local Culture, Refreshment, Meaningfulness, Involvement and Knowledge.

Sampling and Analysis

This study used purposive sampling for the data collection. The samples were chosen by focusing on a few criteria such as visitor with aged 18 and above, head of a group, had visited GPCC, and a mixture of international and local visitors. This study was carried out during the Malaysia's school holidays in December 2016 in order to capture a wider range of visitors from different socio-demographic backgrounds.

A pilot survey was conducted with 40 samples. The objectives of pilot survey were to determine the content and forms are valid, and easily to understand by the respondents. Cronbach's Alpha is applied to examine the internal consistency of concept (Jacob & Schreyer, 1980). According to Nunally (1978), if the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for

the scale is 0.7 or more, the elements used are reliable and adequate for basic research. Table 1 shows the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for the dimensions of Service Quality and Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) which obtained more than 0.7 and considered as acceptable and reliable.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

	Number of variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Cronbach's Alpha for Technical Quality	5	0.929
Cronbach's Alpha for Functional Quality	13	0.972
Cronbach's Alpha for Memorable Tourism Experiences	24	0.986

The questionnaire was constructed based on the conceptual framework with dual languages, English and Malay. For the measurement of the dimensions of Service Quality and MTEs, Likert scale ranged 1 to 5 was used where 1 represented Strongly Disagree, 2 represented Disagree, 3 represented Neutral, 4 represented Agree, and 5 represented Strongly Agree.

The data were analysed using the SPSS IBM version Statistics 23. The types of analysis conducted were descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis. Descriptive analysis is typically used to provide basic detailed features such as summaries of the collected data in a study (Trochim & Donnelly, 2006). In this study, this analysis is used to find the percentage and mean for demographic characteristics and visiting patterns. Multiple regression analysis is one of the most broadly used statistical methods (Grigoroudis and Siskos, 2010). It is a statistical analytical tool used to estimate the causal relationships between variables. The regression model used was

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_s X_m + u,$$

where

Y = dependent variable (overall satisfaction index)

Xm = independent variables

α = constant

βs = coefficients

u = error term

The dependent variable (criterion variable) used in this study's model was the MTEs index which was re-calculated using the 24 items. On the other hand, the independent variable (predictor) was service quality's technical quality and functional quality. The confidence interval used in this analysis was 95% confidence interval with t-value of 1.96,

which means any value falls between P-value < 0.05 and t-value > 1.96 were accepted as significant (Jones, 2015).

III. RESULTS

In table 4, the R2 obtained from this model was 0.575 which indicates that the independent variables in the model account for approximately 58% of the variation in the level of memorable tourism experience (MTE). This shows that there are still about 42% unexplained amounts of variation which may be caused by other factors At the 5% level, the critical F-value equals 3.89 (F1,212). Since the F-value obtained was 144.762 which were greater than the critical F-value, it means that at least one of the 2 parameters was different from zero, and the F-test for this model is significant. The proportion of the variation which is unexplained is lower than the proportion of the variation which is explained. It is highly significant at 0.01 level as the p-value for this model was 0.000.

The results suggested that both the independent variables have slope coefficients that were statistically significant (based on the t-values and p-values). Therefore, the final model of the study using the General Linear Model,

$$\text{Memorable Tourism Experiences} = 1.124 + 0.163 \text{ Technical Quality} + 0.546 \text{ Functional Quality}$$

The factors that affect visitors' overall MTEs level towards GPCC were both technical quality and functional quality. As far as the relative impacts of the two dimensions is concerned, functional quality (t = 8.453, p = 0.000) carries the strongest predictors, followed by technical quality (t = 2.735, p = 0.007). If t-value of the variable is higher, then the significance relative to the other variable will be greater.

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Table 2: The Multiple Regression Analysis results of Relationship between Service Quality and Memorable Tourism Experience

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		t -value	p-value
	B	Std. Error		
(Constant)	1.124	0.158	7.135	0.000
Technical Quality	0.163	0.060	2.735	0.007
Functional Quality	0.546	0.065	8.453	0.000

Note: Significant at t-value > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 (5% level)
 F= 144.762, Sig.=0.000, R² = 0.575 and Adjusted R² = 0.571

IV. DISCUSSIONS

From the results, Service Quality is proven to be positively associated with memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), which in this case the visitors' positive MTEs towards Giant Panda Conservation Centre (GPCC). The two factors, technical quality and functional quality, were statistically significant towards MTEs. These two factors account about 58% of the total factors that can influence the MTEs which shows that they are essential factors when developing visitors' positive MTEs. Therefore, both the factors are of great importance even though many arguments mention only service-delivery process which is the functional quality is sufficient to measure service quality alone (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985, 1988)

In this case, functional quality (t = 8.453, p = 0.000) carries the stronger predictors, which means that this factor among the two factors is the more impactful factor that influences a visitor's positive MTEs for GPCC. Functional quality refers to how the visitors experience the human interactions from the service providers' side to the visitors during the period of production and consumption of the service, where high level of functional quality relates to the satisfaction that a visitor feels towards the experience of receiving the service through the service providers (Arora & Stoner, 1996). Therefore, it suggests that staffs of GPCC are in charge of the functional quality and they have to provide a high level of functional quality in order to increase the visitors' positive MTEs towards GPCC. The management of GPCC definitely needs to invest the most in functional quality since personal contact is the most fundamental and substantial factor of all (Keyser & Lariviere, 2014). On the other hand, technical quality (t = 2.735, p = 0.000) is another strong predictor that is also an important factor that influence a visitor's positive MTEs for GPCC. Technical quality is technically being what the visitor received after the service delivery or the technical outcome of the production process. Hence, it shows that technical quality is an essential factor for wildlife tourism destination setting like GPCC as not all types of setting is suitable for measuring technical quality such as health care service providers (Kang & James, 2004). For the management of GPCC, this result indicated that they have to monitor the outcome of their service which covers the service carried out by their staffs and also the service they provide through the use of equipment, facilities and materials. They have to make sure that all the service that they are providing will give good and appealing impressions to the visitors since it will influence the visitors' positive MTEs towards GPCC.

Apart from that, the result also confirmed the relationship between service quality and MTE where previous researches regarding these two constructs are still lacking. This result also verified Sipe and Testa (2017) findings where memorable experience goes beyond service quality in their minds and they found that service quality goes beyond just satisfying needs efficiently, and pointed out the great significance that both scholars and practitioners should give attention to both service and experience constructs that form the visitor's MTE. The results also show that service quality significantly predicts memorable tourism experience. This finding supported a previous study by Kim (2014) that quality of service is one of the important destination attributes that are most probable to facilitate a visitor's memorable tourism experience.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, delivering excellent service quality definitely will increase a visitor's positive memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) as shown in this study where the two dimensions of service quality, technical quality and functional quality, are proven to be predictors of MTEs. This study successfully indicates that there is a significant relationship between them where the higher the service quality provided by a destination provider, the higher the visitors' positive MTEs of a destination. This study tested and validated the two Grönroos' service quality dimensions, technical quality and functional quality, with overall positive MTEs at Giant Panda Conservation Centre (GPCC) in Zoo Negara. The results also pointed out that the effect of functional quality on MTEs was larger than the effect on technical quality. Therefore, the results of this study can be valuable for various wildlife destinations' managers especially in a captive breeding setting. For the management of GPCC, the results indicated that by developing and investing on both dimensions of service quality especially functional quality, they could directly increase visitors' positive MTEs. For example, GPCC's management should invest in providing training for their staffs to increase their ability on interpretative and communication skills with the visitors so that they can handle the visitors in an efficient manner. Furthermore, they can implement more interaction sessions while the visitors are in GPCC so that they create confidence within the visitors.

This will help to increase the functional quality of GPCC. For technical quality, the GPCC's management should improve their quality of outcome especially on their services provided through their facilities. They have to maintain the quality of their facilities at the highest level and update the facilities when it is necessary so that they can have an error-free and excellent quality that will definitely increase the visitors' positive MTEs.

Providing a good service outcome (technical quality) in an outstanding way (functional quality) are fundamental elements that a service provider should practice in order for the visitors to obtain great memorable experiences which can contribute as a competitive advantage for the company as MTEs is currently being highlighted as one of the important factors that can lead to visitors' loyalty. Overall, the study has contributed to extending knowledge regarding the relationship between service quality and MTEs in the wildlife tourism especially on the zoo setting. It also provides room for further research since there are still other influential factors were not included in this model such as destination image, satisfaction and loyalty.

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