INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF SERVQUAL DIMENSIONS ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG TOURISTS WHO VISITED RESORT HOTELS IN PERAK, MALAYSIA

BY

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A final year project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

BACHELOR OF MARKETING (HONS)

UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND FINANCE

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING

SEPTEMBER 2024

APPENDIX I

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Degree Awarded : Bachelor of Marketing (Honours)

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ABSTRACT

This research applies the SERVQUAL dimensions including tangible, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy to examinate their effect on customer satisfaction towards resort hotels located in Perak, Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to close the gap on the lack of research regarding Perak resort hotels by providing better insight into factors affecting customer satisfaction. The findings are expected to contribute to understanding what customers expect. This is quantitative research consisting of 390 participants who visited and stayed at Perak resort hotels before. The judgemental technique is employed to find suitable respondents. The questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and contains four sections. The data that has been collected is analysed utilising the SPSS software. The results show that each dimension (tangible, assurance, reliability, responsiveness and empathy) has a significant impact on customer satisfaction. Furthermore, empathy was the most important predictor of customer satisfaction compared to other dimensions.

Keywords: Tangible, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Customer Satisfaction, Resort, Perak

HF5410-5417.5 Marketing. Distribution of products

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IV	Independent Variable
DV	Dependent Variable
EM	Empathy
TG	Tangible
RL	Reliability
RS	Responsiveness
AS	Assurance
CS	Customer Satisfaction
SERVQUAL	Service Quality Model

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.1 Research Background

Tourism is defined as the activity of individuals travelling to places away from home to pursue leisure, pleasure, and relaxation while using the services provided by businesses (Walton, 2024). It plays a crucial role in Malaysia's economy. Malaysia is a country blessed with a wealth of natural wonders, historical sites, and diverse cultural backgrounds (Sangaran, 2021). Because of this, Malaysia has attracted tourists worldwide. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia's 2022 report (2023), the number of foreign tourist arrivals to Malaysia increased to over 10 million, a remarkable leap from the number of 134,728 recorded in 2021. This momentum continued to escalate, reaching an astounding 27.3 million arrivals by 2024 (Malaymail, 2024).

The tourism industry has contributed significantly to Malaysia's economy. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia's data (2023), the tourism industry contributed 14.0 per cent to Malaysia's GDP in 2022. Further examination of Malaysia's tourism report (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023), reveals that the state of Perak has emerged as a noteworthy destination, attracting an impressive 6.9 million domestic tourists and securing a position among Malaysia's top two destinations in 2022, and stated few notable destinations that favour by tourist include Lost World of Tambun, Pulau Pangkor and Bukit Merah Laketown Resort.

Hotels are considered an essential component of the tourism sector (Prabhu et al., 2020 as cited in Ali et al., 2021). There were 330 Hotels, and 16,451 rooms in Perak accordance to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023). The rising rate of tourism indicates travellers' increased need for accommodation services. This is proved by the increasing hotel occupancy rate in Perak, Malaysia. In 2022, the year-on-year (YOY) occupancy rates exceeded 20% across various types of hotels and accommodations, with the highest growth rate up to 39.2% for 5-star hotels in Perak (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023).

Researchers raised that one of the sections with the quickest growth rates recently is resort hotels (Nneoma & Uwabor, 2021). Furthermore, Researchers believe that resort hotels have attracted a large number of tourists domestically and around the world to escape from daily

routines and seek enjoyment (Ali, 2015; Yang & Chan, 2010; Walker, 2006; as cited in Nneoma & Uwabor, 2021). There are various types of resort hotels including golf resorts, beach resorts, lake resorts, island resorts, spa resorts and mountain resorts (Zoeller & Alcocer, 2023). Each resort offers different types of relaxation services to cater to different individuals, for instance, golf resorts cater to people who love golfing, while beach, lake and Island resorts cater to individuals who want close access to water-based activities (Zoeller & Alcocer, 2023). A Resort hotel is defined as a high-end accommodation designed primarily for vacationers and is usually situated close to a special destination such as beaches, spas, seashores, scenic areas and so forth (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Resorts tend to have more amenities, facilities and activities compared to normal hotels (Elphick, 2024). Furthermore, based on the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023) classification, resort hotels are hotels that are rated 3 stars and above by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC). Furthermore, according to MOTAC guidelines (MOTAC, 2021), an accommodation should be categorized as a resort hotel when the accommodation is located near a lake, river, beach or a remote island. Based on the above information, there were approximately eight resort hotels in Perak based on the MOTAC official portal, namely Pangkor Laut Resort, The Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat, The Haven Resort Hotel, Bukit Merah Lake Town Resort and so forth (MOTAC, n.d.). This research covers various types of resorts as long as they are located in Perak, Malaysia.

A large selection of services are provided by hotels, and because of the diverse nature of their offerings, the emphasis on service quality is crucial in maintaining customer satisfaction. Providing top-notch services that surpass client expectations as well as continuously improving service quality are some traits of a successful organisation (Jasinskas, et al., 2016). This emphasis on service excellence holds particular significance for resort hotels, which offer a wider range of services and facilities compared to other types of hotels. In today's saturated market, where consumers have an abundance of hotel options, the key to industry sustainability lies in customer retention rather than mere attraction (Jasinskas et al., 2016). To remain competitive, the factors affecting satisfaction should be determined and focused on by management (Mohamad et al., 2016 as cited in Priyo et al., 2019). Factors such as service quality become crucial considerations when consumers select a hotel, fulfilling these factors helps in attracting and retaining customers (Jasinskas et al., 2016). The SERVQUAL model is a framework designed to gauge consumers' perception regarding the quality of the service by comparing the actual received quality with their expectations (Parasurama et al., 1985). The model has been applied in different fields to measure service quality such as the bank industry

(Nguyen, et al., 2018 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022), the hospitality industry, the tourism industry, (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2019; Park & Jeong, 2019 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022), etc.

When the perceived quality of the service surpasses the expectations of the customers, they are satisfied (Akunja, 2020). Every business, particularly in the service industries, attracts potential new customers and retains existing customers depending on customer satisfaction (Brady et al. 2005 as cited in Priyo et al. 2019). How effectively a hotel fulfils the client's expectations determines its service quality, and practically all hotels are able to increase customer satisfaction through offering service with high quality (Top & Ali, 2021). Delivering proper and good service to customers fosters their positive experience and the possibility of return while failing to do so might impact the customer experience and they will not come back in the future (Sultan et al. 2020). Therefore, ensuring customer satisfaction before leaving the accommodation is crucial.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the tourism sector, resort hotels play an essential role by offering diverse services tailored to fulfil every customer's needs. Beyond fulfilling mere tourist accommodation needs, also extend the offerings to include an array of facilities such as playgrounds, tennis courts, saunas, restaurants, and swimming pools, ensuring that every guest, whether utilising the accommodation services or not, also benefits from a comprehensive range of services provided (Ali et al., 2021). In an ideal scenario, the fundamental disconnection between manager and customer perceptions of service quality is absent, managers know exactly what customers demand, with customers seeking positive interactions with well-trained staff and access to new, distinctive, and well-designed facilities were all been predicted and thoughtfully provided by attentive managers (Lu et al., 2015). Ultimately, guest satisfaction serves as the cornerstone for repeat visits and referrals, driving increased revenue for the hotels (Ali et al., 2021). In this win-win situation, customers enjoy a memorable tourism journey, while hotels gain revenue and reputations.

Regrettably, meeting customers' needs, expectations, and requirements proves to be a challenge in service-oriented industries. Consumers encounter service quality issues regularly across various services, whether it's during public transportation where overcrowding causes

discomfort, or feel offended by the salesperson's behaviour in a shopping mall (Ali et al., 2021). Similarly, in a café or restaurant, a consumer might dislike the way the waiter serves them (Ali et al., 2021). The characteristics of service pose challenges in delivering consistent high-quality service to customers. The combination of active customer participation during the delivery of the service process, as well as the service's intangible nature creates a barrier to delivering consistent high-quality service (Bordoloi, 2023). Service delivery often varies among customers due to the customers' needs being different (Bordoloi, 2023). The different preferences of customers make it challenging for managers to predict and deliver high service quality to customers, some customers might like the service delivered, but not all customers have the same perception (Islam et al., 2020). Moreover, the service delivery is also different depending on the employee's attitude and behaviour (Bordoloi, 2023). Notably, hotel staff are crucial since they will be the ones who provide customer services (Ali et al., 2021). Failure to meet the service quality standard by hotel staff can significantly affect the customers' experience, potentially leading to a loss of future business (Sultan et al., 2020). In order to offer high-quality services, understanding what consumers expect is crucial for management.

However, existing studies conducted in Malaysia to understand customer expectations regarding service quality have dynamic results. It is difficult to gain insight from these research findings. For instance, the empathy dimension has no impact on customer satisfaction towards hotels located in Kuala Lumpur (Li, 2020). Furthermore, Yap (2019) found that reliability and responsiveness have insignificant influence on customer satisfaction towards hotels in Johor Bahru. Next, Yeong et al. (2022) conducted research and found that assurance and responsiveness do not have a significant impact on customer satisfaction towards Malaysia's Resort hotels. Conversely, research by Jabar, Dangi and Muhamed (2018), shows that all SERVQUAL components (Assurance, Reliability, Empathy, Tangible and Responsiveness) hold a significant influence on customer satisfaction in Malaysia homestay.

In order for the result to be more applicable and specific, this research focused on Perak resort hotels. Most of the previous research was focused on other states instead, such as studying the impact of the SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction towards hotels in Johor Bahru (Yap, 2019), SERVQUAL effect satisfaction towards Melaka hotels (Goh et al., 2012), SERVQUAL affect satisfaction towards hotels and resort hotels in Melaka (Husein et al., 2010), Kuala Lumpur (Islam et al., 2020), etc. There was found to be a lack of research regarding Perak resort hotels. Therefore, in order to better understand what customers need, this study

was carried out to gain a better insight into the effect of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction among tourists, specifically those who visited Resort Hotels in Perak, Malaysia.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following includes the research's general and specific objectives:

1.3.1 General Objective

This research aims to examine the relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction among tourists who visit Resort Hotels in Perak, Malaysia.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives include:

- To investigate the significant influence of tangible on customer satisfaction.
- To investigate the significant influence of reliability on customer satisfaction.
- To investigate the significant influence of responsiveness on customer satisfaction.
- To investigate the significant influence of assurance on customer satisfaction.
- To investigate the significant influence of empathy on customer satisfaction.

1.4 Research Questions

The following includes the research's general and specific questions:

1.4.1 General Research Question

- How do SERVQUAL dimensions affect tourists' satisfaction towards the Resort Hotel in Perak, Malaysia?

1.4.2 Specific Research Questions

- How does the tangible dimension affect customer satisfaction?
- How does the reliability dimension affect customer satisfaction?
- How does the responsiveness dimension affect customer satisfaction?
- How does the assurance dimension affect customer satisfaction?
- How does the empathy dimension affect customer satisfaction?

1.5   Significance of the study

1.5.1 To Practitioner

The results of this research may provide valuable insights for the Perak Resort hotel management and staff, serve as a clearer picture of what customers truly need, and contribute to a deeper understanding of how to enhance the quality of service to meet customer expectations. Thus, hotel management can implement more effective strategies to attract and satisfy customers so they will revisit the hotel in future.

Next, the insights gleaned from this study extend beyond the hospitality sector to benefit local government bodies and tourism authorities in Perak with a deeper understanding of the customer's perception of service quality. They can use the result of this study as input to develop policies and strategies to improve the overall tourism experience in Perak, which in turn can attract more visitors to Perak.

Other than that, from the consumer's point of view, this study serves as a platform for consumers to voice their feedback and suggestions to resort hotels in Perak. Providing input to the resort hotel management team so they could work on the factors that affect

customer satisfaction and their willingness to visit and stay again in the resort hotel. Eventually, this leads to a mutual benefit for the resort hotel management team and customers.

1.5.2 To Academics

Moreover, due to the complexity of relationships between SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry as mentioned above, this study contributes to advancing the theoretical understanding of SERVQUAL dimensions affecting customer satisfaction, specifically in the hospitality industry. Academics in fields such as hospitality, tourism, marketing, consumer behaviour, etc. will benefit from the insights provided by this research. This study not only benefits resort hotels in Perak, Malaysia, but it extends further for academics to refine their existing theories and frameworks to explore related topics, and other mediator or moderator relationships.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Underlying Theory: SERVQUAL model

SERVQUAL model was designed to measure the quality of service, Parasurama, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) are the researchers who proposed it. The model attempts to assess the customers' perception of the quality of service received; this perception might change according to the gap between the customer's expectations and their actual received value, which is ultimately affected by the various factors that are controlled by the service provider, including customer expectation – management perception of customer expectation gap where management holds inaccurate perceptions regarding the customer's actual expectations on what they really want to receive from the service provider, design gap, where management is unable to translate customer expectations into service quality design, delivery gap, occur when service performance does not meet the service quality design, message convey gap refers to the marketing strategy accurately convey the service quality to form realistic customer expectation (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Overall, what fulfils and exceeds a consumer's expectation of service quality is known as high service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Additionally, the model was formed by 10 dimensions that customers might consider when forming expectations and perceptions of service quality, including reliability, competence, access, credibility, security, courtesy, communication, understanding, tangible, and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1985). However, it was then refined into five dimensions only including reliability, tangible, empathy, assurance, and responsiveness (Parasuraman et al., 1988) due to some dimensions overlapped, where assurance and empathy include the dimensions of security, competence, communication, credibility, access, courtesy and understanding (Albarq, 2013). The model's main five dimensions included 44 questions to address the distinct between perceived and expected service quality, the first 22 questions measure the customer expectations and the remaining questions measure the quality of service perceived by the customers (Mauri et al., 2013 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022).

The SERVQUAL model has been employed to assess the quality of service across different sectors that provide services, such as healthcare industry (Lam, 1997; Kilbourne et al., 2004 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022), fast food industry (Nguyen, et al., 2018 as cited in Yeong et al.,

2022), bank industry (Lam, 2002 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022) and hospitality and tourism industry (Bagur-Femenias et al., 2019; Park & Jeong, 2019 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022). However, criticisms are mentioned that the SERVPERF model (Cronin & Taylor, 1994) measuring performance only is superior to the SERVQUAL model. The model is more efficient than the SERVQUAL model as it reduces the items from 44 to 22, emphasising that the measure of service quality is solely based on customer-perceived quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1994). SERVPERF assumes that addressing customer expectations does not add value to assessing service quality, while perceived quality better reflects the service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1994 as cited in Yeong et al., 2022). Nevertheless, debates on SERVPERF provide insufficient insight into why customers have specific perceptions regarding service quality, while SERVQUAL provides a more comprehensive insight (Yeong et al., 2022). Therefore, this study implements the SERVQUAL theory to assess the quality of service perceived by customers in the Resort Hotels located in Perak.

2.2 Review of Variables

2.2.1 Tangible

Physical proof of the service provided, such as the facility design and layout, the staff's demeanour and the service instrument, is referred to as tangible (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Facilities include work equipment and any type of facilities that are necessary to carry out work and benefit people who interact with the company such as customers (Bungatang & Reynel, 2021). The operational hour of the hotel is also a crucial factor as they influence the physical accessibility for customers (Priyo et al.,2019). Tangibles refer to what customers are able to see, touch, feel and hear, such as facilities, employees' appearance, and equipment, these factors affect the company's overall tangible quality (Deshmukh, 2022). It also refers to the cleanliness of areas, as well as the proper appearance of staff uniforms (Abdulla et al., 2017). Tangible represents the most crucial component for the customer compared to the other four dimensions, as they ease customers, especially new customers to judge the service in a more tangible way (Ali et al., 2021). Put simply, the tangible dimension focuses on creating a first impression, it should be prioritised by companies as it increases the likelihood of customers returning in the future by creating a unique and long-lasting impression and

memory in customers' minds (Delgado and Ballester, 2004 as cited in Gunarathne, 2014). In this study, tangible is measuring the appearance of employees, equipment, and physical facilities at the resort hotel, as well as the operation hours of resort hotels.

2.2.2 Reliability

The service provider's capability to precisely and consistently perform the service as promised is referred to as reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1985). It encompasses the meaningfulness of these promises to customers and the service provider's ability to uphold them (Ali et al., 2021). The providers of service are required to fulfil their promises by delivering the right service the first time when interacting with customers, including completing tasks accurately and delivering the service within the specified timeframe (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Much like a good image for a service supplier, reliability is a significant importance element, as every customer seeks a reliable supplier which able to satisfy their needs dependably (Delgado and Ballester, 2004 as cited in Gunarathne, 2014). Customers often hold a certain expectation on the reliability aspect when purchasing a product from a company, and the ability of the company to meet those expectations helps to satisfy customers (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). In this research, reliability accesses the capability of a resort and its employees to show a genuine interest in solving problems, to consistently provide appropriate service correctly the first time, and to always deliver the promised service on time.

2.2.3 Responsiveness

Responsiveness represents the timeliness or willingness of staff to perform the service, including solving customers' problems immediately, contacting customers promptly, and providing any type of service in a prompt manner (Parasuraman et al., 1985). This dimension is highly appreciated by customers as they feel that they are valued by the company (Delgado and Ballester, 2004 as cited in Gunarathne, 2014). According to Ali et al. (2021), a service provider should ensure that they are able to deliver the service on time, as it is a fundamental service quality judgement of major customers. Other than that, serving the customer promptly is crucial, as unsolved requests might turn into

complaints (Ali et al., 2021), and complaints that refer to negative word-of-mouth might damage the organisation's reputation. Responsiveness is measured by the time customers wait for their enquiries to respond to them (Ali et al., 2021). In a hotel service context, front-line staff including reception, waitresses, and so forth should be well-trained to respond promptly towards customer needs (Ali et al., 2021). A company with high-quality service always tries to promptly respond to customers during the communication process to ensure customers are satisfied (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). In this finding, responsiveness accesses how well communications are made on the timeliness of services, availability and the capability of the resort hotel staff to help the customers promptly fulfil whatever they asked for.

2.2.4 Assurance

The staff's expertise, manners and capability to instil confidence and trust in customers are referred to as assurance (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Stated differently, assurance refers to the customer's belief and confidence in a business, employees are the key to building trust to retain customers (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). A hotel should prove to customers that their service is worth the money that customers pay and is trustworthy (Ali et al., 2021). Customers should feel secure when consuming various types of services provided by the hotel including their stay (Anwar & Louis, 2017). It is especially important when consumers are consuming some services that are potentially highly hazardous and the outcomes are uncertain (Ali et al., 2021). A client has a high chance of leaving and not returning to the business if they feel uncomfortable with the service provided by the supplier (Delgado and Ballester, 2004 as cited in Gunarathne, 2014). The assurance includes the dimensions of competence, credibility, security, and courtesy (Albarq, 2013). In this study, assurance refers to the resort hotel employees' behaviour, attitude, skill and intelligence to deliver the service and instil confidence in the customers to enhance trust.

2.2.5 Empathy

Empathy refers to attention and care given to the customers by the provider of service (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Individualised attention and care provided enhance the customer's service experience (Deshmukh, 2022). According to Priyo et al. (2019), empathy includes knowing customers' needs, paying attention to customers and so forth. Additionally, empathy is developed through effective communication, including providing information to customers in a clear and comprehensive way, actively listening to the customer's expressions and trying their best to understand the customers, particularly important for returning customers, VIPs, loyal customers by predicting their needs before they expressed or recognising them by name (Clara et al., 2022). Empathy includes the dimension of access, communication, and understanding (Albarq, 2013). Customers tend to be loyal to a company when they believe the company truly cares about them (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022). In this study, empathy accesses the care and concern the resort hotels and their employees have for customers, such as giving personal attention, considering customers' best interests, understanding the customer's specific needs, and promptly apologising for service errors.

2.2.6 Customer Satisfaction

In this fast as well as dynamic environment, customer satisfaction has become a crucial factor. A lot of researchers in different fields such as economics, marketing, management studies, etc, have been focusing on this factor (Priyo et al.,2019). In other words, it refers to disappointment or liking feeling from a person after comparing the perceived service performance to their expectations (Surahman et al. 2020). The customer will be disappointed and dissatisfied when the perceived service is below their expectations (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003; Mohamad et al., 2017; Surahman et al. 2020). Satisfaction is a favourable and impactful condition arising from the evaluation of every interaction with another party (Boselie et al., 2002 as cited in Priyo et al., 2019). Customer satisfaction is connected with the quality of service, product, pricing, and timeliness of service delivery (Priyo et al., 2019). A service provider can gain many benefits from satisfied customers, including engaging in positive and favourable behaviour such as spreading positive word-of-mouth (WOM), paying high prices and

having high loyalty to a business (Amin et al., 2013). Customers will more likely recommend the company to a friend, repeat purchases, and be loyal if they are satisfied (Franklin, 2024). This highlights that customer satisfaction is crucial in retaining the customer and forming more positive behaviour from customers (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). All efforts made by the company to enhance service quality become irrelevant when a client leaves the hotel without feeling satisfied because a dissatisfied client is unlikely to return or repeat the purchase of the service provided (Ali et al., 2021).

From a hospitality perspective, customers will be involved in the consumption process and hold a certain level of expectation on service quality (Ali et al., 2021). In today's hospitality sector, customers have less time available, higher expectations and are more selective (Anwar, 2017 as cited in Ali et al., 2021). Therefore, in the hotel sector, meeting client expectations can be very challenging (Ali et al., 2021). Customer satisfaction can be gained through the staff attitude, hotel environment, room service, cuisine tastes and so forth (Priyo et al., 2019). Hotels should focus on client satisfaction as it serves as the direction, inspiration and driving force for the hotels to pursue innovation and competitiveness as well as survive in the hotel sector (Padma, et al., 2010). Other than that, customer satisfaction can help a business expand its market share, increase profitability by gaining loyal customers, and spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Khor et al., 2018). In this study, customer satisfaction is measured according to the customer feeling of satisfaction toward the resort hotels as a whole after they evaluated their decision to stay at the resort hotel, and perceived value over their expectation. Plus, satisfied customers believe that others will also satisfied and have favourable behaviours.

2.3 Hypothesis Development

2.3.1 The Relationship between SERVQUAL and Customer Satisfaction

2.3.1.1 The Relationship between Tangible and Customer Satisfaction

According to Gunarathne (2014), the tangible dimension has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The results are consistent with the results from Jabar, Dangi and Muhamed's (2018) research, which also shows that tangible have significant relationships with customer satisfaction. Other research also found a similar relationship between customer satisfaction and tangible (Wydyanto & Hamdan, 2020; Alsardia et al., 2020). Moreover, other research also shows the same findings, such as Shrestha (2021), a study on the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction, also indicated that the tangible dimension will affect customer satisfaction significantly. Other researchers found that tangible is correlated with customer satisfaction (Ali et al., 2021). Furthermore, Yeong et al. (2022) found that tangible have a significant and direct relationship with customer satisfaction. However, according to Khattab and Aldehayyat (2011), there is no significant relationship between tangible and customer satisfaction. Similarly, according to Shameem and Preetha (2012), tangible has no significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: **Tangible significantly influences customer satisfaction.**

2.3.1.2 The Relationship between Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

Reliability has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction, which means the higher the reliability, the higher the customer satisfaction (Gunarathne, 2014). Additionally, research by Jabar, Dangi and Muhamed (2018), mentioned that reliability significantly influences customer satisfaction. According to Tabash (2019), reliability has a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Besides that, Shrestha (2021) also mentioned that reliability affected customer satisfaction and highlighted that reliability served as the most crucial dimension. Besides that, Ali et al.

(2021) found that reliability is correlated with customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Yeong et al. (2022) also found that reliability has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction. Conversely, Yap (2019) found that reliability does not influence customer satisfaction towards hotels in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H2: **Reliability significantly influences customer satisfaction.**

2.3.1.3 The Relationship between Responsiveness and Customer Satisfaction

Existing research conducted on hotels proved that responsiveness significantly influences customer satisfaction (Khattab & Aldehayyat, 2011). Additionally, responsiveness has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction (Jabar et al., 2018). Moreover, Tabash (2019) also proved that responsiveness has a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Next, the study from Wydyanto and Hamdan (2020) found that responsiveness has a significant and direct relationship with customer satisfaction. The result is consistent with the results from Alsardia et al. (2020), which also found that responsiveness has a significant and direct relationship with customer satisfaction. Shrestha (2021) also highlighted responsiveness as a factor affecting customer satisfaction. Moreover, Ali et al. (2021) also found that responsiveness is correlated with customer satisfaction. However, Shameem and Preetha (2012) found that responsiveness has no significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Moreover, the result by Yap (2019) shows that responsiveness has an insignificant relationship with customer satisfaction towards hotels. Similarly, Yeong et al. (2022) also claimed that responsiveness has no influence on customer satisfaction specifically towards Resort hotels in Malaysia. Moreover, according to Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H3: **Responsiveness significantly influences customer satisfaction.**

2.3.1.4 The Relationship between Assurance and Customer Satisfaction

Khattab and Aldehayyat (2011) found that assurance has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Additionally, research by Jabar, Dangi and Muhamed (2018), proved that assurance affects customer satisfaction significantly. Another researcher also mentioned that assurance has a significant and direct relationship with customer satisfaction (Wydyanto & Hamdan, 2020). Next, researchers found that assurance has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction (Alsardia et al., 2020). The results are proved to be in line with Shrestha (2021), who also highlighted that the assurance dimension affects customer satisfaction. Next, Ali et al. (2021) also found that assurance has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. However, Yeong et al. (2022) claimed that assurance has an insignificant relationship with customer satisfaction towards Resort hotels in Malaysia. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

H4: **Assurance significantly influences customer satisfaction.**

2.3.1.5 The Relationship between Empathy and Customer Satisfaction

Research by Jabar, Dangi and Muhamed (2018), mentioned that empathy significantly influences customer satisfaction. Next, the study by Wydyanto and Hamdan (2020) also proved that empathy significantly and directly impacted customer satisfaction. The results are consistent with the result from Alsardia et al. (2020), who also found that empathy has a significant and positive relationship with customer satisfaction. Next, Shrestha (2021) also highlighted empathy affects customer satisfaction. The result is consistent with Ali et al. (2021), who also found that empathy has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Additionally, Yeong et al. (2022) found that empathy has the strongest positive influence on customer satisfaction. However, Li (2020) found that the empathy dimension does not have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction toward hotels in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: **Empathy significantly influences customer satisfaction.**

2.4 Research Framework
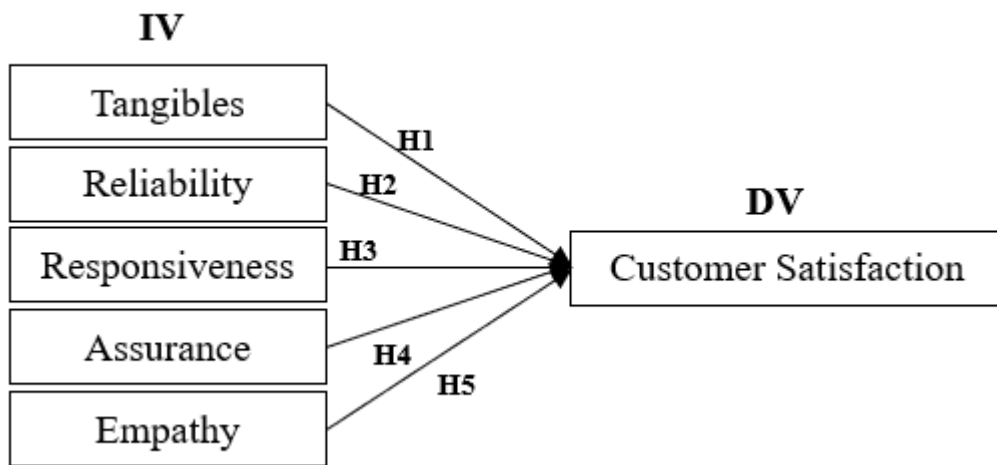
Figure 2.4.1 Research Framework of Customer Satisfaction

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research adopts quantitative research in order to measure the effect of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction among tourists who visited resort hotels in Perak, Malaysia. Quantitative research involves collecting and measuring numerical information to test causal relationships (Bhandari, 2020). Thus, various numerical data are collected and analysed to discover the effects (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) on customer satisfaction.

Furthermore, causal research was adopted to study the effects of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction in this study. Causal research is research that focuses on measures of two various items that have a cause-and-effect association (Indeed Editorial Team, 2023). After reviewing existing research, it is believed that SERVQUAL dimensions have a cause-and-effect relationship with customer satisfaction.

3.2 Sampling Design

3.2.1 Target population

This research's target population are the tourists who visited and stayed in Perak and they choose resort hotels in Perak as their accommodation to stay when visiting Perak.

3.2.2 Sampling technique

This research utilised the judgemental sampling approach to select respondents. Judgemental sampling is categorised under the non-probability sampling method, respondents were chosen according to the researcher's knowledge and judgement (Akman, 2023). The respondent is chosen by any factors that are most relevant to the study and each individual in the population has the same chance to be selected as

respondent. Respondents were chosen based on the following characteristics in this study: They stayed at resort hotels in Perak, Malaysia. A pre-screening question: "Have you ever stayed at the Perak Resort Hotel?" (Eg: Bukit Merah Lake Town Resort, The Haven Resort Hotel, Pangkor Laut Resort, Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat, etc.) The answer: "Yes" or "No" was used to screen out respondents who never stayed at the Perak Resort Hotels.

3.2.3 Sampling size

The number of tourists visiting Perak was above 10 million, specifically 14,567,000 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023) classification, a person will be counted as a tourist if his/her trip requires an overnight stay. Thus, our target population is 14 million, according to the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970), as cited in Bukhari (2021), the sampling size in this study is 384.

N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368
140	103	700	248	10000	370
150	108	750	254	15000	375
160	113	800	260	20000	377
170	118	850	265	30000	379
180	123	900	269	40000	380
190	127	950	274	50000	381
200	132	1000	278	75000	382
210	136	1100	285	1000000	384

Note.—N is population size. S is sample size.

Source: Krejcie & Morgan, 1970

Figure 3.2.3.1. Morgan's Table for Sample Size

3.3 Data collection method

3.3.1 Research Instrument

To collect primary data, a self-administered survey was created with Google Forms and distributed to respondents to fill out. Respondents were given a QR code to scan or a link to click on to access the questionnaire online through their smartphones. The QR code is the priority method for physical field data collection because the QR code provides a more convenient option for the respondents to fill up the questionnaire by scanning the QR code directly with their smartphone without the need to have their

information such as Email, WhatsApp, or other platforms to send the Google Form link to the respondents. However, the link is another option in case the respondents are unable to scan the QR code, such as the QR code shown to be invalid, and so forth. The link might be sent to the respondents in any possible way that the respondent accepted, such as through social media platforms, email, etc. Other than physical field data collection, we also distributed the questionnaire through social platforms to respondents who qualified to participate. Thus, the link will be a more convenient option for respondents who fill up our questionnaire through social media platforms, as they can directly click on the link to access the questionnaire.

The questionnaire's questions are adapted from existing studies done by other researchers who define the variables in a way that closely aligns with this research. Fixed-alternative questions were asked in the questionnaire where respondents were provided fixed questions with limited options to express their ideas. Options to measure respondents' level of agreement were provided in Five-point Likert Scale methods, scaled from 1. Strongly disagree; 2. Disagree; 3. Neutral; 4. Agree; 5. Strongly agree. The respondents were required to choose the answer that had the nearest meaning to their feelings.

The questionnaire has four sections. In Section A, only those who have stayed in Perak Resort Hotels will proceed to Section B. To ensure an adequate sample size representing the population after filtering out disqualified respondents, more than 384 questionnaires were distributed to potential respondents. In Section B, the respondent is required to fill in their demographic information including gender, age, academic qualification, income and so forth. Section C includes the independent variables questions (SERVQUAL items) and Section D includes the dependent variable questions (Customer Satisfaction).

Table 3.3.1.1

Research Instrument

Variables	Items	Origin of source
Independent: SERVQUAL	**Section C**	

21

Tangible	Q11	• Adapted from Khattab & Aldehayyat (2011)
	Q12-Q14	• Adapted from Priyo et al. (2019)
Reliability	Q15-Q17	• Adapted from Priyo et al. (2019)
	Q18	• Adapted from Khattab & Aldehayyat (2011)
Responsiveness	Q19	• Adapted from Wong et al. (1999)
	Q20-Q22	• Adapted from Priyo et al. (2019)
Assurance	Q23-Q25	• Adapted from Khattab & Aldehayyat (2011)
	Q26	• Adapted from Wong et al. (1999)
Empathy	Q27-Q29	• Adapted from Khattab & Aldehayyat (2011)
	Q30	• Adapted from Gunarathne (2014)
Dependent:	**Section D**	
Customer Satisfaction	Q31-Q32	• Adapted from Akunja (2020)
	Q33-Q34	• Adapted from Priyo et al. (2019)

3.3.2 Pretesting

To validate the survey questions, we sought opinions from academic experts at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR). According to their feedback, corrections, and approval, the pilot test was conducted.

3.3.3 Pilot Test

Before the actual questionnaire was distributed to respondents, the 'feasibility study' also known as the pilot test was conducted involving 30 participants through QR code scanning or link navigation. This pilot testing helps to address and resolve any potential issues in the questionnaire. Afterwards, SPSS software was utilised to perform a reliability test on the data collected from respondents.

3.3.4 Pilot Test Reliability Analysis

Table 3.3.4.1

Pilot Test Reliability Analysis Result

Variables		Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Result of Reliability
Dependent Variable (DV)	Customer Satisfaction (CS)	4	0.892	Good
Independent Variables (IVs)	Tangible (TG)	4	0.736	Acceptable
	Reliability (RL)	4	0.816	Good
	Responsiveness (RS)	4	0.685	Questionable

	Assurance (AS)	4	0.833	Good
	Empathy (EM)	4	0.863	Good

3.4 Data Analysis Tool

3.4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis involves summarising and describing the main characteristics of a data set including the measurement of the mean, median and mode to access the central tendency (Cooksey, 2020). It helps summarise data into basic quantitative metrics (such as averages or percentages) and graphical illustrations (such as pie charts) (Morcillo, 2023). Descriptive analysis of demographic data focuses on identifying errors and outliers and making a general conclusion regarding the distribution of data on respondent attributes (Bhandari, 2020).

3.4.2 Cronbach Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the research findings, different items measuring various components consistently must produce similar outcomes (McNeish, 2018). Cronbach analysis was used to assess the reliability. According to Arof et al. (2018), a minimum value of 0.6 Cronbach's alpha coefficient is expected.

No	Coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability Level
1	More than 0.90	Excellent
2	0.80-0.89	Good
3	0.70-0.79	Acceptable
4	0.6-.69	Questionable
5	0.5-0.59	Poor
6	Less than 0.59	Unacceptable

Figure 3.4.2.1 Cronbach's Alpha Table.: Adopted from Arof et al. (2018)

3.4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

We used multiple linear regression to examine how various factors interact and influence outcomes. This approach helps us estimate the relationship between the five independent variables and one dependent variable in the study. By doing so, we can understand the strength of these relationships. The following is the equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_5 x_5 + \varepsilon$$

(Hayes, 2024).

The multiple regression formula shows how the dependent variable (Y) is influenced by several independent variables (X1, X2, X3, X4, and X5). Beta represents the parameter and E accounts for any error in the model.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY RESULT

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Respondent Demographic Profile

The questionnaire was distributed to a total of 406 respondents, however, 16 of them never stayed at the resort hotels in Perak. Hence, only 390 responses were used for analysis after confirming that all data were good and complete.

Table 4.1.1.1

Respondent's age

Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
18-25	215	55.1
26-32	144	36.9
33-40	23	5.9
41-48	5	1.3
49 and above	3	.8
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.1 shows that 215 respondents or 55.1%, are in the 18-25 age range. Moreover, 144 of the respondents (36.9%) are in the 26-32 age range. Followed by 23 respondents (5.9%). who were in the 33-40 age range. 5 respondents (1.3%) and 3 respondents (0.8%) are aged between 41-48 years old and 49 and above years old respectively. The results show that the majority of our respondents are in the 18-25 age range.

Table 4.1.1.2

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent (%)
Chinese	309	79.2
Indian	25	6.4
Malay	56	14.4
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.2 shows the respondent's ethnicity. 309 respondents (79.2%) are Chinese. 25 respondents (6.4%) are Indian, and 56 respondents (14.4%) are Malay.

The high proportion of Chinese respondents is due to several factors. Firstly, we asked people within our social network to fill out the survey, and most of them are Chinese. Secondly, we distributed the survey through social media platforms to find respondents, where most of our followers and audiences were Chinese. Additionally, during field data collection, we found a higher response chance when the respondent selected is free or resting. This often happened in places or areas where we took breaks when collecting data, such as the Chinese breakfast store, Chinese restaurants, Chinese street etc, where the majority of customers are Chinese in these areas.

Table 4.1.1.3

Respondent's Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent (%)
Female	135	34.6
Male	255	65.4
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.3 shows that there are 255 respondents (65.4%) out of 390 are male. The remaining are female, which occupy 34.6 per cent of the total respondents.

Table 4.1.1.4

Respondent's Relationship

Relationship	Frequency	Percent (%)
Single	173	44.4
Couple	147	37.7
Married	69	17.7
Divorced	1	.3
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.4 shows that there are 173 respondents (44.4%) are single. Second, there are 147 respondents (37.7%) are couples, 69 respondents (17.7%) are married, and 1 respondent is divorced (0.3%).

Table 4.1.1.5

Respondent's Education

Education	Frequency	Percent (%)
Secondary/Certificate	104	26.7
Diploma/Degree	266	68.2
Master	20	5.1
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.5 shows the respondents' education levels, 104 of the respondents (26.7%) have a secondary education or certificate. The majority of the respondents, 266 (68.2%) out of 390 have a diploma or degree. The remaining 20 respondents (5.1%) have a master's degree.

Table 4.1.1.6

Respondent's Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Students	171	43.8
Entrepreneurs/ Business owners	16	4.1
Housewife	13	3.3
Employed	184	47.2
Pending for employment	6	1.5
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.6 shows the respondent's occupation. There are 184 respondents (47.2%) who are employed, which makes them the largest group. This is followed by 171 respondents (43.8%) who are students. Moreover, 4.1 percent of the respondents, which are 16 of them are entrepreneurs or business owners. The remaining are 13 housewives (3.3%), 6 pending for employment (1.5%). This indicates that the largest groups of respondents are employed individuals.

Table 4.1.1.7

Respondent's Income

Income (monthly)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Less than RM1000	50	12.8
RM1000-RM2500	162	41.5
RM2501-RM5000	140	35.9
More than RM5000	38	9.7
Total	**390**	**100.0**

Table 4.1.1.7 shows that there are 50 of the respondents (12.8%) have less than RM1000 income. Besides that, 162 respondents (41.5%) which made out the largest group are earning RM1000 to RM2500. Moreover, there are 140 respondents (35.9%) who earn RM2501 to RM5000 in income. The remaining 38 respondents (9.7) earn more than RM5000 income.

The number of students among our respondents was 171, but those with incomes less than RM1000 do not occupy half of the portion. This is because most students fill their income as RM1000-RM2500. An allowance of less than RM1000 might be insufficient for monthly expenses such as hostel rental fees, utilities, food, etc. for a student. Thus, most of the students might receive financial support of more than RM1000 from their parents, resulting in this result pattern.

4.1.2 Descriptive Findings - Tangible

Table 4.1.2.1

Descriptive Findings - Tangible

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The resort hotel has modern looking equipment	4.45	.885
2. The resort hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing	4.30	.840
3. The resort hotel's operating hours are convenient for all customers.	4.35	.816
4. The resort hotel's employees appear neatly	4.40	.877

Table 4.1.2.1 revealed that mean values fall between 4.30 to 4.45 on the resort hotel's tangible aspect. Most of the respondents agreed that the resort hotel has modern-looking equipment, visually appealing physical facilities, convenient operation hours, and neat-looking employees.

4.1.3 Descriptive Findings - Reliability

Table 4.1.3.1

Descriptive findings – Reliability

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. **The resort hotel performs the service right for the first time.**	4.41	.899
2. **The resort hotel provides the promised services.**	4.31	.886
3. **The resort hotel shows sincere interest in solving my problem.**	4.28	.940
4. **The resort hotel provides its services at the time it promises to do so.**	4.36	.942

Table 4.1.3.1 revealed that mean values fall between 4.28 to 4.41 on resort hotel service reliability, which means most of the respondents agreed that the resort hotel service is reliable, such as the service is provided right for the first time, provided promised services, showing interest in solving problems, and provide the services on promised time.

4.1.4 Descriptive Findings - Responsiveness

Table 4.1.4.1

Descriptive Findings - Responsiveness

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. **Employees in this resort hotel tell me exactly when services will be performed.**	4.34	.984
2. **Employees in this resort hotel are never too busy to respond to my requests.**	4.25	.966

	Mean	Std. Deviation
3. Employees in this resort hotel are willing to help me.	4.36	.927
4. Employees in this resort hotel respond to my request promptly.	4.30	.983

Table 4.1.4.1 shows that mean values fall between 4.25 to 4.36 on resort hotel service responsiveness. Most of the respondents agreed that the resort hotel employee tells them when the service will be performed, the staff is never too busy to respond, and willing to help and respond promptly.

4.1.5 Descriptive Findings - Assurance

Table 4.1.5.1

Descriptive Findings - Assurance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The behaviour of employees of the resort hotel instils confidence in me.	4.36	.913
2. Employees of the resort hotel are consistently courteous with me.	4.25	.947
3. Employees of the resort hotel have the knowledge to answer my questions	4.32	.935
4. Employees of the resort hotel have the skill to perform the service.	4.33	.873

Table 4.1.5.1 shows that the mean is ranged from 4.25 to 4.36 on the factor of assurance. The most agreed that the resort hotel's employees are consistently courteous, knowledgeable, and skilful which instils confidence in customers.

4.1.6 Descriptive Findings - Empathy

Table 4.1.6.1

Descriptive Findings – Empathy

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. The resort hotel has employees who give me personal attention.	4.24	.946
2. The resort hotel has my best interest in their heart.	4.25	.933
3. Employees of the resort hotel understand my specific needs.	4.31	.936
4. The employee quickly apologized when service mistakes were made.	4.29	.934

Table 4.1.6.1 shows that Empathy aspects have a mean of 4.24 to 4.31. This value indicates that most of the respondents agreed that the resort hotel employees give them personal attention, care about their best interests, understand their needs, and apologise when they make mistakes.

4.1.7 Descriptive Findings - Customer Satisfaction

Table 4.1.7.1

Descriptive Findings – Customer Satisfaction

	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I did the right thing when choosing to stay at the resort hotel.	4.40	.926

2. I feel the resort hotel services are better than my expectations.	4.30	.915
3. I feel satisfied with the services of the resort hotel.	4.32	.891
4. I think other customers will not complain about the services of the resort hotel.	4.18	1.000

Table 4.1.7.1 shows that most of the customers (respondents) agreed that they are satisfied as the mean falls between 4.18 to 4.40. Most of them agreed that they made the right decision, were satisfied with the service received, perceived services were higher than their expectations, and thought that others would not complain about the resort hotel either.

4.2 Reliability Test

Table 4.2.1

Reliability Scores of IV 1: Tangibles.

Variable	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
Independent Variable	Tangible	0.889	4

The result in Table 4.2.1 shows that tangible has Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.889, indicating that the four items have good internal consistency ($0.8 < \alpha < 0.9$).

Table 4.2.2

Reliability Scores of IV2: Reliability.

Variable	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
Independent Variable	Reliability	0.907	4

The result in Table 4.2.2 shows that reliability has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.907, indicating that the four items have excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.9$).

Table 4.2.3

Reliability Scores of IV 3: Responsiveness.

Variable	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
Independent Variable	Responsiveness	0.909	4

Table 4.2.3 shows that Cronbach's Alpha value of responsiveness is 0.909, indicating that the four items of the responsiveness variable have excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.9$).

Table 4.2.4

Reliability Scores of IV 4: Assurances.

Variable	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
Independent Variable	Assurance	0.908	4

The result in Table 4.2.4 shows that Cronbach's Alpha value of assurance is 0.908, indicating that the four items have excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.9$).

Table 4.2.6

Reliability Scores of IV 5: Empathy.

Variable	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
Independent Variable	Empathy	0.916	4

Table 4.2.6 shows that empathy has a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.916, which is the largest value compared to other variables. The four items have excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.9$).

Table 4.2.7

Reliability Scores of DV: Customer Satisfaction.

Variable	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of item
Dependent Variable	Customer Satisfaction	0.913	4

Table 4.2.7 shows that customer satisfaction has the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.913, indicating that the four items of customer satisfaction have excellent internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.9$).

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 4.3.1

Variables Entered/Removed

Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	EM_Mean,	.	Enter
	TG_Mean,		
	RL_Mean,		
	RS_Mean,		
	AS_Mean[b]		

a. Dependent Variable: CS_Mean

b. All requested variables entered

Table 4.3.1 shows that there are five predictor variables included in the regression model: EM_Mean (Empathy), TG_Mean (Tangible), RL_Mean (Reliability), RS_Mean (Responsiveness), and AS_Mean (Assurance). No variables were removed from the model, indicating that all selected predictor variables were retained for analysis.

Table 4.3.2

Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.943	0.889	0.888	0.27855

Predictors:

(Constant), EM_Mean, TG_Mean, RL_Mean, AS_Mean

Dependent Variable:

CS_Mean

Model summary Table 4.3.2 indicates the variance of the dependent variable explained by the variance of the independent variable. The model summary table (Table 4.9) showed that the value of R square is 0.889. It indicated that 88.9% of the variance in customer satisfaction is explained by empathy, tangible, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. There is an 11.1% unexplained variance by the independent variables which can be explored for future study.

Table 4.3.3

ANOVA table

Anova Table

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	239.366	5	47.873	617.001	<.000[b]
	Residual	29.795	384	.078		
	Total	269.161	384			

a. Dependent Variable: CS_Mean

b. Predictors: (constant), EM_mean, TG_Mean, RL_Mean, RS_Mean, AS_Mean

The ANOVA results in Table 4.3.3 indicate that the research model is statistically significant. Specifically, the F value of 617.001 and the p-value of <0.000. which is lower than 0.05, indicating that the independent variable, SERVQUAL dimensions has a significant impact on the dependent variable, customer satisfaction (CS_Mean).

Table 4.3.4

Coefficients Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.023	.085		-.270	.787
TG_Mean	.199	.049	.177	4.088	<.001
RL_Mean	.170	.055	.166	3.116	.002
RS_Mean	.117	.052	.121	2.278	.023
AS_Mean	.126	.057	.123	2.215	.027
EM_Mean	.389	.052	.391	7.452	<.001

Based on Table 4.3.4, the regression findings revealed that tangible (TG_MEAN) has a positive beta value of 0.177. Tangible has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction as the p-value <0.001 is lower than 0.05. Thus, H1 is supported.

H1: Tangible significantly influences customer satisfaction. (supported)

Next, reliability (RL_MEAN) has a positive beta value of 0.166. The variable has a significant impact on customer satisfaction because the p-value is 0.02 which is lower than 0.05. Thus, H2 is supported.

H2: Reliability significantly influences customer satisfaction. (supported)

Besides that, responsiveness (RS_MEAN) has a positive beta value of 0.121. Responsiveness has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction as the p-value of 0.023 is lower than the p-value of 0.05. Therefore, H3 is supported.

H3: **Responsiveness significantly influences customer satisfaction. (supported)**

Moreover, assurance (AS_MEAN) has a beta value of 0.123. Assurance significantly impacts customer satisfaction as it has a p-value of 0.027 which is lower than the p-value of 0.05. Thus, H4 is supported.

H4: **Assurance significantly influences customer satisfaction. (supported)**

Lastly, empathy (EM_MEAN) has a positive beta value of 0.391. It has the highest beta value (0.391) among all the independent variables. Thus, it is considered as an important predictor in this study. The item has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction as the p-value <0.001 is lower than 0.05.

H5: **Empathy significantly influences customer satisfaction. (supported)**

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Accomplishment of Research Objectives

This research set to study the relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions and customer satisfaction among tourists who visited Resort Hotels in Perak, Malaysia. The result shows that each SERVQUAL dimensions have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction, which means all hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5) were supported. Other than that, empathy was found to be the strongest indicator compared to other variables.

5.2 Discussion

Hypothesis 1 was supported which indicates that tangible served as a factor that will significantly impact customer satisfaction toward the resort hotel. The result is consistent with other findings by Wydyanto and Hamdan, (2020), Alsardia et al., (2020), Shrestha (2021) and Yeong et al. (2022). The result shows that modern-looking equipment and visually appealing physical facilities in the resort hotels affect their satisfaction. Besides that, the resort hotel's operation hours are convenient and their employee's appearance neatly will significantly impact their satisfaction. If these factors are not met, they feel dissatisfied. Thus, hotel managers should always ensure these expectations are met to enhance customer satisfaction.

The support of hypothesis 2 indicates that reliability significantly impacts customer satisfaction, which means if the service is performed right for the first time, the promised service is provided, and employees show genuine interest in resolving the customer's issues, the customer will feel satisfied. Also, performing appropriate services on the promised time will affect their satisfaction, while failing to do so would cause dissatisfaction. The result is consistent with Jabar et al. (2018), Shrestha (2021), Tabash (2019), and Yeong et al. (2022). Thus, managers must plan a strategy to provide customers with reliable service.

The support of H3 highlights the responsiveness variable is relevant to customer satisfaction. The result is consistent with Wydyanto and Hamdan (2020), Alsardia et al. (2020), and Shrestha (2021) findings. This result indicates that if the specific time to perform the service has been

explicitly told by the resort hotel employee to the customer, the employees are never unavailable to respond to the customer's needs, and are willing to provide help and respond promptly will significantly impact customer satisfaction. Thus, hotel managers should ensure their staff are well-trained and always able to respond promptly to various situations.

The support of H4 indicates that assurance is a factor affecting customer satisfaction. Customers will feel satisfied if they find that the staffs in the resort hotel are consistently polite, knowledgeable, as well as skilful which instils confidence in them. The result is the same as other researchers' findings (Wydyanto & Hamdan, 2020, Alsardia et al., 2020, Ali et al. 2021). Thus, employees should be mindful of their behaviour when interacting with customers, as it will impact their satisfaction.

The support of hypothesis 5 indicates that empathy has a significant influence on customer satisfaction. The result is similar to Jabar, Dangi, and Muhamed (2018), Yeong et al. (2022), and Alsardia et al. (2020) research. Moreover, the beta value of 0.391, which is the highest value compared to other variables suggests that empathy is the strongest predictor. Thus, customers will feel satisfied if the resort hotel employees give them personal attention, care about their best interests, understand their needs, and apologise when make mistakes.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 Theoretical Implications

This study shows the relevance of all SERVQUAL dimensions to customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry context, specifically for resort hotels in Perak, Malaysia. The 0.889 R Square value suggests that the SERVQUAL model (tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) serves as a robust framework to evaluate service quality in the hospitality industry. Empathy (EM_Mean) with the highest standardised coefficient beta value of 0.391 has the strongest impact on customer satisfaction. This indicates that personal attention, understanding, caring, and prompt apologies are crucial in enhancing customer satisfaction at resort hotels. However, it is important to note that the result might vary depending on various locations or industries. In this case,

empathy is an important factor in the service quality for resort hotels in Perak, Malaysia. Thus, the model must be adapted based on different contexts for the most accurate and relevant results. Future researchers can build on these findings to develop a more complex and comprehensive framework to better understand customer satisfaction. In our research, we focused on five independent variables including tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, other relevant variables should also be explored to be further studied on the target respondents to gain a deeper insight into customer satisfaction. Other than that, this study contributes to a better understanding of SERVQUAL dimensions affecting customer satisfaction in Malaysia. It provides valuable insight benefiting academics who want to increase their knowledge regarding customer expectations and customer service quality evaluation. Overall, this study provides significant guidance for future researchers on the factors affecting customer satisfaction.

5.3.2 Practical Implications

The empathy variable has the highest beta value (0.391) and the tangible has the beta value of 0.177, which ranked as the second highest predictor. Thus, the hotel management team should prioritise these factors. In order to maintain customer satisfaction, the hotel management team should set detailed standards and instructions for their employees to follow, especially in the service empathy area. In this study, personal attention, caring and understanding are mentioned to be crucial for customers. Thus, the hotel management team could set instructions and standards requiring staff to provide customers personal attention, demonstrate care, and try to understand the customers with their best efforts, etc. Moreover, regular training programs should be implemented to ensure each employee understands what the standards are and how to adhere to these standards. As tangible is also an important predictor of customer satisfaction, the hotel management team should always ensure that the equipment and facilities are well-maintained and visually appealing. This can be achieved through regular inspections and renovations. Besides that, the management team should ensure their operation hour are convenient for customers, and pay attention to their employees, making sure they adhere to the company's dress code, are well-groomed, wear the appropriate uniforms correctly, etc. Given that all variable has a significant impact on

customer satisfaction, the management team should also develop comprehensive procedures, and invest in employee training programs to enhance employees' professional skills, making sure that each employee interacts professionally with customers. Although responsiveness has the smallest beta value (0.121), it remains significant. Thus, establishing effective communication channels to facilitate timely and accurate communication between staff and customers is crucial. Employees themselves should actively participate in those regular training programs organised by the management team to increase their professional skills, as they are the ones interacting with customers. They should be mindful of their behaviour when interacting with customers and make their best efforts to follow standards set by the management team to maximise customer satisfaction.

Additionally, Perak government bodies and tourism authorities can use the results from this study to develop policies and strategies that effectively enhance service quality. Specifically, funding from local government bodies would be helpful, which would serve as resource inputs for hotel management to implement regular training programs. They should also focus on infrastructure development to enhance the tangible element of service quality, which includes cleanliness and maintenance of areas near the resort hotel and ensuring public transportation services are convenient in these areas. Moreover, government bodies should also regularly inspect the resort hotels' equipment and facilities, ensuring that their facilities are well-maintained and safe to use. Penalties should be imposed on resort hotels that fail to adhere to the standards.

5.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

This study focuses exclusively on resort hotels in Perak, Malaysia. The result might not be generalisable to other types of hospitality, state or country. Future researchers should include wider types of accommodations such as homestays and hotels, from different states or internationally to enhance the generalisability of the result. Including different types of accommodation can better understand the factors that a consumer is seeking when visiting different accommodations. Visitors view facilities and activities (tangibility) as important factors affecting their satisfaction when visiting homestays in Malaysia (Jabar, Dangi & Muhamed, 2018), while in this research, empathy served as the most important predictor

toward satisfaction as this research focuses on resort hotels. Thus, for a more generalisable result, future researchers are recommended to include various types of accommodations from various locations.

Moreover, this result confirmed the relevancy of SERVQUAL dimensions including tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy to customer satisfaction toward resort hotels. However, this research excluded some other potentially important factors that might also affect customer satisfaction toward the resort hotels such as price, brand image, place, product quality, etc. Future researchers are recommended to attempt to include various other factors that are not covered by SERVQUAL dimensions or attempt to use other theories that are not well explored by current research to better understand what customers are expecting.

Additionally, most of our respondents are Chinese. The results might be more reliable if there are more responses from different ethnic groups. This is mainly due to different ethnicities having different cultural norms which cause different evaluations of service quality. Distinct cultures value different things, it influences how an individual thinks about a situation (Forgeard, 2022). Thus, it is recommended for future researchers to consider targeting individuals from diverse ethnicities and cultural norms.

Besides that, this research is quantitative which involves gathering and measuring numerical information to test causal relationships (Bhandari, 2020). A self-administered survey is distributed to respondents with limited alternatives. Options were given on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Respondents might sometimes find it difficult to find the most suitable answer to describe what they feel. Other than that, some issues are unpredictable, such as respondents' misunderstanding, lack of guidance, or not following instructions, which might cause the result to be unreliable. Thus, to address these issues, future researchers are recommended to employ a qualitative method to collect the data. Qualitative approaches such as interviews allow the researcher to provide the respondent guidance, and correct the respondent when they misunderstand, as well as the respondent able to express in detail their feeling, which provides a deeper understanding of what they want. Other than that, this study's questionnaire was distributed solely in English version. Some respondents with lower education levels claim that they have difficulties understanding the questionnaire as English is not their primary language. Thus, for future researchers who plan to do research in Malaysia, it is recommended that they should have at least three language versions of their questionnaire, specifically Mandarin, Malay and English, which will help respondents to

answer more accurately, enhancing the reliability of response as Malaysia's diverse ethnic group including Chinese, Indian and Bumiputera and other minority groups (Lockard et al., 2024).

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Appendix: Questionnaire for Main Study

Investigating the effect of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction among tourists who visited Resort Hotels in Perak, Malaysia

Dear Respondents,

We are final year undergraduate students of Bachelor of Marketing (Hons), from Faculty of Business and Finance in University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Kampar campus. We are conducting a research project on "Investigating the effect of SERVQUAL dimensions on customer satisfaction among tourists who visited Resort Hotels in Perak, Malaysia"

This survey will take you approximately 5 minutes, and all participation towards this survey are voluntary. Rest assured that all the responses collected will be used solely for academic purposes, and will be kept private and confidential. Thank you in advance for your time and cooperation in answering our questionnaire.

Your participation is highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Loh Wei Hong and Joe Lee Wai Hong

Section A: Pre-screening Questions

1. Have you ever stayed at the Perak Resort Hotel? (Eg: Bukit Merah Lake Town Resort, The Haven Resort Hotel, Pangkor Laut Resort, Banjaran Hotsprings Retreat, etc.)
Mark only one oval.

⬭ Yes
⬭ No

Section B: Demographic Questions

Please select the most appropriate answer for each of the following

2. What is your age?
Mark only one oval.

⬭ 18-25
⬭ 26-32
⬭ 33-40
⬭ 41-48
⬭ 49 and above

3. What is your ethnicity?
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Malay
- ⬭ Chinese
- ⬭ Indian
- ⬭ Other

4. What is your gender?
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Male
- ⬭ Female

5. What is your relationship status?
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Single
- ⬭ Couple
- ⬭ Married
- ⬭ Divorced

6. Which is the highest education level you have attained?
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Secondary/Certificate
- ⬭ Diploma/Degree
- ⬭ Master
- ⬭ Doctorate
- ⬭ Other

7. What is your current occupational status?
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Student
- ⬭ Entrepreneur/Business Owner
- ⬭ Housewife
- ⬭ Employed
- ⬭ Retired
- ⬭ Pending for employment
- ⬭ Other

8. What is the range of your monthly income or allowance?
Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Less than RM1000
- ⬭ RM1000-RM2500
- ⬭ RM2501-RM5000
- ⬭ More than RM5000

Section C: SERVQUAL
Kindly select the option that best indicates your agreement with the following statement.
1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

A: Tangible

Questionnaire	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The resort hotel has modern-looking equipment.					
The resort hotel's physical facilities are visually appealing.					
The resort hotel's operating hours are convenient for all customers.					
The resort hotel's employees appear neatly.					

B: Reliability

Questionnaire	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The resort hotel performs the service right for the first time.					

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The resort hotel provides the promised services.					
The resort hotel shows sincere interest in solving my problem.					
The resort hotel provides its services at the time it promises to do so.					

C: Responsiveness

Questionnaire	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employees in this resort hotel tell me exactly when services will be performed.					
Employees in this resort hotel are never too busy to respond to my requests.					
Employees in this resort hotel are willing to help me.					
Employees in this resort hotel respond to my request promptly.					

D: Assurance

Questionnaire	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

The behaviour of employees of the resort hotel instils confidence in me.	57				
Employees of the resort hotel are consistently courteous with me.					
Employees of the resort hotel have the knowledge to answer my questions.					
Employees of the resort hotel have the skills to perform the service.					

E: Empathy

Questionnaire	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The resort hotel has employees who give me personal attention.					
The resort hotel has my best interest in my heart.					
Employees of the resort hotel understand my specific needs.					
The employee quickly apologized when service mistakes were made.					

Section D: Satisfaction

Kindly select the option that best indicates your agreement with the following statement.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree

3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Questionnaire	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I did the right thing when choosing to stay at the resort hotel.					
I feel the resort hotel services are better than my expectations.					
I feel satisfied with the services of the resort hotel.					
I think other customers will not complain about the services of the resort hotel.					