

## UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN STADIUM ENVIRONMENTS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SERVICE QUALITY IN NORTH MALAYSIA

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### ABSTRACT

Over the years, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has been consistently engaged in initiatives aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle among Malaysians, thus enhancing their overall quality of life and reducing the risk of potential diseases. Central to this effort is the National Sports Vision 2030 (VSN2030) under pillar six, which emphasizes the importance of establishing sporting hubs equipped with top-tier facilities and expert administration. The importance of excellent service quality cannot be emphasized enough, as it plays a crucial role in nurturing customer satisfaction and cultivating long-lasting loyalty. This study endeavours to examine the influence of service quality on customer satisfaction levels towards stadium environments in North Malaysia. A total of 104 respondents, comprising visitors and participants at stadiums in the region, voluntarily participated in the study. The questionnaire utilized was adapted from Parasuraman's (1986: the dimensions of Service Quality, with additional elements drawn from Churchill's (1979) CSAT questionnaire for customer satisfaction. The findings revealed a significant relationship ( $F(5,99) = 59.191, p < .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  value of .732 (as depicted in Table 4.2). Analysis further indicated that customer satisfaction could be predicted by the equation:  $y = -.149(\text{constant}) + .219(\text{tangibles}) + .162(\text{reliability}) + .048(\text{responsiveness}) + .198(\text{assurance}) + .178(\text{empathy})$ , where 73.2% of the variance in customer satisfaction stemmed from service quality ( $R^2 = .732$ ). This underscores the critical role of service quality in meeting the diverse needs and expectations of stadium patrons, whether they are active participants or enthusiastic spectators.

**KEYWORDS:** Service Quality, Customers Satisfaction, Stadium, North Malaysia

### INTRODUCTION

For many years, the Ministry of Youth and Sports always working out with the initiatives to ensure that the Malaysians should practice healthy lifestyle to avoid any potential diseases and to upgrade the quality of life. Aligned with the vision of the Ministry to ensure that the Malaysians to practice healthy lifestyle, the location of practice must be in the top-notch condition. The sport facilities must be ready in terms of the accessibility, safety and also equipped with sufficient necessities to embrace the vision of the Ministry. Furthermore, in the sixth pillar of the National Sports Vision (VSN2030) underscores

the significance of a sporting hub in providing expertise in the administration and maintenance of top-quality facilities.

A well-equipped and modern sports complex, complete with cutting-edge amenities and a varied selection of activities, is a tempting magnet for visitors looking for exciting leisure experiences. However, despite of their main function as the recreational place, the accessibility, safety, and overall quality of sports facilities often face challenges. The service quality issue such as the sports facilities does not well-maintained offer substantial problems and consequences for users and the surrounding community that might lead them to potential harm and injuries. When sports facilities are not adequately maintained, it can lead to safety issues, insufficient staff expertise, poor communication across organizational levels, and budgetary constraints. (Chaltu Shuma & Alemayehu Ijigu, 2022). It reflects one of the service quality dimensions, which is the reliability, whereby people do not trust the safety aspects provided by particular facilities.

Therefore, the service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall profitability of firms in a variety of industries (Huang, Y., & Kim, D. (2023). High service quality is critical in shaping consumer happiness and establishing long-term loyalty since it demonstrates a company's dedication to continually meeting and exceeding customer expectations, resulting in long-term partnerships and favourable brand associations.

Within North Malaysia, individuals demonstrate unique tendencies towards engaging in sporting endeavours, with this inclination transcending generational boundaries. Not confined solely to the younger population, older members of the community also actively involve themselves in recreational pursuits. Their participation is driven by a desire to cultivate familial connections and strengthen interpersonal relationships, thus highlighting the multifaceted nature of leisure engagement (Rahim et al., 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of service quality, such as responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, in order to assess their influence on customer satisfaction levels at stadium environments in North Malaysia. The study's findings will add to the existing body of knowledge on service quality and customer satisfaction, providing valuable insights for businesses looking to improve their service offerings, improve customer experiences, and ultimately foster long-term customer loyalty and positive brand associations.

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), the service quality consists of five dimensions, which are responsiveness, reliability, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Responsiveness pertains to the promptness and willingness of staff to assist spectators, while reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of services (Ramlan et al., 2021). Assurance relates to the competence, courtesy, and credibility of staff, whereas empathy involves understanding and addressing spectators' individual needs and concerns (Al-Fadhli et al., 2019). Tangibles encompass the physical facilities, amenities, and overall environment of the stadium (Lee et al., 2017). While the SERVQUAL model has been widely applied in various service industries, including hospitality and retail, its application to the stadium context remains relatively underexplored, particularly in Malaysia. However, recent studies have started to explore the relationship between service quality dimensions according to the Parasuraman framework and customer satisfaction in stadiums across Malaysia, providing valuable insights into improving the spectator experience (Al-Fadhli et al., 2019; Ramlan et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2017; Mohd Shah et al., 2017; Kamarudin et al., 2021).

Sports facilities are fundamental components of Malaysia's sports infrastructure, playing a pivotal role in fostering physical activity, promoting healthy lifestyles, and supporting athletic development (Al-Shammari, 2019). Research by Sharif Ishak et al. (2020) underscores the importance of sports facilities in encouraging sports participation among Malaysians, particularly youth, by providing accessible and well-equipped venues. Therefore, a set of assessment need to establish to measure the service quality level towards spectator satisfaction to use the facility, particularly in North Malaysia. Service quality is a critical aspect of sports facility management in Malaysia, directly influencing customer satisfaction and overall experiences (Ramli et al., 2018). There are so many researchers conducted studies regarding service quality on stadium service features and. Zainal et al. (2020) emphasizes the importance of service quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles in shaping perceptions of sports facility users. Studies have indicated that reliable services, including consistent facility availability and functionality, are essential for

meeting user expectations and building trust (Tan et al., 2019). Moreover, responsive and empathetic staff interactions play a crucial role in addressing user needs and enhancing satisfaction levels (Kamarudin et al., 2021). The tangible aspects of sports facilities, including cleanliness, maintenance, and amenities, also significantly contribute to user satisfaction and loyalty (Mohd Shah et al., 2017). However, still there is a drawback when it comes to the service offered by stadium operators. The challenges such as inadequate staffing, training, and resource allocation have been identified as barriers to delivering high-quality services in sports facilities (Ibrahim et al., 2019). To optimize service quality and user experiences, there is a growing need for systematic approaches to facility management, staff training, and customer feedback mechanisms (Ahmad et al., 2021).

Customer satisfaction regarding service quality in stadiums is a crucial aspect of the overall spectator experience, with implications for loyalty and repeat attendance. Research on stadiums in Malaysia emphasizes the importance of service quality dimensions in influencing customer satisfaction levels. Ramli et al. (2020) highlight reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles as key factors affecting spectators' perceptions of service quality in stadiums. Studies have indicated that reliable services, such as efficient ticketing systems and timely facilities maintenance, contribute significantly to spectator satisfaction (Abdul Rahman et al., 2018). Moreover, responsive and empathetic staff interactions play a crucial role in addressing spectator needs and resolving issues promptly, enhancing overall satisfaction levels (Al-Fadhli et al., 2019). Tangible aspects of stadium facilities, including cleanliness, seating comfort, and amenities, also impact spectator satisfaction (Ramlan et al., 2021). However, challenges such as overcrowding, inadequate facilities, and security concerns have been identified as detractors from the spectator experience (Lee et al., 2017). To optimize customer satisfaction, stadium management must prioritize service quality improvements, staff training, and facilities maintenance (Wan Ismail et al., 2022). The five elements in service quality plays a vital role to ensure the customer satisfaction. Therefore, further research is needed to explore innovative strategies and best practices for enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction in stadiums, thereby ensuring memorable and enjoyable experiences for spectators, particularly in North Malaysia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To meet the objective of this study, the probability sampling, which is simple random sampling is used as every person has equal chance to be selected in this study. The identified population is the visitors and customers at stadium around North Region. For sample size, the researchers decided to use the opinion of prominent scholars, such as Fidell and Tabachnick (2003) and Cohen (1992) as a method to identify the sample size for this study.

There are 104 respondents voluntarily participate in this study, which is consist of the visitors and customers at selected stadiums located at North region of Malaysia. All of the respondents are voluntarily answered the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into 3 sections, whereby Part A consist of demographic profile of the respondent, Part B is the 5-scale questions of service quality dimension (responsiveness, reliability, empathy, tangibles and assurance) adapted by Parasuraman (1986), and Part C consist of 5-scale customers' satisfaction on the service quality offered by stadium operators at North region in Malaysia, adapted from CSAT questionnaire (Churchill, 1982).

Data collection of this study will be collected through Quick Response Code (QR Code) that links with Google Form. The respondents scan the QR Code that links with the questionnaire for data entry. The questionnaire will be placed at the each of main entrance gate of the stadiums to ensure the customers aware with the presence of the QR Code. Estimated time for respondent to answer the questionnaire is about 15 minutes. The respondent has been told that all the personal information will be disclosed and protected. Last but not least, the responses were collected within stipulated time and were analysed by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 26.

To ensure the reliability of the study, a pilot test was conducted by distributing to 30 respondents before the actual data collection was carried out. 30 is the minimum sample size was considered as suggested by Isaac and Michael (1995) to address the purpose of pilot test. As a result of the reliability analysis of the Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction towards Stadium in Northern

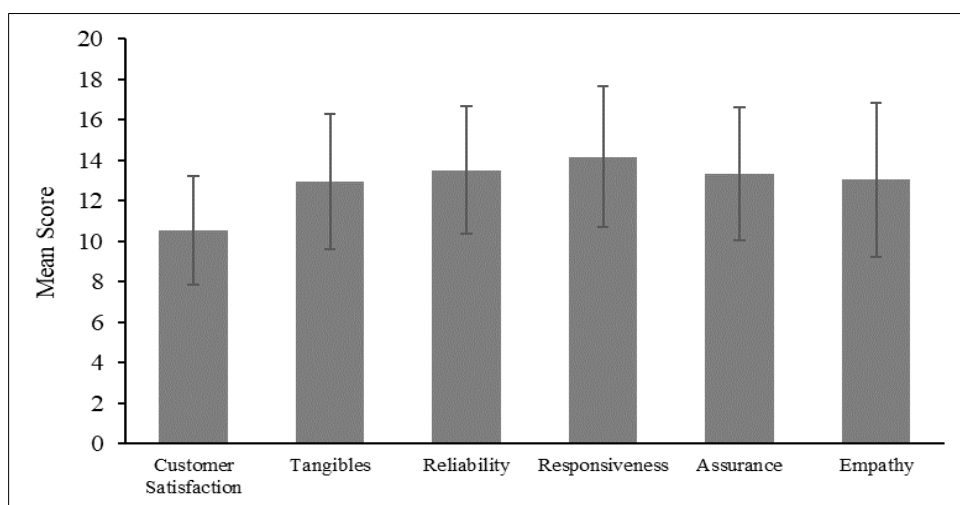
Region, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was presented as below, as it is surpassed 0.7 to be reliable scale (Shemwell et al, 2015).

**Table 1.** Reliability Analysis of Service Quality on Customer Satisfaction towards Stadium at Northern Region

Serial	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Tangibles	.951
2	Reliability	.926
3	Responsiveness	.934
4	Assurance	.917
5	Empathy	.935
6	Customer Satisfaction	.928

## RESULTS

Once the pilot study was conducted, the multiple regression was employed as a statistical test to measure the influence of service quality as the independent variable on customer satisfaction as a dependent variable. There are five independent variables used in this study. The listed independent variables are reliable, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, while the dependent variable in this study is customer satisfaction. Figure 1 shows the descriptive statistics with mean score and standard deviation of customer satisfaction and the service quality dimensions. Based on that, the results are as follows: the customer satisfaction score (M = 10.53, SD = 2.68), customer satisfaction (M = 10.53, SD = 2.68), Tangibles (M = 12.95, SD = 3.35), Reliability (M = 13.52, SD = 3.14), Responsiveness (M = 14.18, SD = 3.48), Assurance (M = 13.34, SD = 3.30), Empathy (M = 13.05, SD = 3.79). In this result, based on service quality dimensions, it showed that the responsiveness recorded highest mean (M=14.18) whereby the tangibles indicated the lowest mean (M=12.95).



**Figure 1.** Descriptive Statistics of Service Quality

Table 2 below showed a significant equation ( $F(5,99) = 59.191, p < .001$ ), with  $R^2$  of .732 as shown at Table 3. From the Table 4, the results predicted that customer satisfaction was equal to  $y = -.149(\text{constant}) + .219(\text{tangibles}) + .162(\text{reliability}) + .048(\text{responsiveness}) + .198(\text{assurance}) + .178(\text{empathy})$ . This implied that 73.2% ( $R^2 = .732$ ) of the variance in customers' satisfaction comes from the independent variable of service quality. Thus, it can be concluded that the remaining 26.8% was due to other factors that were not taken into consideration in this study.

**Table 2.** Model Summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.856 <sup>a</sup>	.732	.719	1.42015

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Responsiveness, Tangibles, Reliability, Assurance

**Table 3.** Statistic of ANOVA

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	546.469	5	109.294	54.191	<.001 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	199.664	99	2.017		
Total	746.133	104			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

b. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Responsiveness, Tangibles, Reliability, Assurance

**Table 4.** Coefficients of customer satisfaction and service quality

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients	
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-.149	.694		-.214	.831
Tangibles	.219	.056	.274	3.892	<.001
Reliability	.162	.069	.190	2.329	.022
Responsiveness	.048	.061	.062	.775	.440
Assurance	.198	.070	.245	2.818	.006
Empathy	.178	.056	.253	3.199	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Customer\_Satisfaction



## **DISCUSSION**

According to the findings of the study mentioned above, the independent variable of service quality accounts for 73.2% of the variance in customer satisfaction in the Northern area. This suggests that the service quality measures defined by Parasuraman et al. (1988) adequately foresee consumer satisfaction at stadium events. These dimensions—tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—are critical for predicting satisfaction since they incorporate all aspects of the spectator experience.

The first predictor is tangibles, which include the stadium's physical facilities, seating comfort, and cleanliness. These elements have a direct impact on customers' initial and overall perceptions. High-quality tangibles, such as modern amenities and clean environments, improve the venue's aesthetic appeal and comfort, resulting in higher satisfaction (Hightower et al., 2002). In the Northern region, most customers feel that tangibles are an important part of the enjoyment they seek. By creating a nice and well-maintained environment, these tangibles inspire enjoyment and satisfaction throughout the sporting event.

Reliability is another important factor that adds to client happiness. In this context, reliability refers to the ability to deliver accurate and dependable service, such as ensuring that events start on time, ticketing systems work well, and facilities perform as promised. Consistent and trustworthy service fosters trust and satisfaction among spectators (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Stadiums routinely meet and exceed expectations by providing accurate event scheduling, efficient ticketing systems, and dependable facility operations.

Responsiveness refers to the staff's quickness in dealing with client requests and issues, such as directing spectators to their seats or quickly settling complaints. This attentiveness and readiness to facilitate beneficial connections and make spectators feel valued (Theodorakis & Alexandris, 2008). Customers perceive excellent responsiveness from stadium service providers, which is critical to ensuring their pleasure. Responding to inquiries, guiding spectators, and resolving concerns quickly not only improves the entire experience, but also develops favorable relationships.

Furthermore, assurance, which includes the staff's expertise, professionalism, and credibility, plays an important role in creating a safe and trusting work environments. Well-trained employees who efficiently manage crowd safety and provide clear, accurate information boost consumer confidence and satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Assurance is crucial to fostering client happiness at Northern stadium. Staff competency, professionalism, and trustworthiness are essential for establishing a safe and trustworthy atmosphere.

Finally, empathy entails giving individualized attention to each consumer and understanding their unique requirements, such as accommodating special requests or supporting those with disabilities. Stadium workers may make the experience more welcome and enjoyable by emphasizing care and consideration, resulting in increased levels of satisfaction (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Customers in the Northern region want stadium service providers to understand their demands and provide exceptional services.

Together, these dimensions create a comprehensive framework for understanding and improving customer satisfaction in stadium settings.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this study indicates into the significant relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction within the context of stadium attendance in the north region of Malaysia. Through rigorous analysis, it uncovers valuable insights into the pivotal role of service quality in meeting the diverse needs and expectations of stadium patrons, whether they are active participants or enthusiastic spectators. The findings underscore the imperative for stadium operators to continually elevate their standards of service delivery to effectively enhance customer satisfaction. Moreover, the study advocates for future researchers to adopt a mixed-methods approach, enabling broader generalization of findings and comprehensive exploration of the underlying drivers behind the observed outcomes. This holistic approach not only enriches our understanding of customer satisfaction dynamics

in stadium environments but also paves the way for more informed strategies aimed at optimizing the overall stadium experience.

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