

WHAT TRULY ELEVATES SERVICE QUALITY FOR MODERN PILGRIMS?

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Abstract

This study aims to detail factors that may elevate pilgrim service quality. Previous studies have learned various aspects of service quality. However, limited studies have detailed factors that elevate service quality for Umrah pilgrims. This study utilized Confirmatory Factor Analysis with three hundred respondents. The finding shows that tangible responsiveness, empathy, and assurance greatly impact service quality, while reliability has a lesser impact. This study describes activities for each dimension that elevate service quality. This study not only enhances the literature on service quality by providing detailed activities or items that elevate service quality in the Umrah context but also offers information for Umrah service providers so that they can understand the needs of pilgrims.

Keywords: Service Quality, Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Umrah, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is all kinds of travel for a religious purpose, including professional matters such as the priests' travel to attend seminars (Griffin & Raj, 2017). The main reason for pilgrimage is to perform obligatory conduct and to gratify spiritual needs (Vukonic, 1996). Tourism motivated by religious factors might be as old as the religion itself; thus, it might be the oldest type of tourism, and it is not a new phenomenon (Rinschede, 1992; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). In addition, the importance of religious tourism has increased within the global tourism industry. Its market share is predicted to grow by 8.9%, from \$174.98 billion in 2024 to \$ 190.53 billion in 2025 (The Business Research Company, 2025). Griffin & Raj (2017) stated that religious tourism is a fast-growing segment in the tourism industry.

One form of religious tourism in Islamic teaching is umrah. Umrah refers to a visit to Ka'abah, and the pilgrims conduct some rituals that are also performed during Hajj (Saabiq, 2004) as cited in (Almuhri & Alsawafi, 2017), such as doing tawaf and Sa'i. Umrah is different from hajj, as umrah is not obligatory, has no time limitation, and has a simpler ritual to perform. Even though it is not obligatory, doing umrah still appeals to Muslims.

Indonesia, as one of the most populous Muslim countries, has a massive demand for umrah. In 2024, there were 1.467.005 umrah pilgrims (SISKOPATUH, 2025). Typically, Indonesians perform umrah through travel agencies. In 2023, there were 2.180 authorized umrah travel agencies (Hawari, 2023). However, there is also a current trend of umrah mandiri, in which pilgrims arrange and perform umrah without the arrangement of travel agencies. As a result, the competition in umrah industry in Indonesia is intense.

Even though travel agencies provide similar services, it is valuable to understand the quality of the services that make them different (Berry et al., 1985). Service quality strengthens and differentiates the organization from competitors (Berry et al., 1985; Ghobadian et al., 1994). Service quality is pivotal for travel agencies (Lin, 2013). There are five attributes of service quality important to customers: reliability (as promised and dependably), responsiveness (willingness to help and in a

prompt way), assurance (knowledge and courtesy), tangibility (physical appearance of facilities and personnel), empathy (caring and individualized attention) (Berry et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988)

Previous studies have learned the impact of service quality in the umrah context. For example, the impact of service quality on customer satisfaction on Malaysian umrah pilgrims (Othman et al., 2019), on umrah travel agencies' performance (Ande et al., 2024), or the evaluation of service quality using fuzzy method (Maisuroh et al., 2020). However, in the author's understanding, only a limited study clarifies the quality valued by the pilgrims. This understanding is pivotal for Umrah travel agencies to provide excellent service quality. In addition, based on the Scopus database, with the keywords "service quality" and "Umrah", only six articles appeared between 2016-2025.

For the above reason, this study aims to specify quality aspects that matter to pilgrims. Thus, the umrah service providers might have a clear picture of the quality that is important to meet pilgrims' expectations. This study might be similar to the study by Maisuroh et al. (2020). However, this study utilizes larger numbers of respondents and different methodology approaches.

This study is constructed in five sections. The first section is the introduction, followed by a literature review and methodology. Subsequently, the results and discussion section will elaborate on the outcome and analysis. Lastly, the conclusion section will sum up the study and provide research limitations and contributions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Service Quality

The definition of quality is varied (Ghobadian et al., 1994; Reeves & Bednar, 1994). For instance, in Japanese philosophy, quality refers to zero defects, doing it right the first time (Parasuraman et al., 1985), or meeting or exceeding customers' expectations (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985). Ghobadian et al. (1994) categorized quality into five groups: transcendent as inherent excellence, product-led quality, process or supply-led quality, customer-led quality, and value-led quality. Value-led quality defines quality as meeting customers' expectations regarding quality, price, and availability.

In relation to service quality, it is worthwhile to understand that customers judge the quality of the service based on their perceptions and expectations. Thus, most of the quality definitions fall in the customer-led category (Ghobadian et al., 1994). Service quality has been defined as customers' general assessment regarding the excellence of services (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Service quality measures how well the service is provided to the customers and meets their expectations (Ghobadian et al., 1994). Service quality is the extent to which the organizations successfully serve the purpose of customers (Yoo & Park, 2007).

Dimension of Service Quality.

Previous studies have shown the dimensions or the determinants of service quality. Grönroos (1984) postulated that there are two dimensions of service quality. First, the technical quality discusses the output of the service and what the customers get from the service provided. For instance, customers clean their cars when going to the car wash. Second, the functional quality of service encounters discusses the interaction between the provider and recipient, which is perceived as subjective. For example, the courtesy shown to customers or the garage ambiance. Lehtinen and Lethinen (1991) posited that service quality involves physical, corporate, and interactive quality. Physical quality refers to the condition of the building and equipment, while corporate quality refers to the organization's image and profile. Interactive quality discusses the interaction between the employee and the customers, as well as the interaction between customers.

The study done by Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1985) and Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1988) learned that the customers' expectations of service quality lie in five areas: reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, empathy, and assurance. Most of the studies on service quality were

based on the service quality determinants provided by Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1985) and Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1988) or some modification of it (Marinković et al., 2011; Martínez Caro & Martínez García, 2008). However, it is worthwhile to understand that different industry has different characteristics, which leads to a different emphasis on each dimension (Chang, 2009; Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Llach et al., 2016; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Likewise, the service quality dimensions of Parasuraman et al. (1985) were also adopted or modified by the studies specific to the hajj and Umrah industries. A study done by Eid (2012) learned the quality of Hajj service provided by the Saudi Arabian Authority utilizing the service quality dimensions by Parasuraman et al. (1985). It was found that the pilgrims were satisfied with items in the assurance dimension, such as religious awareness programs, safety, and security at holy places. On the other hand, the research shows that tangible items such as transportation, the availability of bathrooms, and pedestrians at holy places need to be improved. A study by Jabnoun (2003) tried to provide the HajjQual scale based on the service quality dimensions of Parasuraman et al. (1985). However, as stated by the author, the drawbacks of the study are the homogeneity and the limited number of respondents. A study conducted by Darfoon (2013) also used the quality dimensions based on the service quality of Parasuraman et al. (1985), which was adapted to the study of Jabnoun (2003) and Eid (2012).

Based on the above explanation, this study utilizes the dimensions of service quality by Parasuraman et al. (1985). These dimensions are explained thoroughly in the following few paragraphs. Having understood the determinants of service quality, it will be necessary for the organization to provide those determinants promptly to enhance the organization's performance.

Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml (1985) and Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1988) posited five service quality dimensions. Firstly, **assurance** is the organization's ability shown in employees' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to build customers' trust and confidence (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Six items represent the dimensions, such as *"this travel ensures pilgrims feel safe traveling with us"* or *"this travel plans the journey based on the guidance as stated in the Quran and Hadith."* Secondly, **responsiveness** refers to the ability to provide prompt service and to help with confidence (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It is represented by four questions, such as *"This travel opts to help pilgrims resolve problems"* or *"This travel responds to pilgrims' requests promptly."*

Thirdly, tangible. It is defined as the physical appearance of the whole organization, such as the facilities, equipment, and personnel (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Five questions represent this dimension. For instance, *"This travel provides accommodation that is appropriate"* or *"This travel provides transportation that is appropriate"*. Fourthly, reliability describes the ability to conduct the service as promised dependably and accurately (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Fifthly, empathy refers to the ability of the organization to provide individual attention to the customers (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a positive approach to investigate the phenomena. Guba and Lincoln (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) stated that positivism sees the whole world using empirical experience as the knowledge itself is posterior; reason alone does not lead to knowledge. Thus, we use deductive research that enables the researchers to collect and analyze the data.

Sample

This study utilizes the internal assessment of service quality, as a previous study has shown no significant difference between the internal and external assessment of service quality (Soteriou & Zenios, 1999). As a result, the sample of this study is employees of Umrah travel agencies. It is recommended to have 13-170 respondents for five factors in CFA (Hair et al., 2019a). Thus, this study aimed to have at least 170 respondents

Measurement

The questionnaire for this study is based on previous literature and FGD from the initial research. FGD and the study of Saleh & Ryan (1991) developed the questions in assurance. The items in responsiveness are adopted by Lin (2013), Parasuraman (1988), and Yee (2010). Moreover, items in reliability are adopted from Lin (2013), Parasuraman (1988), and Presbury (2009), while items in empathy utilized scale by Saleh & Ryan (1991), Parasuraman (1988), and Yee (2010). The questionnaire utilized 5 Likert scales, with one being totally disagreed and five totally agree.

Data Collection

Perspective respondents are called based on the list of authorized Umrah travel agencies. Once they agreed to participate, the enumerator came to their office. Then, the respondents filled out the questionnaire. The respondents are ensured that all the data are solely used for the research.

Data-analysis

This study utilized the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) method. CFA is used to understand the relationship between latent variables and measured variables (Hair et al., 2019a). In addition, the number of loading factors in CFA shows the influence of measured and latent variables (Tang et al., 2024)

In doing CFA, validity, reliability, and model fit are measured. Validity is measured by calculating the loading factor and AVE, while reliability is measured by Construct Reliability (CR) (Hair et al., 2019a). The criteria for loading factors are ≥ 0.5 , AVE ≥ 0.5 , and CR ≥ 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019a). After ensuring the validity and reliability, then the model fit is measured. The criteria for measuring model fit are p-value > 0.05 , RMSEA < 0.08 , SRMR ≤ 0.04 , NFI, GFI, and PNFI (a higher value indicates better fit) (Hair et al., 2019a)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

Based on the statistical results in the table,1 shows the descriptive data. The data generally has a minimum value of 3 and a maximum value of 5. However, SDQRBL04, SDQRBL05, and SQDEMP02 have values ranging from 1 to 5. In addition, the Standard Deviation ranges from 0.48 to 0.77. The full results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic

	Median	Min	Max	SD	Mean
SQDASR01	5	3	5	0.50	4.69
SQDASR02	5	3	5	0.48	4.69
SQDASR03	5	3	5	0.53	4.62
SQDASR04	5	3	5	0.52	4.62
SQDASR05	5	3	5	0.53	4.62
SQDASR06	5	3	5	0.51	4.63
SQDRPS01	5	3	5	0.54	4.59
SQDRPS02	5	3	5	0.54	4.58
SQDRPS03	5	3	5	0.56	4.58
SQDRPS04	5	3	5	0.55	4.61
SQDTAN01	5	2	5	0.52	4.65
SQDTAN02	5	3	5	0.50	4.66
SQDTAN03	5	3	5	0.54	4.59

SQDTAN04	5	3	5	0.54	4.59
SQDTAN05	5	3	5	0.50	4.67
SQDRBL01	5	3	5	0.55	4.60
SQDRBL02	5	3	5	0.55	4.60
SQDRBL03	5	1	5	0.76	4.59
SQDRBL04	5	1	5	0.77	4.53
SQDRBL05	5	1	5	0.77	4.50
SQDEMP01	5	3	5	0.56	4.57
SQDEMP02	5	1	5	0.67	4.52
SQDEMP03	5	3	5	0.52	4.63
SQDEMP04	5	3	5	0.58	4.56
SQDEMP05	5	3	5	0.53	4.64

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Figure 1. shows the results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Based on this finding, the reliability, validity, and measurement fit were calculated, as explained in the following sections. Moreover, the loading factors are utilized as foundations on how assurance, responsiveness, tangible, reliability, and empathy influence service quality.

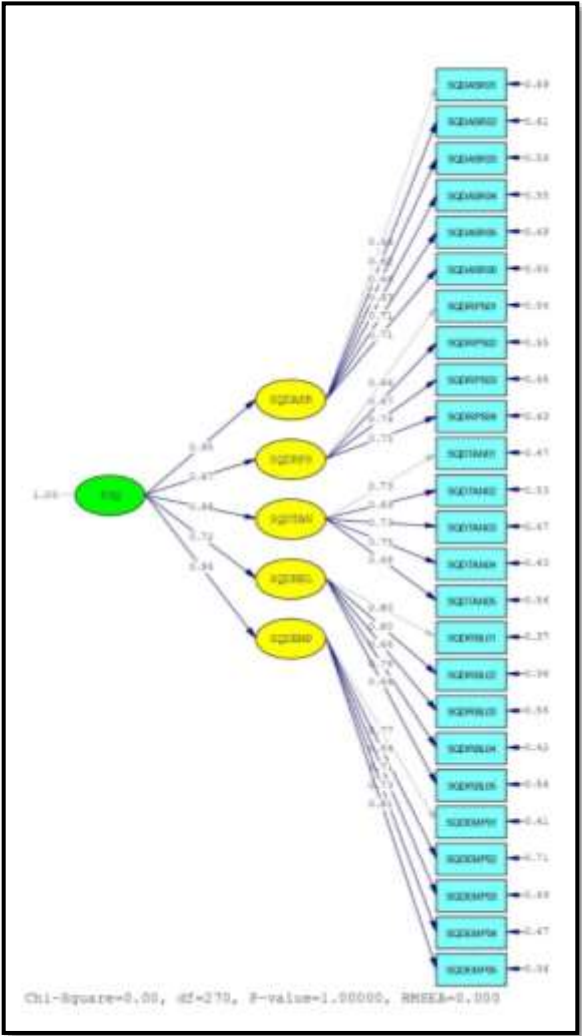


Figure 1. CFA Results

Reliability and Validity

As shown in Table 2, the statistical results show that all loading factors are above the cut-off point of ≥ 0.5 , ensuring the item's validity. Likewise, the numbers of CR are also above the threshold of $CR \geq 0.7$. It can be defined that all variables are reliable. However, the AVE of Assurance is below the threshold of $AVE \geq 0.5$. Nevertheless, Fornell & Larcker (1981) stated that the validity is acceptable if AVE is less than 0.5 but CR is above 0.6. In short, all variables are reliable and valid.

Table 2. Validity and Reliability Results

Variable	Validity	Reliability	
	Loading Factor	CR ≥ 0.7	VE ≥ 0.50
Assurance		0.83	0.44
PSQASR01	0.64		
PSQASR02	0.62		
PSQASR03	0.64		
PSQASR04	0.67		
PSQASR05	0.71		
PSQASR06	0.71		
Responsiveness		0.80	0.50
PSQRPS01	0.66		
PSQRPS02	0.67		
PSQRPS03	0.74		
PSQRPS04	0.75		
Tangible		0.84	0.51
PSQTAN01	0.73		
PSQTAN02	0.69		
PSQTAN03	0.73		
PSQTAN04	0.75		
PSQTAN05	0.68		
Reliability		0.86	0.55
PSQRSBL01	0.8		
PSQRSBL02	0.8		
PSQRSBL03	0.66		
PSQRSBL04	0.76		
PSQRSBL05	0.68		
Empathy		0.84	0.52
PSQREMP01	0.77		
PSQREMP02	0.54		
PSQREMP03	0.71		
PSQREMP04	0.73		
PSQREMP05	0.81		

Measurement Model Test

Hair et al. (2019b) posited that using three to four fit indices provides adequate evidence of model fit, and it must include at least one incremental index and one absolute index. Table 2. shows the results of measurement models. The result concludes that Chi-Square, RMSEA, RMR, GFI, CFI, RFI, NFI, and PNFI can categorized as Good Fit.

Table 3. Measurement Model Test

Category	Name of Index	Result	Level of Acceptance (Hair et al., 2019a)	Remarks
Absolute Fit	Chi-Square (c^2)	0	The lower, the better	Good Fit
	RMSEA	0	$RMR \leq 0.05$	Good Fit
	RMR	0.028	$RMR \leq 0.04$	Good Fit
	GFI	0.97	$GFI \geq 0.90$	Good Fit
Incremental Fit	CFI	1	The range between 0-1. The higher, the better. Perfect fit 1	Good Fit
	RFI	1	The range between 0-1. The higher, the better. Perfect fit 1	Good Fit
	NFI	1	The range between 0-1. The higher, the better. Perfect fit 1	Good Fit
Parsimonious Fit	PNFI	0.9	The Higher the better	Good Fit

Discussion

As shown in Figure 1, all dimensions reflect the service quality. This means assurance, responsiveness, tangibility, reliability, and empathy can elevate service quality. However, only reliability has loading factors below 0.9, while other loading factors range from 0.95 to 0.98. As a result, the influence of reliability on service quality is less significant than that of other services.

Tangible has the highest loading factor of 0.98, indicating that pilgrims value tangible aspects at most. Tangible aspects include accommodation and transportation during the journey, travel agencies' office location and conditions, or the employee's appearance. Accommodation provided to pilgrims plays an important role as they have the highest loading factors (0.75), followed by employee appearances (neat and appropriate) and the access and condition of the travel office (with loading factors of 0.73). Interestingly, transportation has the least impact on service as its loading factors are only 0.68. In general, pilgrims are transported by airplane to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and by bus while in KSA. Pilgrims might perceive that most airplanes and buses are similar without significant differences in service. As a result, the transportation aspect has the least impact on tangible things.

Responsiveness has a loading factor of 0.97. Responsiveness refers to the willingness to provide prompt service and help customers. Pilgrims value it most when travel agencies can respond to their requests promptly, followed by the ability of travel agencies to always inform the itinerary in detail. Nevertheless, **empathy** has a loading factor of 0.96. Empathy reflects the delivery of care and individual attention to pilgrims. Feeling warm and welcome is the most important service for pilgrims. The item significantly has a higher value than other items. In addition, pilgrims want travel agencies to understand their needs. These two items might be important as pilgrims come from diverse backgrounds and needs. Thus, they may have different perspectives or needs during the journey. Moreover, traveling with strangers during the journey makes it important to feel warm and welcome.

Assurance discusses how employees' capabilities convey trust and confidence; it has a loading factor of 0.95. The activities of efficiently interacting with pilgrims and the employee's capabilities are the two most important factors in elevating assurance. They have similar loading

factors of 0.71. On the other hand, employees' politeness has the least impact on enhancing assurance. The loading factor is only 0.62.

Reliability refers to providing services as promised and reliably. Interestingly, its loading factor (0.72) is far below other indicators. This does not mean that this service is not important in elevating the quality of the service. It only indicates that the reliability value is less than other indicators. Umrah is a religious journey with relatively high complexity. For instance, it involves the government/kingdom of home and host countries, transportation/accommodation/visa service providers, and travel agencies. It indicates that a slight "mistake" might be considered understandable. In addition, the pilgrims focus on performing the Umrah as guided by al-Quran and Hadist. Then, if performing the ritual accordingly, other service deviations might be acceptable. Among items in reliability, the activities of fulfilling services as promised accurately and reliably and the ability to solve pilgrims independently have a similar high loading factor of 0.80. Indicating the importance of these activities. Table 4 shows significantly pivotal items in elevating pilgrims' perceived service quality.

Table 4. Items that Elevate Pilgrims' Perceived Service Quality

Dimension (loading factor)	Item (loading factor)
Tangible (0.98)	Accommodation (0.75)
	Travel Agencies Office (access and condition) (0.73)
	Employee Appearance (neat and appropriate) (0.73)
Responsiveness (0.97)	Respond to pilgrims' requests promptly (0.75)
	Always providing a detailed itinerary (0.74)
Empathy (0.96)	Make the pilgrims feel welcome and warm (0.81)
	Understanding Pilgrims' Needs (0.77)
Assurance (0.95)	Efficient interaction with pilgrims (0.71)
	Employee capabilities in answering questions regarding Umrah (0.71)
Reliability (0.72)	Fulfilling service as promised (0.8)
	Solving pilgrims' issues independently (0.8)

CONCLUSION

This study aims to detail factors that elevate the service quality of Umrah pilgrims. Utilizing CFA, this paper finds that responsiveness, tangibility, reliability, and empathy greatly affect service quality. Regarding tangible aspects, it shows that accommodation plays a significant role, as does the access and condition of travel agencies' offices. The high impact of responsiveness, empathy, and assurance implies that human interaction and emotional support are pivotal in the Umrah context. On the other hand, less impact of reliability demonstrates that pilgrims are more likely to accept or understand slight deviation or promised service.

This paper contributes to the literature on service quality as it details the aspects of quality that elevate the service. There is much literature on service quality, but limited studies focus on detailing the service quality that is pivotal for Umrah pilgrims. In addition, this paper might benefit Umrah service providers as they might understand what activities and actions matter for Umrah pilgrims.

This paper has several limitations. Firstly, the sample was taken in one period of time. Second, the tendency of samples to be homogeneous as the respondents come from the same country. As a result, future studies might adopt longitudinal studies with diverse countries' backgrounds.

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