

Modeling Customer Satisfaction towards Private Hospitals during Covid-19 Pandemic in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to find out what factors influence outpatient satisfaction in private hospitals in the Klang Valley. This study employs the SERVQUAL model to determine which factors have the greatest impact on patient satisfaction in Klang Valley private hospitals. The tangibles are dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The SERVQUAL dimensions investigated in this study are tangibles, dependability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These factors are thought to be well researched in terms of influencing outpatient satisfaction, but they can still influence patient satisfaction in private hospitals in the Klang Valley. The sample of 414 was successfully collected and further analysed using SPSS. The overall SERVQUAL model can predict outpatient satisfaction, according to the findings, with the responsiveness dimension being the most powerful predictor for private hospitals in Klang. This research also contributes to the UNDP's-SDG efforts to reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and to promote mental health and well-being by 2030.

Keywords: Outpatient Satisfaction, Malaysia, Private Hospitals, SERVQUAL

Introduction

Jan and Ishtiaq (2017) found that patient satisfaction is higher in private hospitals compared to public hospitals. Besides that, Fatima et al. (2017) found that higher quality

aspects of private healthcare services (e.g., physical environment, customer-friendly environment, responsiveness, communication, privacy, and safety) are positively related to patient satisfaction and loyalty, which is mediated through patient satisfaction. On the other hand, Geberu et al. (2019) opined that there is no significant difference between public and private hospitals in terms of patient satisfaction. Geberu et al. (2019) also found that sex, waiting time, getting information on how to prevent illnesses from coming back, and getting information on how to use drugs and their side effects were all important factors for patient satisfaction.

Moreover, certain aspects, such as the design of the hospital, according to Aljunid et al. (2020), have a significant impact on patient satisfaction, and it also showed that improving the space layout of inpatient units can result in significant improvements in patient experience, with accessibility being the least of the patients' concerns while in the hospital. Given the above discrepancies in the academic literature, there is clearly a literature gap because the factors influencing patient satisfaction cannot be affirmed despite extensive research (Aljunid et al., 2020; Fatima et al., 2017; Geberu et al., 2019; Jan and Ishtiaq, 2017; Poudel et al., 2020). Hence, there is still a need to determine how the service quality dimensions influence patient satisfaction towards private hospitals in Klang Valley.

Problem Statement

In today's complex and fast changing world, healthcare organisations such as clinics and hospitals are among the fields in the service-based sector that offer healthcare and become the attention and focus of the community. With the increased demand for healthcare services, concerns like customer satisfaction and loyalty have become important topics for both the management team and the consumer. However, there is not much literature revealing the relationship between the overall SERVQUAL and outpatient satisfaction. Hence, this research will address this problem with both the overall and individual SERVQUAL dimensions.

The research conducted by Simsekler, Alhashmi, Azar, et al. (2021) showed that higher patient satisfaction can have a positive impact on the patient and will result in better health outcomes, which includes better quality of life and the likelihood of recommending hospital services to others is higher. Fatima, Malik, and Shabbir (2018) concluded that the relationship between patient satisfaction and patient loyalty is interrelated; hence, patient satisfaction is an important factor that creates loyalty among patients towards the healthcare service provider. Furthermore, Agyapong et al. (2017) stated that patient satisfaction is defined as the difference between expected service and experienced or perceived service, and it is an important quality indicator for healthcare providers. Hence, from the statistics provided by the American Customer Satisfaction Index (2020), the worrying trend is that hospitals are at the lower end of the overall customer satisfaction among industries in America, which could prompt further studies to evaluate the customer satisfaction of private hospitals in Klang Valley.

Research Questions

In this research, the influence of the SERVQUAL dimensions on patient satisfaction will be studied, and the correlation between SERVQUAL dimensions and patient satisfaction will be determined in private hospitals in Klang Valley.

RQ1: Will tangibles have an influence on outpatient satisfaction?

RQ2: Will reliability have an influence on outpatient satisfaction?

RQ3: Will responsiveness have an influence on outpatient satisfaction?

RQ4: Will assurance have an influence on outpatient satisfaction?

RQ5: Will empathy have an influence on outpatient satisfaction?

RQ6: Will SERVQUAL have an influence on outpatient satisfaction?

Literature Review

Customer Satisfaction

Saeidi, Rasli, Saeidi, et al. (2017) concluded that there is a positive and impactful relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality in four retail stores (Tesco, AEON/Jusco, Giant, and The Store) in Johor Bahru and highlighted the importance of service quality in satisfying customers' needs. Furthermore, Adam, Kee, Junaina, et al. (2020) concluded that the most influential attribute influencing customer satisfaction of Grab in Malaysia is quality, which is then followed by reliability. Lye, Tan, Haldorai, et al. (2018) concluded that the factors affecting customer satisfaction the most in the public railway service in Klang Valley are safety, followed by responsiveness, and comfort, which highlights that the psychological needs of a customer have to be met first in order to achieve better customer satisfaction.

Tan, Ojo, Cheah, et al. (2019) studied the predictors (hospital image, patient safety, personnel quality, and social responsibility) of patient satisfaction in both private and public hospitals in Melaka and Johor and concluded that the best predictor is personnel quality. Hence, hospitals should invest more in personnel training to ensure improved patient satisfaction, which increases the patient's willingness to return for additional treatments.

Furthermore, Ismail, Gan, and Ahmad (2020) concluded that patient satisfaction with pharmacy services was high in randomly selected public health clinics in Klang Valley, with age, education, frequency of visit, self-perceived health status, and pharmacist knowledge being important determinants. (Tan et al., 2019). However, Aljunid et al. (2020) found that certain aspects of interior design have a significant influence on patient satisfaction and that improving the space layout of inpatient units can result in significant improvements in patient experience, with accessibility being the least of the patients' concerns while in the hospital.

Although there is a lot of research (Geberu et al., 2019; Karagoz et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2018; Setyawan et al., 2020) that is studying patient satisfaction, the research differs in the independent variables. On top of that, the context of all this research varies, so there is a need to closely examine the feasibility of specific influencing factors on the phenomenon of patient satisfaction as there are many such factors influencing it.

Factors Influencing Patient Satisfaction

SERVQUAL is a method that assesses both aspects of expectation and perception of service performance (Agyapong et al., 2017; Tripathi and Siddiqui, 2018; Zun, Ibrahim, and Hamid, 2018).

Tangibles

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), tangibles are defined as physical facilities, tools or equipment utilised to perform services, and the appearance of staff members. Ahmed et al. (2017) opined that this component is a significant service quality dimension that may be used to improve quality performance in the service sector. In the healthcare setting context, the tangible dimension, according to Zun et al. (2018), is the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, and healthcare professionals.

As a result, according to Mohammadi-Sardo and Salehi (2019), tangibles were selected as the most relevant component that could improve patient satisfaction with the emergency department's treatment. Patient satisfaction was found to be most influenced by tangible factors in hospitals, such as the quality of the environment in which patients were treated, medical spaces, facilities, and equipment, physical instruments, and the appearance of hospital staff members.

This was further supported by Zun et al. (2018), who identified the tangible dimension as the most critical dimension in need of improvement, based on the study's findings that the tangible dimension had the highest service quality gap. Furthermore, Tripathi and Siddiqui (2020) stated that within the realm of tangibility, the most significant feature was judged to be "high standards of hygiene and cleanliness," followed by "up to-date equipment" and "visually appealing facilities".

According to a study conducted by Umoke, Umoke, Nwimo, et al. (2020), patients in public hospitals had the highest satisfaction with empathy and the lowest satisfaction with tangibility. As a result, managers can concentrate their quality development efforts on areas such as health personnel's tidy appearance, waiting facilities for attendants and patients, and hygienic conditions at the hospital.

Reliability

According to Parasuraman et al. (1988), reliability is the ability to provide accurate service on time and at the same level of performance every time. According to a study by Rahman, Islam, Mitu, et al. (2019), reliability is defined as the ability to deliver services at the shortest time frame, fulfill their promises, and deliver service to customers at the designated time. This increases customer satisfaction and trust in the provider because their performance improves over time and consistently meets customer expectations.

Study by Kwateng et al. (2019), service quality reliability in the healthcare sector involves a healthcare provider's capacity to give treatment, diagnostic tests, and other services on time, demonstrate an interest in solving patients' problems, and provide correct information about the procedure.

Azmi, Rahman, Mustafi, et al. (2017) discovered that the relationship between reliability and patient satisfaction is very significant at the 1% level of significance for private hospitals in Bangladesh, implying that there is a high level of accuracy in providing quality treatments.

In a study conducted by Ali (2018), patients in a teaching hospital were dissatisfied with three dimensions: tangibles, reliability, and assurance. Reliability was the worst performing factor, with disappointing items including commitment to punctuality, handling patients' difficulties, and reliance on the researched facility. This was concurred by Anabila, Kumi, and Anomi (2019). "Reliability" was not identified as a significant factor of customer satisfaction. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that patients regard hospital reliability as a core service function (assumed) rather than a component of service enhancement.

Responsiveness

The term "responsiveness" refers to an organization's employees' readiness to assist consumers by providing prompt service (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Responsiveness is another service characteristic that is critical in exceeding customer expectations; it refers to the

employees' preparedness and eagerness to provide service, which includes the timeliness of services (Neupane & Devkota, 2017).

Additionally, it entails paying attention to the customer's safety and concerns during the transaction, as well as the employee's particular attention and flexible operation hours. These are critical in meeting the expectation of customers that responsiveness will delight them and boost their likelihood of doing business with the organization.

Mohammadi-Sardo and Salehi (2019) opined that responsiveness has an impact on patient satisfaction since it includes informing patients about received care, delivering immediate service, showing enthusiasm to help patients, and responding to patient requests. According to the findings of Kwanteng et al. (2019), the gap variations observed between public and private health institutions on the responsiveness dimension are statistically significant.

According to Tripathi and Siddiqui (2020), the most desired attribute by respondents (weight of 56 percent) while deciding on the responsiveness of healthcare services is "promptness of staff." Furthermore, Zun et al. (2018) concluded that the most satisfied SERVQUAL dimensions were dependability and responsiveness since both dimensions had the least SQ gap in 1 Malaysia Clinic in Kota Bharu, Kelantan, according to the findings of their study.

Assurance

Assurance is staff expertise, professionalism, and the capacity to inspire trust and confidence (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Employees should be equipped with the information and skills necessary to offer the best possible service to their customers.

According to Kwateng et al. (2019), the assurance dimension in the healthcare context was a reflection of service quality delivery at public and private health facilities related to doctors' or nurses' competence or skilfulness, confidence offered to patients or privacy provided to them during treatment, how respectful doctors/nurses were to patients, and whether the doctors/nurses had good communication skills.

Azmi et al. (2017) came to the conclusion that the assurance of patient satisfaction is extremely significant at the one percent level of significance, which means that private hospitals in Bangladesh are capable of providing adequate quality services. According to Al-Neyadi, Salam, and Malik (2018), assurance is the most significant SERVQUAL characteristic, whereas responsiveness is the least important.

Furthermore, there is no significant distinction in terms of patient satisfaction between private and public healthcare organisations. On top of that, according to Essel (2020), the assurance component contributed the most to patient satisfaction in Ghana's public healthcare system, while convenience and availability contributed the least. Kwateng et al. (2019) found an interesting finding while comparing the service quality between public and private healthcare. The expectation for the assurance dimension of public hospitals is higher compared with private hospitals.

Empathy

The individual attention given to a customer, which is given out of the passion of an employee of the organization and able to go the extra mile, is defined as empathy by Parasuraman et al. (1988). As stated by Mohammadi-Sado and Salehi (2018), the empathy

dimension in the healthcare context is defined as the care and special attention given by hospital employees to individual patients.

As reported by Kwateng et al. (2019), the tangibility and empathy dimensions are the dimensions with the highest expectation score in private hospital settings. This means that patients who visit private hospitals have high expectations for the empathy dimension, which must be met in order to improve patient satisfaction. As a result of the increasing frequency of clinic visits, Zun et al. (2018) concluded that patients expected more from the empathy dimension (i.e., the care and attention offered by a healthcare worker) as a determinant of satisfaction, which was supported by the data from their research.

According to Dopeykar, Bahadori, Mehdizabeh, et al. (2018), patient satisfaction can be increased in all dimensions, particularly responsiveness and empathy, by correctly planning, prioritising services, and assessing processes in light of the patients' expectations. Using SERVQUAL and HEALTHQUAL models, Sharifi, Hosseini, Mohammadpour, et al. (2021) discovered that the highest quality gaps were observed in the "Empathy" dimension, drawing the attention of policymakers to develop a reform plan that might include improving the "Empathy" dimension, paying attention to patients when utilising health services, proper training of staff on how to deal with clients, and implementing a quality improvement programme.

Ravangard, Farhadi, Shokrpour, et al. (2017) came to the conclusion that the most significant discrepancy was in empathy. This may be owing to overcrowding in public hospitals, a high demand on medical staff, and a resultant incapacity of hospital professionals to treat patients correctly in accordance with their individual characteristics.

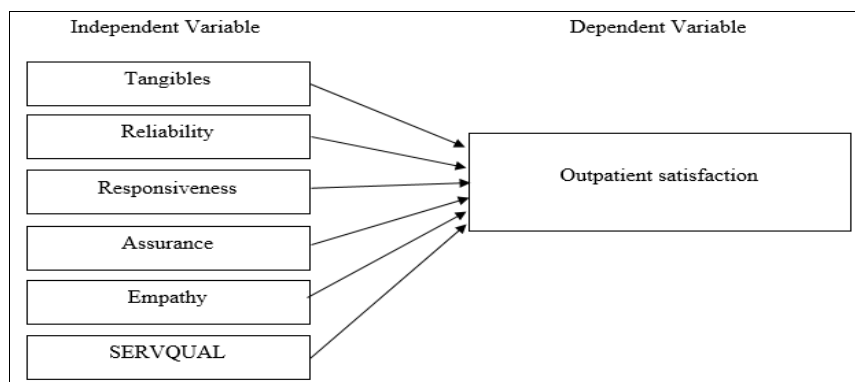


Figure 1: *Conceptual Framework*

Hypotheses

In terms of obtaining the purpose of assessing patient satisfaction with service quality provided by private hospitals in the Klang Valley, as well as the research objectives of analysing how well service quality predicts customer satisfaction, as well as the influence between the five dimensions of service quality and patient satisfaction, The following are the research hypotheses:

- H1:** Tangibles is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction
- H2:** Reliability is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction
- H3:** Responsiveness is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction
- H4:** Assurance is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction
- H5:** Empathy is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction

H6: SERVQUAL is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction

Research Methodology

The sampling plan adopted in this study will use the non-probability to resolve the current pandemic issue where we cannot conduct surveys outdoors. Questionnaires will be sent to their friends, family, coworkers, and other people in their network who have used the outpatient services of a private hospital in the Klang Valley.

According to the Health Facts 2019, there were a total of 4,916,437 patients who visited private hospitals in Malaysia (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2019). There are a total of 167 private hospitals in Malaysia, of which in the Klang Valley alone (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor) there are 93 private hospitals (Senarai Hospital Swasta Berlesen Bawah AKTA 586, 2021). As a result, the target research population will be approximately 2,737,896 patients in Klang Valley private hospitals. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the sample size will be 384 because the research's target population exceeds 1,000,000. However, the sample size of 414 was successfully collected.

Results

Based on Table 1 below, the standardized coefficients of the individual independent variables, the highest predictability of outpatient satisfaction is responsiveness (Beta = 0.869), followed by assurance (Beta = 0.446). The lowest influence is reported to be empathy, which has a beta value of 0.421.

Table 1: *Coefficients*

Model	Coefficients			t	Sig.
	Unstandardized	Standardized			
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.370	.260		5.268	.000
Tangibles	.667	.062	.467	10.717	.000
(Constant)	1.264	.284		4.459	.000
Reliability	.688	.067	.449	10.205	.000
(Constant)	.730	.097		7.548	.000
Responsiveness	.831	.023	.869	35.651	.000
(Constant)	1.911	.222		8.596	.000
Assurance	.512	.051	.446	10.114	.000
(Constant)	1.922	.237		8.094	.000
Empathy	.534	.057	.421	9.417	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Outpatient Satisfaction

The regression analysis was performed on each of the SERVQUAL dimensions and were found to be a significant predictor ($p < 0.05$) and all the beta values are positive which indicates a positive predictor for outpatient satisfaction. Hence the hypotheses of H1 to H5 were accepted.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The model summary as shown in Table 2 below shows that the model fits the research. The R square value is 0.772 which indicates that 77.2% of outpatient satisfaction can be predicted by all the independent variables which are tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. On the other hand, the remaining 22.8% are explained by other factors which are not included in this research.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.879a	.772	.769	.247	1.945

a. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Responsiveness, Tangibles, Assurance, Reliability
 b. Dependent Variable: Outpatient Satisfaction

According to Table 3, the ANOVA of the regression which has an overall P-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This signifies that the regression is statistically significant hence the regression model can be used to predict outpatient satisfaction. Hypothesis 6 is accepted.

Table 3: Regression ANOVA for Outpatient Satisfaction

ANOVAa						
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	84.793	5	16.959	276.663	.000b
	Residual	25.009	408	.061		
	Total	109.802	413			

a. Dependent Variable: Outpatient Satisfaction
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Empathy, Responsiveness, Tangibles, Assurance, Reliability

Summary of Findings

Table 4: Summary of Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Status
H1: Tangibles is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction	Accepted
H2: Reliability is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction	Accepted
H3: Responsiveness is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction	Accepted
H4: Assurance is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction	Accepted
H5: Empathy is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction	Accepted
H6: SERVQUAL is a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction	Accepted

The research hypotheses are summarised in Table 4 below. All the hypotheses tested were accepted in which tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance were found to be a positive and significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a significant positive relationship between tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy towards outpatient satisfaction. The most significant influencer is the responsiveness dimension. The least significant predictor of outpatient satisfaction is the empathy dimensions. Hence, in order for private hospitals in Klang Valley to improve their outpatient satisfaction, they need to improve the responsiveness dimension, which includes strategies to improve it.

The contribution of this research towards academia would be significant as there is limited literature in the context of how SERVQUAL influences outpatients' satisfaction, which is in the context of Klang Valley private hospitals. With the results of this research, the responsiveness dimension of the SERVQUAL model can be seen as the strongest predictor of outpatient satisfaction. Hence, this would contribute to a different result where only one dimension has the most significant results.

The private hospitals in Klang Valley can use the results of this study to learn more about how to help their patients. Their hospitals' service quality, which is the main influencer of patient satisfaction, which in turn would increase patient loyalty and increase the revenue of the organization, The SERVQUAL dimensions mentioned in this research would be the main focus of the industry as each individual dimension has a positive and significant influence on outpatient satisfaction. This study can serve as an indicator for policymakers in encouraging patients to seek modern medical treatments in hospitals in order to meet the SDG of reducing premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases.

The research is restricted to private hospitals in the Klang Valley. Furthermore, due to time constraints and the pandemic, the study cannot be conducted on hospital grounds, which could compromise the study's accuracy. Furthermore, the study is limited to five SERVQUAL characteristics: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, with other dimensions that may influence outpatient satisfaction being excluded.

The future research direction could be expanded to all the private hospitals in Malaysia and to expand the examine other tools such as the SERVPERF or a modified SERVQUAL to better suite the research. On top of that, the future research can examine the gap of outpatient satisfaction between public hospitals and private hospitals in Malaysia.

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