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# A STUDY OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION TOWARD HOMESTAY SERVICE QUALITY AT MERLIMAU, MELAKA

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## Abstract

In recent years, the rapid evolution of rural homestays has become a cornerstone of rural revitalization policies. However, the global pandemic that emerged in early 2020 presented formidable challenges to the industry, exposing the vulnerability of self-employed operators to operational failures and economic risks. Recognizing that the tourism sector is Malaysia's second-largest economic contributor, the government has strategically promoted the homestay program as an engine for socio-economic development in rural areas. Central to this development is service quality, a critical determinant that fosters customer satisfaction and long-term brand loyalty. This case study aims to evaluate customer satisfaction toward homestays in Merlimau, Melaka, focusing on three primary dimensions: room cleanliness, facility provision, and interior spaciousness. The research methodology employed a quantitative approach, utilizing online questionnaires distributed to 30 respondents, including members of the Merlimau community and students from Politeknik Merlimau. Data analysis conducted via SPSS revealed an overall mean score of 2.69, indicating that customers are only moderately satisfied with the current service quality. Specifically, facilities recorded a mean of 2.76, cleanliness 2.68, and interior spaciousness 2.66. Significant dissatisfaction was identified regarding aesthetic room themes (mean 2.30) and fundamental upkeep, such as floor cleanliness and the condition of bed linens (mean 2.50). To address these gaps, the study proposes strategic solutions, including investing in high-quality sanitation products, modernizing technology such as Wi-Fi and Smart TVs, and optimizing furniture layouts to enhance the perception of space. In conclusion, the findings suggest that homestay operators in Merlimau have yet to meet optimal guest expectations. Continuous service transformation is essential to bridge the satisfaction gap and enhance the competitiveness of rural tourism in the region.

**Keywords :** Customer Satisfaction, Service Quality, Rural Tourism, Mean Score Analysis, Community-Based Tourism

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry has witnessed a significant surge in homestay tourism, establishing it as a thriving sector that offers tourists a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in local cultures and traditions by residing with host families. In Malaysia, the homestay program was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism in 1988 as a strategic product to promote community-based tourism and alternative accommodation, particularly in rural areas. However, the industry faced unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted operations and emphasized the critical need for service quality to ensure business resilience and customer loyalty.

In recent years, homestay tourist has experienced a surge in popularity, establishing itself as a thriving sector within the global tourism industry. This form of travel offers a distinctive opportunity for tourists to fulfil immerse themselves in local cultures, traditions and communities by staying with the local families or individuals in their homes. (Zhang and Tang, 2021). By providing an authentic and personalized travel experiences, homestay facilitates cross – cultural exchange and foster mutual understanding. The growth of homestay tourism can be attributed to several key factors. Modern travelers are increasingly in search of genuine and meaningful experiences that go

beyond conventional hotel accommodations. (Xing and Xie, 2022).

Service quality in the homestay sector is fundamentally linked to the ability of operators to meet guest expectations through tangible and reliable service dimensions. In Merlimau, Melaka, homestay operators often face challenges in managing operations and providing standardized services, which can lead to guest dissatisfaction. It is because customer service quality is a primary driver of satisfaction and repeat business, and it essential to evaluate how physical room standards specifically cleanliness, facilities, and interior layout impact the overall guest experience.

Consequently, this study focuses on evaluating the service quality of homestays in Merlimau, Melaka by addressing three specific research objectives. First, the study aims to identify customer satisfaction toward room cleanliness during their stay, addressing issues such as floor hygiene and the condition of bed linens. Second, the research is conducted to investigate customer satisfaction toward the room facilities provided, including the functionality of air-conditioning, Wi-Fi availability, and safety features like smoke detectors. Finally, the study seeks to determine whether the customer is satisfied toward the room spacious interiors, evaluating aspects such as furniture arrangement, lighting, and the overall aesthetic theme of the room aromatherapy for the mind. Using students at Politeknik Merlimau Melaka as a case study, this project explores how a simple, nature-based tool can help bridge the gap between high-tech lives and a need for real deep relaxation.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1) *The Evolution of Homestay Tourism and Rural Revitalization*

In the contemporary tourism landscape, homestays have emerged as a pivotal mechanism for rural revitalization, offering an authentic "home-away-from-home" experience that facilitates cultural exchange between hosts and guests (Zahir Osman et al., 2023). According to Zhang and Tang (2021), the post-pandemic era has reshaped the homestay industry, where emotional solidarity and safety standards have become primary concerns for travellers. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Tourism has strategically positioned the homestay program as a community-based tourism (CBT) product to bridge the socio-economic gap in rural areas, such as Merlimau, Melaka (Ismail et al., 2016). However,

the sustainability of this sector is heavily reliant on the ability of operators to maintain consistent service standards amidst fluctuating market demands.

### 2) *Theoretical Framework of Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction*

Customer satisfaction in the hospitality sector is widely conceptualized as the psychological outcome of the comparison between prior expectations and perceived performance (Aliman et al., 2016). Service quality, often measured through tangible and intangible dimensions, serves as a significant predictor of guest loyalty. Sharifah Nor Huda Syed Wahid et al. (2017) argue that for homestay programs, tangibility which includes the physical condition of the room and facilities is the most influential factor in determining overall satisfaction. This is particularly relevant in rural settings where guests often trade luxury for authenticity but still expect fundamental hygiene and functional reliability

### 3) *Critical Dimensions of Room Standards*

A. Room cleanliness and hygiene standards cleanliness is the most basic yet critical attribute of service quality. Research by Alzua-Sorzabal et al. (2017) highlights that sanitized environments, specifically in bathrooms and sleeping areas, are non-negotiable for modern travellers. In small-scale homestays, cleanliness often acts as a proxy for professionalism; a lack of hygiene in linens or floors suggests a lack of operational management, which negatively impacts the destination's image (Kasuma et al., 2016).

B. Functional facilities and technological integration of modern facilities within traditional homestays has become a necessity. Ali and Kaldeen (2017) emphasize that the provision of "essential comforts" such as stable Wi-Fi, air conditioning, and safety features (e.g., smoke detectors) are now considered baseline requirements rather than added values. For students and young travelers a key demographic in Merlimau technological amenities are often ranked higher than traditional hospitality gestures in their evaluation of satisfaction (Ferdous et al., 2017).

C. Interior ergonomics and spatial perception the aesthetic and functional layout of a room significantly influences the perceived value of the stay. Jamaluddin et al. (2019) suggest that spaciousness is not merely about square footage but

the efficient arrangement of furniture and lighting. Poor interior design, such as cluttered spaces or unappealing themes, can induce a sense of discomfort, thereby reducing the guest's intention to recommend the establishment to others.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research Design and Instrumentation

This study adopts a quantitative research design to evaluate customer satisfaction levels toward homestay service quality in Merlimau, Melaka. The primary research instrument is a structured questionnaire consisting of four distinct sections: Section A for demographic profiles, Section B for room cleanliness, Section C for room facilities, and Section D for room spacious interiors. To ensure precise measurement, the instrument utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

#### B. Sampling and Data Collection

The study utilizes a purposive sampling technique, focusing on a sample size of 30 respondents. This target population specifically includes the Merlimau community and students of Politeknik Merlimau, Melaka, who have first-hand experience staying at local homestays. Due to time and financial constraints, the researchers also integrated secondary data gathered from books, academic journals, and online platforms to complement the primary findings. The survey was administered via an online platform to ensure accessibility and efficient data gathering.

#### C. Data Analysis Method

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This topic presents the analysis of data acquired from 30 respondents among the community in Merlimau, Melaka. The data was collected through an online platform and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine the mean scores for each research objective.

#### Demographic Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The analysis focuses on calculating mean scores to interpret the levels of satisfaction across the three research objectives. These scores are interpreted based on a specific scale: Data collection method are technique and procedures used to gather information for research purpose.

Table 1: Interpretation of Mean Score Level

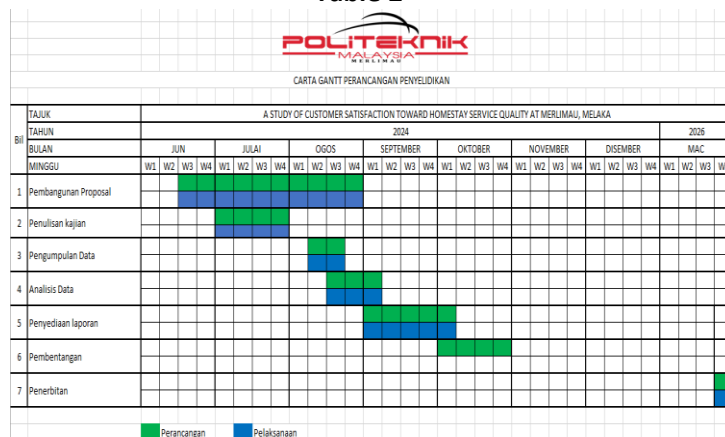
Table 1

Mean Score Range	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.20	Medium
3.21 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

This methodological framework ensures that all findings are critically interpreted and presented systematically to address the research problem.

#### D. Research Gantt Chart

Table 2



The demographic profile of the 30 respondents is summarized below:

- a) Age: The majority of respondents are aged 20–30 (70%), followed by 31–40 (16.7%) and 41–50 (13.3%).
- b) Gender: Female respondents comprise the highest percentage at 76.7%, while males represent 23.3%.

- c) Race: The majority are Malay (83.3%), followed by Chinese (10.0%), Indian (3.3%), and others (3.3%).
- d) Occupation: Employment is the highest category at 56.7%, followed by students (33.3%) and the unemployed (10.0%).
- e) Working Experience: Most respondents have 1–3 years of experience (63.3%), while 20.0% have 10 years or more.

### Analysis of Research Objectives

**Objective 1:** Customer Satisfaction Toward Room Cleanliness The evaluation of room cleanliness resulted in a Medium satisfaction level.

Table 3: Mean Score for Room Cleanliness

Item	Mean Score	Interpretation
The toilet is ready to use	2.90	Medium
The room was ready and clean when check-in	2.83	Medium
The room floor is clean and shiny	2.50	Low
The bed sheets are straightened accordingly	2.50	Low
The mattress is not smelly	2.50	Low

**Objective 2:** Customer Satisfaction Toward Room Facilities The highest score in this section indicates a demand for additional bedding, while general facilities remain at a Medium level

Table 4: Mean Score for Room Facilities

Item	Mean Score	Interpretation
The extra bed needs to be provided	3.23	High
The swimming pool is one of the attractions	3.00	Medium
Electricity sources easy to access	2.80	Medium
The TV is working well	2.60	Low
The bed is comfortable to sleep	2.53	Low

**Objective 3:** Customer Satisfaction Toward Room Spacious Interiors Respondents provided a medium rating for the layout, though aesthetic themes received the lowest overall score.

Table 5: Mean Score for Room Spacious Interiors

Item	Mean Score	Interpretation
The air-conditioning is located near the bed	2.90	Medium
Simple interior design	2.77	Medium
The room is spacious enough	2.67	Medium
The light making the room brighter and more spacious	2.60	Low
Beautiful appropriated room themes	2.30	Low

### Overall Discussion

Based on the analysis, the overall mean score for customer satisfaction toward homestay service quality in Merlimau is 2.69, which falls under the Medium satisfaction category. This indicates that the community and students are not fully satisfied with the current service standards, particularly regarding room themes, bed comfort, and floor cleanliness

### V. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to evaluate the satisfaction levels of the community in Merlimau regarding homestay service quality, specifically focusing on room cleanliness, facilities, and interior spaciousness. Based on the data analysis derived from the distributed questionnaires, the findings conclude that the overall level of customer satisfaction is at a medium level, with a cumulative mean score of 2.69. This result indicates that the majority of respondents comprising local community members and students are not fully satisfied with the current service standards provided by local operators. This gap in satisfaction primarily stems from negative perceptions regarding basic

hygiene, a lack of modern amenities, and inefficient furniture layouts that compromise guest comfort. Consequently, this study confirms that there is an urgent need for homestay operators in Merlimau to transform their service delivery to align with the quality standards expected by modern travellers.




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