

# Effect of INTQUAL and Employees' Relation towards Muslim Friendly Hotels

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## Abstract

The increasing demand for Muslim-friendly products and services has led hoteliers in Malaysia to provide more Muslim-friendly hotel (M.F.H.s) services to fulfill Muslim tourists' needs. However, previous studies have shown that there is still a lack of conformity between M.F.H.s and their guests, which harms M.F.H.s' service performance. It is essential to expand the discussion on improving service performance in M.F.H.s. The information about 390 MFH employees in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor was collected quantitatively, and structural equation modeling and partial least squares analysis were used to look at the information.

**Keywords:** Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL); Employees' Relation; Service Performance; Muslim Friendly Hotels.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/jabs.v7i21.408>

## **1.0 Introduction**

Malaysia was the most preferred destination for Muslim travelers worldwide in 2018 and 2019, contributing over 5 million tourists annually. The positive numbers of Muslim travelers visiting Malaysia have resulted from the Malaysian tourism industry's capability to implement Muslim-friendly tourism products (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020). Muslim Friendly Hotels (M.F.H.s) are one of the tourism products available in Malaysia. It is defined by Shaharuddin et al. (2018) as an accommodation that offers facilities and services conforming to Muslim-friendly principles. The idea of establishing M.F.H.s is born when the demand for Muslim-friendly compliance accommodation is emerging among Muslim travelers (Putit et al., 2016). Since the demand for M.F.H.s is increasing, the development of Muslim Friendly-based hotel concept is also growing. In 2020, there were already 42 certified M.F.H.s in total that available in Malaysia (Yusof, 2020). Like other types of hotel operations, the pinnacle objective for M.F.H.s is achieving the highest level of service performance to guarantee guest satisfaction (Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015). Positive guest feedback related to hotel service performance will undoubtedly lead to a successful hotel business (Putit et al., 2016). The uniqueness of M.F.H.s attributes such as praying facilities, Halal food, and Muslim Friendly-based service operation, has a significant relationship to customer satisfaction, especially among Muslim travelers (Samori et al., 2017). Thus, it is fair to conclude that maintaining Muslim Friendly attributes within the hotel's operation and delivering excellent service performance should be the main priorities among M.F.H.s administrators. The business concept of M.F.H.s is considered one of the most popular in Muslim tourism in Malaysia and around the globe. The Muslim-friendly-based operation offered in M.F.H.s provides halal food and covers the whole area of service operation (Albattat et al., 2018). However, some studies negatively describe the M.F.H.s' business in Malaysia as needing improvement and strength, especially in service standardization and operational requirements. Hence, the operating system of M.F.H.s is still unstable as loopholes in the operational side of M.F.H.s are found in several studies (Albattat et al., 2018). According to Jais and Marzuki (2018), the operating manual, procedures, implementation guidelines, quality standards, circulars, and terms of reference that are considered necessary in the M.F.H.s are still not adequately established. The government's lack of proper service guidance and consultation also led to high uncertainty among M.F.H.s administrators (Razak et al., 2019). In order to satisfy diverse customers' needs, M.F.H.s administrators constantly shift their operating procedures. One example of challenges that may affect M.F.H.s service performance is Quran recitation and Adzan being too loud and disturbing the non-Muslim guest (Razak et al., 2019). This situation will affect guest satisfaction with hotel service procedures. Expanding the discussion around M.F.H. service performance is crucial concerning the problems identified. Thus, this study aims to help M.F.H.s improve their service performance by using Internal Measurement of Service Quality (INTQUAL) to determine the level of service performance in M.F.H.s from employees' perspectives. The INTQUAL model, created by Caruana and Pitt in 1997, is derived from creating an internal measure of service quality. This measure used Parasuraman et al. (1988) service quality measures on two dimensions which are (1)

management of expectation and (2) service reliability, as an adopted model for INTQUAL. As this study aims to improve M.F.H.s' service performance, the other factors that could influence service performance should also be considered. Based on the study by Biggs et al. (2016), the influence of employee relations, which consists of coworkers' and superiors' influence, could also affect the level of service performance. According to Biggs et al. (2016) and Chiaburu and Harrison (2008), coworkers' and superiors' influence can affect service performance, so they can provide information and engage in behavioral support for some activities while discouraging others, thus helping to shape a colleague's beliefs about what he or she should or should not do (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1991; Kram & Isabella, 1985). This study is significant as it provides a comprehensive view of how INTQUAL and employee relations could affect M.F.H.s' service performance. The remaining portions of this paper exhibit literature review, hypotheses development, research methods, data analysis, discussion, contribution to theory and practice, conclusion, and future research directions.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Challenges faced in Muslim-Friendly Hotels**

Despite the mentioned attributes of M.F.H.s, the formal concept of M.F.H.s that can be referred to as the common ground to all M.F.H.s administrators is still unavailable (Shaharuddin et al., 2018). Hence, M.F.H.s administration in Malaysia is based on management's thought and understanding of the M.F.H.s operation (Ahmat et al., 2015). Besides, without proper guidelines to follow, it is undeniable that the M.F.H.s are facing difficulties in running their operation, which causes problems in improving their services (Salleh et al., 2015). Plus, based on the study by Henderson (2010), it is revealed that the international industry players such as Starwood, Hilton, and Inter-Continental hotels group have no intention to shift the operation to the M.F.H.s concept as they view the M.F.H.s concept as still unstable and unpredictable (Shaharuddin et al., 2018). Besides, the lack of understanding of the concept of M.F.H.s causes the low interest of international hotels in operating M.F.H.s business in Malaysia. Nevertheless, the growth of M.F.H.s is increasing as the demand for Muslim tourism products is emerging among Muslim travelers (Putit et al., 2016). However, as mentioned earlier, the service performance problem in M.F.H.s is causing substantial negative impacts which can be generalized on several aspects, such as managing customers' demand, the relationship with guests that cause the low level of satisfaction, and lack of service performance measurement (Razak et al., 2019).

### **2.2 Service Quality**

The competition between hotels in the industry to attract and retain guests is intense, and the possibility of promoting guest intention to re-visit the hotel is a problem when the hotel fails to satisfy the guest with the expected level of service quality, regardless of its price point (Rauch et al., 2015). The consistency of service quality has been a vital success factor

in this dynamic market environment (Mukhles, 2016). Service quality in the hotel industry can be assumed as one of the most critical considerations to achieving a sustained competitive edge and gaining trust from existing and potential guests (Naseem et al., 2011). Service quality is critically important in strengthening the hotel with a competitive advantage. It, therefore, becomes the most significant opportunity for hoteliers to have a different competitive advantage through service quality (Crawford, 2013). Thus, it is considered that service quality is one of the core concepts that hoteliers should focus on more to step to the above level among their competitors (Narangjavana & Hu, 2008). Nevertheless, service quality is a critical feature of service management and service performance (Naseem et al., 2011). Narangjavana and Hu (2008) also mentioned that the most effective method to attract guests is with reasonable service quality. An extensive effort in focusing in terms of service quality not only can offer a comparative edge to the hotel and improve the level of guest engagement. Mukhles (2016) reveal that stakeholders' understanding of service quality efficiency varies between staff, managers, and consumers. Employees may have a greater understanding of the efficiency of the facilities they offer relative to consumers (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Differences in perception can be attributed to several factors. Managers and employees prefer to avoid mentioning deficiencies in the quality of services (Dedeoglu & Demirel, 2015). In other words, they want to uphold the jobs and programs they have done. Looking at the context of M.F.H.s, the most significant issue discussed among the researchers is service performance which is supported by proven evidence that M.F.H.s are still struggling to achieve an acceptable level of service performance towards both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests. However, there is still no exhaustive discussion on service quality in M.F.H.s. Therefore, it is essential to determine and discuss the level of service quality in the M.F.H.s to uncover the truth about service quality in M.F.H.s as well as enable an alternative for M.F.H.s administrators to enhance their level of service performance.

### **2.3 Internal Measurement of Service Quality**

To meet the objective of this research, which is to assess the level of service quality from the point of view of employees, an adapted service quality model, INTQUAL (Caruana & Pitt, 1997), is derived from the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and focusing on measuring the level of service quality from the perspective of employees compared to SERVQUAL model which focuses on identifying the level of service quality from the customer's responses. This metric is used as a two-dimensional service quality measure, which is (1) the management of expectations and (2) the reliability of services as an accepted model for internal service quality measurement. According to the previous research on INTQUAL by Zailani et al. (2006), their study focuses on how internal service quality can affect performance, to investigate the influence of internal service quality measures on business performance in the Malaysia hotel industry and validate the INTQUAL model established by Caruana and Pitt (1997). According to their study, it is proven that INTQUAL is an appropriate model to measure the level of service quality from the employees' perspective. The result will be associated with the

hotel's performance on Return On Capital Employed (ROCE), sales growth, and service performance by measuring the internal service quality. The dimensions of INTQUAL, which consist of management of expectations and service reliability, were implemented in this study to measure the level of service quality provided by service employees in M.F.H.s.

## 2.4 Employees' Relation

Similar to the other concept of hotels, in the context of M.F.H.s, employees' management at work is an important integral part of the management process to provide and retain employees with enabling a positive working environment. Doubtlessly, employees are one of the most vital indicators and focus factors that influence the success or failure of any service sector, especially in the current competitive environment. The sustainability and prosperity of an organization in the turbulent and competitive market situation nowadays depend highly on the employees' quality. Employees' quality is the reflection of the breadth and depth of the knowledge that managers have on the function that needs to be performed to engage competent employees. Looking at the current situation of the hotel industry, hotel managers start to see human resources as major contributors to accomplish service objectives. While the growing numbers of M.F.H.s, the fact that implementing effective employee relation strategies to strengthen the organization and improve M.F.H.s service performance should be realized by M.F.H.s administers and managers. Since the conception of modern economic organizations starts rising, employee relation has been the most critical elements in any sector, including the hotel industry. Employee relationship is one of the most important relationships a person can have with his / her coworkers. Employee relationships can be interactions between individuals and their coworkers, supervisors, and organizations (Brooke, 2022). Cross (1973) measured three aspects of employee relations, and two aspects are generally characterized in the literature on leader-member exchange (L.M.X.) and team member exchange (T.M.X.). Leader-member exchanges emphasize the value of interactions between subordinates and managers (Xie et al., 2020). The Leader-member exchange (L.M.X.) theory is a relationship-based, dyadic leadership theory. L.M.X. theory strongly emphasizes that leaders influence employees in their team (referred to as members) through the quality of relationships they develop with them. A good quality relationship is characterized by honesty, commitment, mutual respect loyalty (Xie et al., 2020; Biggs et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, the Team-Member Exchange (T.M.X.) was first identified by Seers (1989) and originated from L.M.X. research. High-quality exchanges are focused on confidence, loyalty, and mutual responsibility, while low-quality exchanges are bound by job contracts (Chen, 2018; Wech et al., 2009). Team-member interactions are like L.M.X. but include coworkers rather than superiors. The idea is that high-quality exchanges are reciprocal and contribute to better results. Leader-member exchanges and T.M.X. are essential predictors of work satisfaction, organizational engagement, and turnover intentions (Chen, 2018; Major et al., 1995). The value of L.M.X. and T.M.X. cannot be understated, and this research aims to draw on their contribution to employees working in M.F.H.s. The concept established in this study is that the dimensions of the relationship between employees

consist of the influence of superiors and coworkers, which influence M.F.H.s service performance. In other words, individuals' relationships with their coworkers, their managers, and the company may affect the success of M.F.H.'s services performance.

## **2.5 Service Performance**

Service performance has been considered at two levels: an organizational level that covers all organizational activity and an individual level linked to personal or employee performance. The level of service performance is often reflected in the employee's behavior, as per Xu and Yeh (2014), who find that service performance has a significant positive correlation with employees' service behaviour; in other words, to which the employee is competent to that the service is good. Dimensions of service performance have also been subject to different itemization. Some authors considered two core elements for service performance: efficiency performance, defined as completing service within set time standards. Quality performance is defined as providing a durable solution to customer problems. Aryee (2016) and Garcia-Buades et al. (2016) classified and mentioned service performance dimensions in their works. These dimensions have also been shaped as convenience perception, customer service, and resolving complaints, putting as indicators for performance in logical sequence (Hanafi & Ibrahim, 2018; Hoang, 2016). These three dimensions have been considered critical for service performance since 1990. They have also been developed recently as factors affecting performance-enhancing customer service (Hanafi & Ibrahim, 2016; Hoang, 2016). Through the dimensions of service performance, which consist of convenience perception, complaint resolving, and customer service, it is appropriate to predict M.F.H.s' service performance. It is crucial to ensure that M.F.H.s' service performance is improved as the better and higher the performance of M.F.H.s' services than the competitors, the more optimistic and appropriate picture of M.F.H.s' services will be formed in the minds of both Muslim and non-Muslim customers. The performance of the services offered by M.F.H.s can be a crucial factor in attracting and satisfying customers with the services provided by M.F.H.s. Hotels offer services, and regular and appropriate services will increase customers' positive image. On the other hand, improved service performance would make M.F.H.s customers and guests repeat their purchasing process, leading to an improved revisit of customers' intentions.

## **3.0 Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development**

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

Having identified the variables in the reviews of the relevant literature, the variable of interest (dependent) in this study is INTQUAL which includes management of expectation and service reliability, and employees' relations which dimensions are superiors' influence and coworkers' influence which are predicted to influence M.F.H.s service performance. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

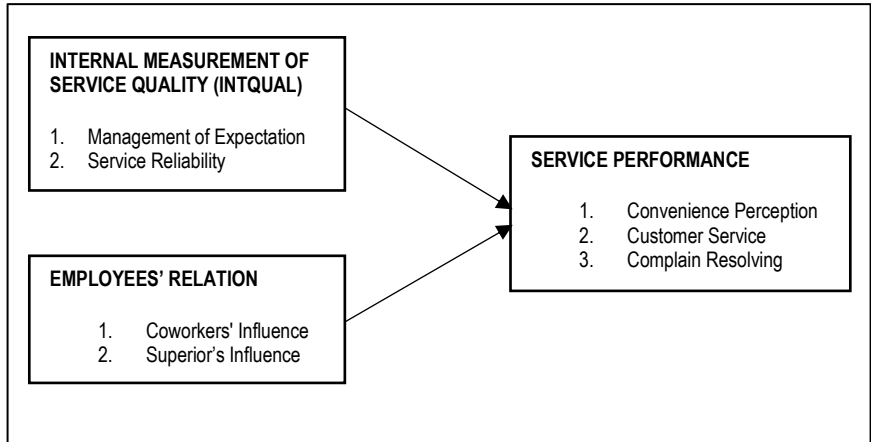


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

(Source: Zailani et al., (2006); Biggs et al., (2016); Hanafi and Ibrahim (2018))

### 3.2 Relationship between INTQUAL and Service Performance

In the context of the hotel industry, INTQUAL, which consists of management of expectations and service reliability, was used to evaluate the level of service quality from the employees' perspective (Zailani et al., 2006). It was discovered that using INTQUAL can improve the hotel's service performance. After all, a significant effort to concentrate on internal measurement of service quality can give the hotel a competitive advantage and increase service performance. Based on these reported findings, which were from research relating to the variables, it is therefore conjectured that:

H1: There is a significant relationship between INTQUAL and service performance.

H1.1: There is a significant relationship between expectations management and service performance.

H1.2: There is a significant relationship between service reliability and service performance.

### 3.3 Relationship between Employees' Relations and Service Performance

It is worth reiterating that good employee relations, consisting of the influence of superiors and coworkers, will ensure that the employees obtain the guidance and information they need to help support the operations, services, principles, and policies of the organization. (Redmond, 2013; Dessler, 2004). Employee relations focus on managing the relationship between workers and employers to improve their commitment to service (Gennard & Judge, 2002), excitement, achievement (Hameed, 2009), loyalty, productivity (Mike, 2008), and motivation (Crandall & Perrewew, 2005) thus enhancing their level of service performance. Hence, it is conjectured that:

H2: There is a significant relationship between employees' relation and service performance.

H2.1: There is a significant relationship between superiors' influence and service performance.

H2.2: There is a significant relationship between coworkers' influence and service performance.

## **4.0 Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative analysis with a combination of cross-sectional research methodology since this study intends to quantify a relationship in one new conceptual framework with a one-time data collection method (Creswell, 2014). A total of 390 respondents agreed to participate in this study, where they were selected using a convenience sampling technique, and the questionnaire was distributed using the social media platform. Items from Zailani et al. (2006) were adapted for measuring management expectation and service reliability variables. In contrast, items developed by Biggs et al. (2016) were adapted for measures of superior's influence and coworker's influence variables. This study adapted items from the Hanafi and Ibrahim (2018) research in terms of service performance variables. As for the statistical analysis procedure, the Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (i.e., PLS-SEM) estimation multivariate data technique was used since this study intends to explore the new conceptual framework simultaneously (Hair et al., 2017). In addition, the significance test in this PLS-SEM analysis was computed using the Bootstrapping method, which can be considered more robust than the conventional t-test method (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, 5000 replications of samples were computed as suggested by Hair et al. (2017) to get reliable results for empirical t-statistics and Bias Corrected (i.e., BCa) bootstrap.

## **5.0 Findings**

### **5.1 Measurement Model Analysis**

The measurement model analysis indicated that all items used for measuring the variables in this model were valid from the convergent validity aspect (Table 1). It is because the factor loading values were above 0.70, and then the value of Average Variance Explain, Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha was also above 0.50 and 0.70 (Hair et al., 2017). The HTMT ratio analysis also indicated that each variable in this model was discriminated against since the ratio value was below 0.90 (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, it confirms that each variable in this model can be considered to have optimal convergence and discriminant validities.



Table 1. Convergent validity for the measurement model

Indicator	Loading	AVE	$\gamma$	$\alpha$
Management Expectation				
I am confident that my hotel promotes our service with utmost responsibility on information validity (ME1)	0.826*			
I believe that my hotel shows great value and cares for both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (ME2)	0.903*			
I have a good idea about what Muslim and Non-Muslim guests expect from our service (ME3)	0.908*	0.728	0.930	0.904
I believe that regular contact with Muslim and Non-Muslim guests can enhance our understanding of customer expectations (ME4)	0.895*			
I am confident that regular contact with guests will enhance our understanding of guests' expectations (ME5)	0.720*			
Service Reliability				
I believe that in my hotel, performing the services ethically to both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests is our main target (SR1)	0.866*			
I can provide service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests accurately and promptly (SR2)	0.872*			
I believe that my hotel trained me to provide quality service to both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SR3)	0.833*	0.748	0.937	0.916
I am confident that my hotel always encouraged me to find a way to delight both Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SR4)	0.860*			
I am confident that all employees are trained to be clear on their career paths through quality and excellent service performance (SR5)	0.893*			
Superior's Influence				
I am confident that my superiors always respect me and my coworkers (SI1)	0.866*			
I often receive recognition and appreciation from my superiors (SI2)	0.905*			
I find it easy to communicate and work with my superiors (SI3)	0.901*	0.778	0.946	0.929
I believe that my superior always encourage positive working relationship (SI4)	0.900*			
I am confident that my superiors did not favor certain groups or individuals over others (SI5)	0.837*			
Coworker's Influence				
I can work efficiently with the majority of my coworkers (CI1)	0.897*			
I have never come into conflict with my coworkers (CI2)	0.902*			
I find it easy to work in a group with my coworkers (CI3)	0.881*			
I am confident that I have a positive working culture with my coworkers (CI4)	0.874*	0.785	0.948	0.931
I can have a positive working environment while performing service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (CI5)	0.876*			
Service Performance				
I believe that the guests can feel safe in their transactions with me (SP1)	0.774*			
I believe that my hotel has up-to-date equipment complying with Muslim Friendly Practice (SP2)	0.914*			
I believe that my hotel always tries to improvise the service procedures to ensure guests satisfaction (SP3)	0.910*	0.756	0.939	0.918
I am confident that guests' honoring programs are good and done regularly (SP4)	0.879*			
I believe that my hotel provides high-quality service to Muslim and Non-Muslim guests (SP5)	0.862*			

Table 2. HTMT discriminant analysis for measurement Model

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1)	-				
(2)	0.812*	-			
(3)	0.792*	0.799*	-		
(4)	0.813*	0.784*	0.851*	-	
(5)	0.875*	0.861*	0.823*	0.817*	-

Note: (1) = Management Expectation; (2) = Service Reliability; (3) = Superior's Influence; (4) = Co-worker's Influence; (5) = Service Performance; \* $p < 0.05$ .

## 5.2 Structural Model Analysis

The structural analysis revealed that management expectation, service reliability, superior's influence, and coworker's influence variables could explain around 72% variance in service performance variables. The analysis also indicated that management expectations and service reliability are a medium effect on service performance. In contrast, the superior's and coworker's influence can be considered a small effect size relationship. In addition, all independent variables were found to have a positive, statistically significant effect on the dependent variable at a 5% significance level since the p-value was below 0.05 (Hair et al., 2017). It is also confirmed by the BCa Bootstrapping confidence interval analysis, where the 95% confidence interval did not consist of the value zero (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Structural model analysis

Path	$\beta$	t-statistic	p-value	95% BCa Bootstrap	$f^2$	Remark
ME $\rightarrow$ SP	0.258	5.604**	<0.01	(0.108, 0.412)	0.156	Medium
SR $\rightarrow$ SP	0.259	5.641**	<0.01	(0.113, 0.425)	0.161	Medium
SI $\rightarrow$ SP	0.184	2.015*	0.045	(0.013, 0.364)	0.025	Small
CI $\rightarrow$ SP	0.215	2.419*	0.016	(0.095, 0.374)	0.054	Small

## 6.0 Conclusion

Undeniably, INTQUAL and employees' relation contribute significantly to the improvisation of service performance for M.F.H.s. By referring to the results of data analysis, it shows that if the average level of management expectation, service reliability, superior's influence, and coworker's influence were simultaneously high, then simultaneously it will increase the average level of service performance. On the other hand, the analysis also revealed that management expectation and service reliability were the primary factors affecting service performance because both path coefficient values were approximately high. Besides that, the role of employee relations was also identified as another important factor in leading employees to provide excellent service, especially in terms of coworkers' influence and superiors' influence. Based on the above discussion, the paper offers several theoretical implications. Findings from this study will substantially expand the body of knowledge relating to the level of service performance in M.F.H.s. As past studies relating to M.F.H.s focus on operational challenges aspects, this study has its novelty through the implementation of INTQUAL model and employees' relation in improving the level of service performance in M.F.H.s. Findings from this study also provide a confirmation whether the

hypotheses constructed based on findings from existing literature are supported or rejected thus enables the researcher to identify similarities or differences compared to previous findings. In addition, the validated tool of INTQUAL that are used in measuring the level of service performance in M.F.H.s will enable future academic studies to use or adapted for research on M.F.H.s at government offices, universities, private sector and government link companies. This paper also contributes to practical implications for the M.F.H.s segment. It is expected that this research will help inform how successful INTQUAL has been in measuring the service performance of M.F.H.s. This may be beneficial for the M.F.H.s administers in making improvements to encourage their service operations to improve the service quality. M.F.H.s administers will also have better knowledge and understanding of the level of employees' relation through the findings of this study. The implementation and evaluation method of INTQUAL and employees' relation on the M.F.H.s can potentially enable the Malaysia Association of Hotels (M.A.H.) and Islamic Tourism Centre (I.T.C.) in making improvements to encourage further the development of M.F.H.s conforming to Muslim Friendly principles. Besides, these findings will also benefit in terms of better knowledge, skill, and understanding when operating an M.F.H.s provided by agencies affiliated with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Limitation for this study serve as the analysis of M.F.H.s level of service quality was studied during a pandemic. There is a great uncertainty whether the progress of M.F.H.s service performance would differ looking at the progress of the outbreak. Therefore, it is useful to review the M.F.H.s service performance after the endemic, as it might help to measure the M.F.H.s service quality in different angle. In addition, it is recommended for future studies to be carried out focusing on top-level management of M.F.H.s as it may provide a different insight of M.F.H.s service performance.

### **Acknowledgement**

This study is funded by Geran Penyelidikan Khas, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Selangor Campus.

### **Article Contribution to Related Field of Study**

This article will provide a comprehensive view on the effect of INTQUAL and employees' relation towards improving M.F.H.s' service performance. The findings from this article will also enhance the body of knowledge on the rarely touched field of study particularly Muslim Friendly Hotel segment in Malaysia's hotel industry. This article can be useful for academicians and industry players to act as a reference for future research and possible framework in order to strengthen the condition of service performance in M.F.H.s in order to provide excellent service to their customers.

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