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# Asia-Pacific Journal of Innovation in Hospitality and Tourism (APJIHT)

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The aim of the journal is to promote and enhance research development and innovation in the field of hospitality and tourism. The journal seeks to provide an international platform for hospitality and tourism educators, postgraduate student and researchers, to debate and disseminate research findings, facilitate the discussion of new research areas and techniques, and highlight best practices for industry practioners. The articles published in the journal take a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach to study the marketing, finance, economics and social aspects of hospitality and tourism. Papers dealing with theoretical, conceptual and empirical aspects of the subject matter will be considered for publication.

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Research Paper

# Perceived Expectations of Internships: Case Study of a Private University in Malaysia

Chan Yi Lin and Sumitha Anantharajah
*Taylor's University, Malaysia*



**Abstract:** With the intergenerational changes that are taking place, the hospitality industry has to continuously look into better employee retention plans in order to keep up with the ever evolving industry and high turnovers. Internships is the most commonly used method to expose students to the industry as well as allowing them to explore career pathways. This study was conducted at a well-known hospitality school in Asia to examine students' perspectives of the industry before internships. The findings can also aid stakeholders in developing effective internships that can help retain talents and to minimize its loss even before students graduate. Primary data collected from 142 hospitality students prior to their internships using a questionnaire was subjected to descriptive statistical and Pearson correlation analysis. The findings indicate that well-managed internship experiences have a significant impact on future career retentions.

**Keywords:** Perception, internship experience, future career, hospitality.

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## Introduction

As an industry with one of the highest growing gross domestic product (GDP) worldwide, the hospitality industry requires many skilled and trained staffs for many expanding and evolving positions. The importance of a trained staff is widely recognized (Bai, Lee & Billinghurst, 2014) and hundreds of millions are spent on staff training annually by businesses (Murphy, Pritchard & Smith, 2000) to ensure services of the highest standards. As an integral component of the industry, in addition to imparting hospitality knowledge, hospitality schools and institutions also aim to

Correspondence: Chan Yi Lin, Taylor's University, Malaysia. Email: *Yilin.Chan@taylors.edu.my*

produce skilful personnel who meet the needs of the employers. Beyond theoretical learning, students are often required to do internships to help them get exposure in the industry and to put to practice what they have learned in the classroom.

In the past, studies have shown that hospitality graduates and undergraduates leave the industry after their internship or actual work stint (Wan, Wong & Kong, 2014). A study on hospitality employee turnover found that generation Y graduates have a higher chance of leaving the industry after a short period of full-time employment (Brown, Thomas & Bosselman, 2015). The high turnover in this growing industry is indeed worrying and thus the need to address the contributing factors (Mohd Ali Tan et al., 2016; Sharon, Goziker & Shahrabani, 2014). While there are many researches on student internship satisfaction, few have focused on students' initial perception and expectation of internship. The authors believe there is a strong need to understand better the initial perception of students in order to identify the disparity between expectations and reality. In this study, a quantitative method was used to capture data on variables of satisfaction from a large tsample of students who have yet to have any industry experience. Certainly, the present study is exploratory in nature in understanding the perception of hospitality students towards the industry.

Our study aims to answer the following three questions:
- What is the perceived knowledge of internship amongst students?
- What are the expectations that are built while they are in hospitality schools?
- Which variables are more important from the student's perspective?

## Literature Review

### Internship

To meet the expansive growth of the hospitality industry, a sufficient supply of skilled workforce is required and internship has been long recognised as a good avenue to build these skills. According to Taylor (1988), internship can be defined as an experience related to work and career meant for students before they graduate. Hence to ensure students gain exposure and working experience in the related industry, most universities and colleges either require or encourage their students to undergo internships before they graduate. In hospitality diploma or degree courses, internship is an integral component of the curriculum.

There are many types of internship available today. As an example, for internships with credit hours, collaborations and agreements between academic intuitions and industry players enable the placement of students in actual workplace settings. Upon the completion of said internship, students can earn their academic credits, in exchange for assignment reports of their experience (Oancea, Pospisil & Dragoescu, 2016). Other types of internship include summer internships, which calls for a shorter period and independent applications are also available, and unpaid internships, usually for non-profit organizations as well as internships at libraries, shelters or community centres that allows one to acquire service-related skills. During internship, students will acquire managerial and supervisory skills as well as learn to manage customers (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017).

It is common understanding that internships help students grasp the work culture better and manage themselves more efficiently. It is also believed that students with internship experience perform and cope better when they step into the working world.

As mentioned earlier, nowadays, internship is considered a necessary programme in hospitality colleges or universities aimed at preparing students with hands-on experience in their chosen industry. Unfortunately, some colleges and universities had presented the internship programme as a requirement for graduating without explaining the implications of internship on the student's future career. As such, many students form the misconception that internship is forced upon them which often leads to an unhealthy perception about internship from the beginning itself.

While there have been many researches that examined the perspective of students on internships (Sharon, Goziker & Shahrabani, 2014; Mohd Ali Tan et al., 2016; Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015), these were conducted after the completion of the internship and looked at the outcome and the gap between expectations and reality, particularly in satisfaction. Moreover, only a limited number of studies have focused on the hospitality student's expectations for their internship with regard to the influence of the hospitality school and their ability to perform.

Not to mention, students nowadays are also very much influenced by the social media and its outlook on internships. This means that more empirical studies are needed to understand better students' expectation of their internships. Expectation can be defined as one's vision as a result of one's experience (Harris, 2002). With regard to internship, students usually have a list of things that they hope to attain or achieve. Expectations can be either positive or negative partially based on our perceptions or outlook on matters around us.

Past research has shown that there is a broad disparity between students' expectations and the perception of education institutions regarding these expectations and the resulting level of satisfaction. This lack of understanding (Harris, 2002) can be attributed to the lack of communication between the academic institutions and students themselves. In his work on internship experience and student expectations, Rothman (2007) confirmed the need for evaluating every internship program with regard to the intern's job performance. This helps to ensure that students maximize their opportunity to learn and to meet the expectations of the internship employers. In other words, consistent evaluation is needed throughout the internship period to ensure it benefits students, employers, and academic institutions. Typically, administrators of academic programs are responsible for assessing a student's internship experience to ensure that learning objectives and student expectations are met (Sapp & Zhang, 2009). The gap between student expectations and actual outcome is a cause for concern and continues to receive substantial interest because these gaps can cause students to become frustrated and result in low job satisfaction (Polach, 2004). Studies have shown that when students with these unresolved expectation-reality gap join the work market, it can significantly increase turnover rates and the attendant cost in rehiring and retraining (Holton III, 1995). Businesses that do not address this gaps in their new hires can face potential damage especially in a turbulent economy. Thus, some create a cohesive work environment to enable new staff especially recent graduates to adapt to the business' work culture and environment. While there are some other studies that have proven internships can meet student expectations, it would be better to develop effective internship programmes to avoid unreasonable and unachievable expectations which will cause students to become demotivated and do their internship half-heartedly.

**Internship Experience**

Internship can be defined as "structured and career-relevant work experiences obtained by students prior to graduating from an academic program" (Taylor, 1988). While the first definition limits the context of internship as something that is obtained before graduation, and the word graduation itself acts as a limitation, Gault, Redington and Schlager (2000) define it more broadly as "part-time field experiences which encompass a wide variety of academic disciplines and organizational settings." Some industries such as hospitality and culinary, medicine and other technical fields that consists of predominantly practical work strongly require internship experience as a learning stage for acquiring hands-on skills. Today, many students have come to believe that internship is more towards gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace for jobs and less so for the sake of their education only (Cannon & Arnold, 1998).

Additionally, internship is sought for the valuable experience and exposure to help graduating students adapt themselves to the industry. Thus overall, internship is seen as beneficial for academic programs (Gordon, 2002), adds value to the education of students (Little, 1993), and also advantageous to industry players (Brady, 2007). During internship itself, many companies strive to provide practical experience to students in terms of know-how skills and about the industry (Gabrowsky & Fitz, 2007). Rehling (2000) maintained that internships can be utilized to help students develop their skills, initiative, and other traits required for the working life.

Based on past surveys (Gloria, Castillo, Choi-Pearson & Rangel, 1997 ), good grades, especially those obtained from prestigious universities or colleges, help students secure better internship positions. Hence, this research will focus more on internships in the hospitality industry.

The hospitality industry is a service industry and is usually referred to as "human service industry". Thus, Human Service Internship is an experience which is sponsored by educational institutions such as colleges or universities whereby their students acquire practical education and training while working in a human service organization for an allocated period of time (Kiser, 2015). As a service industry, up-close knowledge about the industry and work specifications are vital for any hospitality employee; thus, the importance of internship. However, while the benefits of internship are manifold, a number of challenges remain as a hindrance towards the effectiveness of any internship programme.

**Future Career**

Sometimes the transition from being a student to working professional can be hard (Polach, 2004). Ko and Sidhu (2012) contended that a negative internship experience can bring about more negative impact to businesses and career choices compared to no internship experience. This is attributed to internship programmes that are unstructured and poorly organized (Lam & Ching, 2007). In contrast, the positive impacts of internship are often associated with the working environment itself such as teamwork, type of work, involvement in actual work, and autonomy (McCaffery, 1979).

Many studies have also shown that there is relation between internship experience and career success. Experiences gained during a student's internship will result in quicker employment after graduation, higher salary, and higher job satisfaction (Gault et al., 2000). Moreover, the internship experience will smoothen the transition from student life to work life.

Furthermore, internship allows students to experience real work and learn aspects of the industry that are not taught in the classroom or lecture. Armed with knowledge, new entrants will be more prepared to face the many challenges in the industry. Internship is used as a platform to build and develop the awareness of the skills needed in the industry. When students experience this, it helps them to adapt and thrive in the industry while pursuing their career ambitions.

**Attitudes**

Attitudes are important for explaining and predicting behaviour. Yet, the relationship between attitudes and actions (behaviour) is controversial (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Attitude refers to the way an individual's character reacts with a certain degree of favourableness or unfavourableness to another behaviour, person or object (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). There are theories of attitude that consist of cognition, components and conation or behaviour.

Sadly, many managers perceive interns as "cheap labour" and utilise them in any department that is shorthanded (Roney & Öztin, 2007). This results in interns becoming demoralized and an unsatisfactory internship experience. Many students undergoing internship are creative and technologically literate and while they may expect immediate rewards and constant feedback, their employers may not always have the luxury of time to do so and this can also affect their internship expectations (Fok & Yeung, 2016). Their work ethics will also be, to some extent, affected by the social status of their job, working conditions in terms of pay and benefits, promotion opportunities and relationships with co-workers and managers (Fok & Yeung, 2016).

During internship, some students become convinced that working in the hotel industry is quite boring and is not worth it (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). At the same time, some may also find it quite stressful. Moreover, students who intern are not given full autonomy for their tasks or given opportunities to communicate with international guests as expected as their supervisor may assume that they are not capable (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Often, they have to work under close supervision or micromanaged and this can result in a less than satisfactory internship experience.

In other instances, some students may feel that they are over-qualified for the tasks assigned to them leading to dissatisfaction, demotivation and unmet expectations (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017).

Further, having no or little knowledge about the industry, many internship students experience "reality or culture shock" once they delve deeper into actual operations and settings (Teng, 2008). Knowledge encompasses acts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education in the form of theory or practical work. The knowledge gained in classrooms is expected to be translated into actual practice during internships (Mihail, 2006). However, this classroom- based knowledge is very limited in its scope to help them perform in their internship. In order to gain better experience from the industry, hospitality students must demonstrate good analytical skills, independence and competency when performing the tasks assigned (Mihail, 2006). In addition, the hotel industry not only demands thorough academic knowledge but also traits such as good team player and problem-solving skills which are essential for a successful internship (Renganathan, Abdul Karim & Chong, 2012). During their internship, hospitality students not only have the opportunity to learn, but also interact and work with supervisors, colleagues and clients. This experience can equip them with the relevant knowledge and practical skills for a successful career start (Mihail, 2006). However, if the acquired knowledge is insufficient or not beneficial for them, they end up becoming demotivated and go off on a bad career start. As their expectations for their internship are unmet, a sense of overall disappointment with the industry develops and brings about a feeling of wasted time, money and effort (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Sadly, some students choose hospitality as a career path without fully understanding the practices, culture or working conditions of the industry.

**Influence**

Personal expression is linked to work that influences professionalism (Fok & Yeung, 2016). This problem also occurs when there is a strong culture of company rules and disciplines (Fok & Yeung, 2016). However, a majority of internship students are not in favour of strict rules and regulations and readily disclose confidential information through social media. Since the social media has become an indispensable part of the young generation, the best way is avoid this is by manipulating this communication trend to support the needs of the working environment (Fok & Yeung, 2016).

Additionally, many graduates enter the job market expecting high-level managerial positions with good remuneration (Roney & Öztin, 2007) but unfortunately, when the reality contradicts with their expectations, it becomes a source of dissatisfaction. As with other industries, promotion is based on merit in the hospitality industry (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). However, at times, the opposite takes place and opportunities are limited. Not to mention, the number of years of hard work and sacrifices that seem to go unappreciated (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). All these become sources of dissatisfaction.

However, some trading enterprises are able to offer competitive salaries and benefits compared to hotels even though many students perceive hotel industry jobs as a shortcut to a higher position (Fok & Yeung, 2016).

On the other hand, some studies argue that organizational culture in the hospitality industry influences work attitude (Teng, 2008). For example, the informal rules of working extra hours generate job dissatisfaction and create a hindrance for jobseekers to work in hotels (Fok & Yeung, 2016). Internship students who are coached and supervised by bad managers or supervisors leave a bad taste and negative perception of the working world (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017). Further, if the assigned supervisor or manager fails to impart the right knowledge or skills, the internship students' experience will be ineffective.

**Ability**

Irregular or long working hours is not uncommon in the hospitality industry (Roney & Öztin, 2007). However, studies show that generation Y is averse to working irregular hours (Brown et al., 2015), be it during their internship or actual work.

Further, expectations of high pay, high qualifications for entry and working hours affect their decision to join this industry (Fok & Yeung, 2016). In some countries like Hong Kong and Australia, most students avoid this industry or would change their major of study after their internship (Fok & Yeung, 2016). As a result, employers continuously face a shortage of skilled workers and high retention costs (Fok & Yeung, 2016).

Sadly, many internship students do not acquire important working skills such as problem-solving or financial skills. Additionally, the right work attitude and behaviour are the most critical elements for those working in this industry as performance is directly related to service excellence, which in turn contributes to the image of the company (Teng, 2008). Moreover, generic skills such as communication and personal relationship skills are not normally taught in the classroom, so it is questionable whether students graduate with these vital skills (Fok & Yeung, 2016).

**Value**

Many internship students believe they can enter directly to management roles after graduating (Fok & Yeung, 2016). Furthermore, many do not understand the value of their job description. While the majority of them expect work and fairness in their internship, many come to a decision that they made the wrong career choice once they realise their work-life balance is compromised. Moreover, they have valid concerns about their personal development as to whether their employers will invest in training and development for them (Fok & Yeung, 2016). Thus, they would prefer to choose an industry that offers a satisfactory work-life balance (Teng, 2008).

In order to be competent, interns are also expected to acquire vital work values such as teamwork, good ethics, productivity, honesty and integrity (Moghaddam, 2014). These values are related to the organisational culture to which interns will be exposed to during their internship. Therefore the organisational culture that one is encounters may affect that person's value system. Thus the outcome of an effective internship program should not be limited to only providing industry-related skills but also integral values to help these interns face working life challenges (Moghaddam, 2014).

Some of internship students also perceive that hospitality-related careers are not highly valued in the society (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). There is also a common misconception that hospitality related careers are usually associated with the decay of morals. At times, managers value their employees' suggestions but not that of internship students. These managers also do not reward employees who do a good job (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000).

Another reason why some expectations of the interns are unmet is the short internship period. Some interns believe it should be extended because they only have few weeks to learn about various roles and functions (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017). Some interns admit they do not feel confident when it comes to operational work and often this leads to confusion about their future career (Dhevabanchachai & Wattanacharoensil, 2017).

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study was developed based on the literature review discussed earlier and looks at the expectations of internship.

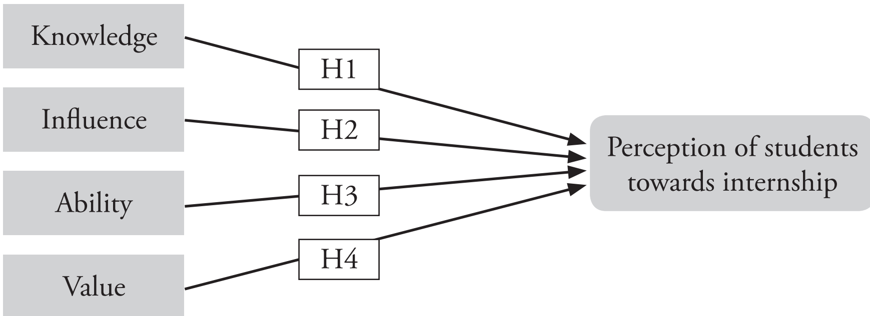


**Figure 4.1** Conceptual Framework

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Undergraduates perceive that the industry allows for more learning opportunities.
Hypothesis 2 (H2): Undergraduates perceive that the industry allows for good career advancement.
Hypothesis 3 (H3): Undergraduates perceive that internships provide an opportunity for explicit guidance by their supervisors
Hypothesis 4 (H4): Undergraduates perceive that internships are able to provide them with good career decision-making.

## Methodology

This study used a quantitative approach and data was collected using questionnaires. The study sample was chosen through purposive sampling, targeting students who are pursuing Hospitality diploma and degree programmes, who will be going for their 4-month internship and have not undergone any internship prior. In total, 142 questionnaires were collected in a period of 3 months. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' feedback, with "1" for "strongly agree" and "5" for "strongly disagree". The questionnaire was first tested in a pilot study with 10 Taylor's University students awaiting their internship. Minor changes were made to the order of the questions to explore further opinions on the topic. Content validity was employed to test the clarity of the construct dimensions used in the study (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2013). A reliability analysis was carried out and Cronbach's alpha was calculated at .948 for 7 items. Whereas for influence, the value was .941 for 6 items, ability was .905 for 7 items and for value was .883 for 6 items. Thus, these entire segments were confirmed reliable and acceptable to be used in this study. Each item was correlated with its own scale and with other sub-scales. According to Sekaran & Bougie (2016), coefficients less than .60 are considered to be "poor", those in the .70 range "acceptable", and those over .80 "good". Thus, the internal consistency of the statements used in this study can be considered good.

## Findings and Discussion

The first four questions of the questionnaire looked at demographics. The rest of the questionnaire looked at a list of factors that affect student's expectations for their internship that emerged from the literature review. After examining the contents of these items, it was decided not to move or delete these items.

The sample consisted of 142 students, of which 35.5 % were male and 64.5 %, female (Table 1). All the respondents were undergraduate students between the ages of 18 to 25 years old. With regard to years of experience in the hotel industry 93 (58.1%) admitted that they did not have any hotel industry experience, 45 (28.1%) had 1 to 2 years of hotel industry experience and 3 (1.9%) had more than 2 years of hotel industry experience (Table 2). This shows that the majority of students did not have any working experience in hotel industry prior to any internship.

**Table 1.** Respondent by gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 50 | 31.3 |
| Female | 91 | 56.9 |

**Table 2.** Respondent by years of experience

| Years of Experience | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| None | 93 | 58.1 |
| 1-2 Years | 45 | 28.1 |
| > 2 years | 3 | 1.9 |

In descriptive analysis, mean scores were derived (see Table 3) to determine student's expectation of their internship. On average, students rated their industry expectation positively, with an overall mean score of 2.03. This implies that a majority of them assessed their expectation as "good" or "excellent". The table also shows very high expectations (mean 2.56) during their internship for meetings and briefings and ability to make own decisions (mean 2.43). The finding also suggests that students want to be treated like a full-time employee (mean 2.32). This can be attributed to the majority of the students not having any experience in the hotel industry and their enthusiasm to learn new things. When asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement to continue working in the hotel industry during the internship, the mean value was calculated at 2.33. This indicates that about 63% are interested in continuing in this line of work but 26.3% are not. This could be due to student's expectations for very high salary, promotion, reasonable working hours and comfortable working conditions.

**Table 3.** Mean analysis of expectations of internships

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fun | 141 | 2.3191 | .88090 |
| Coordination | 141 | 2.0780 | .98612 |
| Treated | 141 | 2.3050 | .97059 |
| Challenging | 141 | 1.9858 | .94858 |
| Opportunity | 141 | 2.2057 | 1.08574 |
| Support | 141 | 1.9291 | 1.05996 |
| Training | 141 | 2.0142 | 1.07561 |
| Full-Time | 141 | 2.3262 | 1.02467 |
| Meeting Brief | 141 | 2.5603 | 1.05132 |
| Learnnew | 141 | 1.7092 | 1.06596 |
| Softskills | 141 | 1.8156 | 1.07307 |
| Apply | 141 | 2.0638 | 1.09030 |
| Orientation | 140 | 2.0857 | .94820 |
| Professional | 140 | 1.8786 | 1.04205 |
| Return | 141 | 2.3333 | 1.08672 |
| Appreciated | 141 | 2.1702 | .98530 |
| Responsibilities | 141 | 2.0496 | 1.00943 |
| acquaintances | 141 | 2.0426 | 1.06148 |
| Ekeeptrack | 141 | 2.1773 | 1.03014 |
| Skeeptrack | 141 | 2.1915 | .98499 |
| Makedecision | 141 | 2.4326 | 1.01633 |
| Lexperience | 141 | 2.1915 | 1.01359 |
| Strengthen | 141 | 1.9362 | 1.04343 |
| Understand | 141 | 1.8014 | 1.04348 |
| Satisfied | 140 | 2.2000 | .91510 |
| Career | 140 | 2.1571 | 1.06123 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 137 | | |

## Expectations in hotel industry internships

In view of the above findings, we decided to test any correlation of student's internship expectations. The dependent variable, overall expectation, was regressed on four items measuring students' internship expectations. The Pearson correlation analysis was performed to identify the factors and perceived image of student's expectations for their internship. Four factors were used to extract factors for expectations for internship in the hotel industry. Thus all items with a factor loading of above 0.30 were included in the constructs. As shown in Table 4, the four factors extracted were "knowledge" (factor 1), "influence" (factor 2), "ability" (factor 3), and "values" (factor 4). Since all four factors showed a p-value of more than 0.05, we conclude that there is a significant difference between the four factors. The results indicate that the students have very high expectations for their internships in terms of knowledge, influence, ability and value. Belief was positively related to knowledge, as hypothesized (r= .049, p = .001). Additionally, value was also positively related to influence (r= .035, p = .001), ability (r= .053, p = .001), and value (r= .0.42, p < .01).

**Table 4.** Pearson correlation of student's internship expectations

| | | Expectations |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Knowledge | Pearson Correlation<br>Significance (2-tailed)<br>N | 0.049141 |
| 2. Influence | Pearson Correlation<br>Significance (2-tailed)<br>N | 0.0351411 |
| 3. Ability | Pearson Correlation<br>Significance (2-tailed)<br>N | 0.0351411 |
| 4. Value | Pearson Correlation<br>Significance (2-tailed)<br>N | 0.0421411 |

Ability (53%) was what most students expect from their internship. The second highest expectation was knowledge (49%). This is most probably because students expect to learn more than what was taught in the classroom. While some may believe knowledge taught in classrooms is sufficient for internships, in reality, this is not the case. This finding correlates with Roney & Öztin (2007) who noted that students value their internship experience. Moreover, if the internship is turned out satisfactory, more often than not, the interns strive to return to the same company as an intern or a full-time employee. These students tend to value the internship more as their supervisors supported them and were willing to teach.

Sadly, a majority of students fail to realize that their career is significantly affected based on their internship performance and progress and rightly, the internship stint propels them towards their future career goals.

## Conclusion

The findings show that all four factors listed were significantly important for students in building and understanding their perceptions; value, ability and influence significantly more than knowledge. While academics believe that knowledge is a never-ending journey, not all students share this view. Many seem to seek extrinsic and social values that may not be particularly aligned with the learning outcomes of the internship. Further, it may seem that students are not aware about the reality behind the glamour of the hospitality industry (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000). Proper guidance and proper internship programmes are a major concern. Additionally, the findings reveal that career retention was not affected by the outcome of the internship (mean 2.1). This rings alarm bells for all stakeholders concerned as it would be harder to find out the reasons behind the career choices of students.

As many of the high expectations before undergoing an internship was not met, this created dissatisfaction and demotivation. Based on the findings, the study suggests some recommendations to stakeholders. For the academic community, it is vital to build linkages with the industry to provide the right exposure and experience to students to align their expectations to the actual reality in order to avoid any disappointments. Industry players should take the initiative to start communicating with their future employees through platforms such as roadshows, talks, or seminars conducted at institutions with hospitality programmes. Employers should also take into account the new generation's different mind-set (especially the millennial) and work towards providing better work life balance in the jobs offered (Brown et al., 2015).

As this study is exploratory in nature, future research should utilise qualitative research to look in-depth on how hospitality students build their perceptions or expectations, and the effect it has on future career decisions. This would further help educational institutions develop better internship programmes that meet the expectations of students and requirements of other stakeholders.



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Research Paper

# International Tourism and Economic Growth: A Panel Causality Analysis of the Three Northeast Asian Countries of China, Japan, and Korea

Minho Kim and Bangwool Han
*Chonbuk National University, Korea*

Jennifer M. Kim
*Ernst &Young Korea, Korea*



**Abstract:** This study investigates the causal relationship between tourism development and economic growth in China, Japan, and South Korea; a topic that has not been extensively explored in the tourism literature. Although the contribution of tourism to the economy is generally low in these countries due to their export-oriented economies of industrial goods, the results of this study demonstrate that tourism development can stimulate economic growth in the long run.

**Keywords:** Tourism; economic growth; cointegration; causality; Northeast Asia

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## Introduction

The three large economies of Northeast Asia, those of China, Japan, and South Korea, are closely interdependent. Geographically, these countries are neighbours to one another. Seoul, the capital of Korea, is located halfway between Beijing and Tokyo, the capitals of China and Japan, respectively. The three capital cities are located within a radius of about 1,300 miles. Economically, these three countries are at different developmental stages, but share the common feature of having export-oriented economies, with large shares of their domestic outputs coming from the

Correspondence: Bangwool Han, Chonbuk National University, Korea. Email: *bellehan@jbnu.ac.kr*.

economies of other countries. In particular, these three countries trade heavily with one another. As shown in Table 1, for each of these three countries, the other two countries are listed among its top five importing and exporting countries. Korea and Japan are the top two importing partners of China, with about 19% of China's imports coming from these two countries. China is the single most important trading partner of Korea, as more than 20% of Korea's imports and exports are exchanged with China. The Japanese economy also relies heavily on imports from and exports to China.

**Table 1.** Top 5 trading partners of China, Korea, and Japan

| Countries | Import | %* | Export | %* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| China | **Korea** | 10.01 | USA | 18.38 |
| | **Japan** | 9.17 | Hong Kong | 13.69 |
| | Other Asia, nes** | 8.74 | **Japan** | 6.16 |
| | USA | 8.51 | **Korea** | 4.47 |
| | Areas, nes*** | 8.12 | Germany | 3.11 |
| Korea | **China** | 21.41 | **China** | 25.11 |
| | **Japan** | 11.68 | USA | 13.47 |
| | USA | 10.68 | Hong Kong | 6.16 |
| | Germany | 4.65 | Vietnam | 6.58 |
| | Other Asia, nes | 4.03 | **Japan** | 4.92 |
| Japan | **China** | 25.79 | USA | 20.24 |
| | USA | 11.41 | **China** | 17.64 |
| | Australia | 5.01 | **Korea** | 7.16 |
| | **Korea** | 4.12 | Hong Kong | 6.09 |
| | Other Asia, nes | 3.78 | Thailand | 4.24 |

Source: United Nations Commodity Trade Statistics, 2016.
*% is the proportion of imports from or exports to each country relative to the total imports and exports of a specific country.
** Trade data for territories belonging to Asia but not specified by country. In practice, only the trade data of Taiwan, Province of China are included under this category, except for several countries (such as Saudi Arabia which reports all of its exports as unknown countries).
*** Used (a) for low-value trade and (b) if the partner designation was unknown to the country or an error was made in the partner assignment.
% is the proportion of imports from or exports to each country relative to the total imports and exports of a specific country.

In terms of tourism, these three countries are also strongly related. Due to the close geographic proximity of China, Japan, and Korea, most tourists from one country visit the other two countries. According to 2016 statistics from UNWTO, China and Japan are the most popular outbound destinations for Koreans, and Japanese tourists mostly travel to short-haul destinations such as Korea and China. For Chinese tourists, the most popular destination is Thailand, followed by Korea and Japan. For all three countries, the other two countries are among the top five most popular destinations for outgoing tourists. In terms of outbound tourist volume, China recorded the largest market in Asia Pacific, with 40 million outbound tourists, followed by Japan (second largest, 17.3 million) and Korea (third largest, 15.5 million).

The economic contribution of tourism to these three countries differs according to the economic developmental stage, and is generally low because these countries have export-oriented economies of industrial goods. For example, the average ratios of tourism receipts to total exports over the last two decades were 5.2%, 3.4%, and 1.8%, for China, Korea and Japan, respectively (World Development Indicators, World Bank ). However, in terms of receipts from international tourism, these three countries have a considerable share amongst the 217 countries from which the World Bank collects data. For example, in 2015, China ranked 2nd (after the United States) in terms of its tourism receipts, while Japan ranked the 13th, and Korea ranked 17th. Overall, these three countries account for about 11.6% of world tourism receipts (World Bank).

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the extant literature by empirically investigating the causal relationship between the the international tourism and economic growth of these three countries in Northeast Asia. Even though these three countries comprise a significant portion of world tourism, past studies have only examined this issue in each respective country. In particular, no study to our knowledge, has considered all three countries collectively in a panel framework.

Studies of the tourism-growth nexus have relied on four different theoretical arguments. The first is the tourism-led growth hypothesis, which asserts that tourism causes economic development. The second is the growth-led tourism hypothesis, which indicates that economic development stimulates tourism. The third is the feedback hypothesis, which states that tourism and economic development are interdependent. The last is the neutrality hypothesis, which argues that there is no causal relationship between tourism and economic development. The results of past studies have differed depending on the countries covered and the methodologies used, and have been extensively reviewed by Comerio and Strozzi (2019), Brida, Cortes-Jimenez, and Pulina (2016), Castro-Nuño, Molina-Toucedo, and Pablo-Romero (2013), and Pablo-Romero and Molina (2013). In this study, the four hypotheses are estimated using the Granger causal test within the panel framework of China, Japan and Korea.

## Model and data

This paper adopts the two-sector growth model of Feder (1983) by assuming the two-sector economy of tourism and non-tourism. This type of model has been widely used to explore the export-economic growth nexus (e.g. Hansen, 1994; Sharma & Panagiotidis, 2005) and the tourism-economic growth nexus (e.g. Modeste, 1995; Tang & Tan, 2015; Tang, Chaem & Ong, 2017). The model is specified as follows:

$$GDP_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1\ tourism_t + \beta_2 capital_t + \varepsilon_t \qquad (1)$$

where GDP is the gross domestic product, tourism is international tourism measured by the two proxies of international tourism receipts and international tourist arrivals, and capital is gross capital formation. All variables are measured on a per capita basis, and real variables are calculated based on 2010 US dollars. The annual data for the period from 1995 to 2015 were retrieved from the World Development Indicators (WDI) found in the online database of the World Bank for the three Northeast Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea. In the empirical estimations, the natural logarithm of the variables were used.

## Econometric Methodology and Results

In this section, we examine the dynamic causal relationship among the variables of GDP, tourism, and capital formation. The testing procedure is as follows. The first step is to test whether the variables contain a unit root. If the variables contain a unit root, the second step is to test whether there is a long-run relationship among the variables. If a long-run relationship among the variables is found, the final step is to perform the Granger causality test within a panel vector error correction framework to infer the causal dynamics among the variables.

Three panel unit root tests were conducted: LLC (Levin, Lin, & Chu, 2002), IPS (Im, Pesaran, & Shin, 2003), and PP-Fisher (Maddala & Wu, 1999). The LLC test assumes that the unit root process for the panel is common or homogenous while the IPS and PP-Fisher tests allows for heterogeneity in the dynamics of autoregressive coefficients. The null hypothesis of each test is that the variable is non-stationary, which means that it contains a unit root. Thus, rejection of the null signifies that the variable in question is stationary. The test results in Table 2 demonstrate that the variables in this study become panel-stationary in their first differences. Based on these results, we proceed to test whether there is a long-run relationship among the variables with panel co-integration tests.

**Table 2.** Panel unit root tests

| Variables | Methods | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | LLC | IPS | Fisher ADF |
| Panel A: Level | | | |
| Tourism | | | |
| Receipts | 0.938 | 2.399 | 0.541 |
| Arrivals | 0.064 | 2.193 | 2.832 |
| GDP | –1.551* | –1.046 | 12.241* |
| Capital | 0.698 | 1.828 | 1.610 |
| Panel B: First difference | | | |
| Tourism | | | |
| Receipts | –6.628*** | –5.854*** | 38.02*** |
| Arrivals | –2.025** | –5.973*** | 39.77*** |
| GDP | –4.235*** | –4.367*** | 30.15*** |
| Capital | –4.702*** | –4.149*** | 27.13*** |

Note: *, **, and ** denote 10%, 5%, and 1% significance level, respectively.

The Johansen Fisher panel co-integration test, a panel version of the individual Johansen (1988) co-integration test, is used to examine the long-run relationships among the variables. The test is proposed by Maddala and Wu (1999), and Hanck's (2009) simulation study reveals that it performs well relative to alternative tests proposed by Kao (1999) and Pedroni (2004). Hanck (2009) argued that the Johansen Fisher's panel co-integration test is flexible, simple to implement, and intuitively appealing. The test results in Table 3 indicate that the variables of receipt (arrivals), GDP, and capital are co-integrated and have a long-run equilibrium relationship. Therefore, the appropriate next step is to estimate the Granger causality based on the vector error correction model (VECM).

**Table 3.** Johansen Fisher panel co-integration tests

| **Hypothesized No. of CE(s)** | **trace test** | **Prob.** | **Max-Eigen test** | **Prob.** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Panel A: Receipts-GDP-Capital** | 23.00*** | 0.0008 | 14.90*** | 0.0211 |
| None | 13.43** | 0.0367 | 12.20*** | 0.0577 |
| At most 1 | 8.83 | 0.1831 | 8.83 | 0.1831 |
| At most 2 | | | | |
| **Panel B: Arrivals-GDP-Capital** | 25.59*** | 0.0003 | 17.48*** | 0.0077 |
| None | 14.30*** | 0.0264 | 13.20*** | 0.0400 |
| At most 1 | 8.39 | 0.2104 | 8.39 | 0.2104 |
| At most 2 | | | | |

Note: *, **, and ** denote 10%, 5%, and 1% significance level, respectively.

The presence of a long-run co-integration vector indicates the existence of Granger causality, at least in one direction although it does not reveal the direction of causality (Granger, 1980, 1988 ). Thus, to estimate the directionss of Granger causality among the variables, the VECM is specified as follows:

$$\Delta GDP_{it} = \pi_{1i} + \sum_p \pi_{11ip} \Delta GDP_{it-p} + \sum_p \pi_{12ip} \Delta tourism_{it-p} + \sum_p \pi_{13ip} \Delta capital_{it-p} + \phi_{1i} ECT_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{1it} \quad (2a)$$

$$\Delta tourism_{it} = \pi_{2i} + \sum_p \pi_{21ip} \Delta GDP_{it-p} + \sum_p \pi_{22ip} \Delta tourism_{it-p} + \sum_p \pi_{23ip} \Delta capital_{it-p} + \phi_{2i} ECT_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{2it} \quad (2b)$$

$$\Delta capital_{it} = \pi_{1i} + \sum_p \pi_{31ip} \Delta GDP_{it-p} + \sum_p \pi_{32ip} \Delta tourism_{it-p} + \sum_p \pi_{33ip} \Delta capital_{it-p} + \phi_{3i} ECT_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{3it} \quad (2c)$$

Within the VECM, two sources of short- and long-run causality are present. Short-run causality can be estimated from the joint significance of first-difference lagged explanatory variables using the Wald test. That is, in Equation (2a) if the joint null hypothesis $\sum_p \pi = 0$ is rejected, then short-run Granger causality runs from tourism to economic growth, whereas in Equation (2b), if $\sum_p \pi = 0$ is rejected, then causality runs from economic growth to tourism. Long-run causality is tested through the lagged co-integrating vectors, $ECT_{it-1}$. In this case, long-run Granger causality is determined through a t-test to assess the statistical significance of the lagged co-integrating vectors. For example, in Equation (2a), economic growth is said to Granger-cause tourism if the coefficient of $ECT_{1it-1}$ is negative and statistically significant (i.e. $\phi_{1i} \neq 0$). Similarly, in Equation (2b) tourism is said to Granger-cause economic growth if $\phi_{2i} \neq 0$.

Within this VECM framework, the panel Granger causality tests were conducted. Panel A of Table 4 displays the estimation results for GDP and tourism receipts. The results of Equation (2a) are in the row in which GDP is the dependent variable, while the results of Equation (2b) are in the next row. With respect to Equation (2a) (the GDP equation), the coefficient of ECT is negative and statistically significant at the 1% level. This implies that tourism receipts Granger-cause GDP in the long-run. The corresponding Chi-square statistic for the receipt variable is not statistically significant, indicating that the Granger causal relationship does not hold between tourism receipts and GDP in the short-run. The results of the receipt equation in the second row demonstrate that the coefficients of both the long-run ECT and short-run GDP variable are not statistically significant. This implies that GDP does not Granger-cause tourism receipts over either the short-run or the long-run. In Panel B, the tourist arrival variable is used instead of tourism receipts, and the results are the same, except the short-run causality running from GDP to tourist arrivals at the 5% level. Overall, we find evidence that the tourism-led growth hypothesis is valid in the long-run for the three Northeast Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea.

**Table 4.** Panel Granger causality tests based on VECM

| Dependent Variables | Independent Variables | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Long-run | Short -run | |
| **Panel A** | ECT | GDP | Receipts |
| GDP | –0.065[0.002]*** | | 1.032(0.596) |
| Receipts | 0.001[0.412] | 0.994(0.608) | |
| Panel B | ECT | GDP | Arrivals |
| GDP | –0.065[0.004]*** | | 0.060(0.971) |
| Arrivals | 0.002[0.265] | 7.144(0.03)** | |

Note: For the long-run, coefficients of the ECT are reported, and the figures in parentheses [ ] are t-statistics. For the short-run, figures denote Chi-square statistics and the figures in ( ) are p-values. *, **, and ** denote 10%, 5%, and 1% significance level, respectively.

## Conclusion

This study investigates the causal relationship between tourism development and economic growth in China, Japan, and Korea, a topic that has not been extensively explored in the extant tourism literature, despite the fact these countries comprise a significant portion of world tourism receipts. The results of this study demonstrate that tourism development stimulates economic growth in the long-run. Therefore, given that these three countries are closely interrelated in terms of trade partners and tourist destinations, they should develop policies to increase the trade and tourism coming from the other trading partner countries. Indeed, policymakers of one country need to promote the bilateral trade activities with the other two countries, which will in turn lead to develop the tourism sector and to boost economic growth. In addition, it would be helpful for the tourism industry of one country to make promotional activities targeting the tourists from the other two countries. Specifically, products and services designed for customers of the neighbouring countries would help to increase the tourists from the other two countries. The performances of Korean pop singers for the Japanese and/or Chinese fans seem to be a good example. The result of this study, however, should be interpreted with caution because the Granger causality for the non-tourism sector would be far more significant to the GDPs of the three countries. Moreover, the contribution of tourism to the economy is generally low in these countries due to their export-oriented economies of industrial goods. Therefore, a polies to increase tourist arrivals from each other may not be cost-effective.

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Research Paper

# The Effect of Leadership Styles on Service Quality Improvement: The Mediating Role of Organisational Learning

Elangkovan Narayanan & Sushila Devi Rajaratnam
*Taylor's University, Malaysia*



**Abstract:** Organisations undergoing adaptations due to business environmental changes are forced to re-evaluate their management principles that underline operational activities in order to strengthen the internal factors. To improve organisational service quality, consistent knowledge acquisition must be interpreted to constitute memory so that organisations can continuously work on its routines and policies to improve performance. The learning process, learning culture and knowledge creation in organisations need to be monitored in order to ensure every employee is aligned with the organisational vision and their collective contribution leads to organisational success. This study examined the relationship between organisational learning and leadership styles on organisational service quality improvement for 3 star to 5 star hotels in Klang Valley. The study focused on the impact of information acquisition, distribution, interpretation and memory together with leadership styles as the driving force towards organisational service quality improvement.  A total of 450 sets of structured questionnaires were distributed to senior managers, managers, assistant managers and supervisors in Klang Valley hotels and 173 (38%) questionnaires were returned. Data were analyzed using regressions analysis to identify the relationship between the three variables. The results indicate that organisational learning and leadership styles have significant effect on organisational service quality improvement. Interestingly, the study reveals organisational learning as the mediator for leadership styles and service quality improvement. This study bridges the gap in existing literature by highlighting the importance of organisational learning and leadership style in the hotel industry, thus providing managerial implications for hospitality managers towards service quality improvement and sustaining loyalty among guests.

**Keywords:** Organisational learning, leadership, service quality, knowledge acquisition.

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Correspondence: Elangkovan Narayanan, Taylor's University, Malaysia. Email: *Elangkovan.Narayan@taylors.edu.my*

## Introduction

Organisational learning has become a metaphor for managers in providing a new paradigm in management practices in their own organisations. Over the last decade, organisational learning has been widely researched as the precursor of improvement within organisations that deploy various management operation tools. As the structure of management becomes more complex when organisations grow, organisational learning is considered important for its sustainability and success (Kezar, 2005). Organisational learning enhances the learning process in developing sustainable knowledge memory for a competitive advantage and service quality improvement. To achieve this, hospitality organisations should set the right leadership culture that inculcates organisational learning on improving services (Yang, 2004). According to World Travel and Tourism Council (2018), the tourism industry continues to grow in the service sector. Specifically, Malaysia in 2018 received 28.5 million tourists with an average stay of 6.8 nights and a total of RM80.2 billion in receipt. As these figures are expected to increase, service providers must continuously improve their standard of service and learn to adapt to meet the ever-evolving customer needs.

Wang and Ahmed (2003) postulated that individuals with good leadership skills are agents for organisational learning which is crucial for acquiring knowledge on service quality and organisational sustainability. While organisational learning capability depends fully on managerial commitment, system perspective, openness and knowledge transfer, scholars however strongly maintain that such dimensions will need strong support in the form of trust, commitment and learning culture among individuals so that the organisational vision can be spearheaded through the integration of knowledge transferred to employees (Gomez, Lorente & Caberera, 2004). The opening of many hotels around the globe has increased competitiveness and placed enormous pressure on service quality improvement. The complexity of guest management has pushed many practioners on the forefront of quality management system that emphasizes on service and delivery. Many have started paying heed to Ritz Charlton, the only hospitality business to win two Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Awards for excellent guest service. The continuous process of improving excellent service quality can only be rendered when managers are good leaders who are willing to listen and learn. Service quality improvement and implementation in hospitality works best with leaders who practice good organisational learning (Burns, Cooper & West, 2003) Early studies show that the adoption of organisational learning leads to an increase in organisational efficiency (Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004). The culture of organisational learning is a continuous and dynamic process that requires good leadership styles. Learning that takes place within organisations causes changes in operations that can lead to service improvement (Swanson & Holton, 2001), efficiency and fostering personal growth (Boud, Keogh, Walker, 1985; Marsick & Watkins 1977). This study explores opportunities for employees in the hospitality industry to focus on the importance of leadership styles and organisational learning towards service quality improvement.

## Organisational Learning

Organisational learning is considered a key variable in explaining an organisation's success and the only source of sustainable competitive advantage (Sanchez, Vijande & Gutierrez, 2010). Organisational learning seeks to enhance core competence through the effective usage of the learning process in developing a sustainable memory of knowledge. Argyris and Schon's (1978), "Organisational Learning: A theory of action perspective," made learning popular through the introduction of the concept of single loop learning and double loop learning. In these schemas postulated by Argyris and Schon (1978), members within an organisation react to the internal and external environment by detecting errors and correcting them continually to sustain operational activity and improvement.

With the environmental changes that are taking place and strong competitiveness, many organisations have had to learn faster in order to improve operational activity (Shein, 1993). Wang and Ahmed (2003) argued that individuals are the agents for organisational learning and as such, it should be the task of leaders to integrate employees towards organisational learning. The scholars also critically contended that creativity and innovation are strategies to sustain competitive advantage by enhancing organisational process, culture, knowledge management and continuous improvement (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). Gomez et al. (2004) mentioned that an organisation's learning capability depends fully on managerial commitment and leadership, systems perspective, openness and knowledge transfer. Scholars in the past have identified four main dimensions of organisational learning (Huber, 1991; Crossan, Lane & White, 1999) or conceptualised four variables: knowledge acquisition, knowledge distribution, knowledge interpretation and knowledge memory.

Organisational learning needs the creation of knowledge for both current and future operations. Knowledge acquisition also requires continual experimentation and constant effort from all employees to facilitate operational activities and improvement (Goh, 2003). Huber (1991) observed that vicarious learning is part of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge acquisition also takes many forms; one such form as expressed by Crossan et al. (1999) is through individual intuition whereby the subconscious mind of an individual continuously develops new forms of information to be converted into knowledge.

Knowledge distribution plays a pivotal role in disseminating information to the relevant parties in order to create knowledge stock (Denton, 2004). The effective dissemination of new knowledge learned will provide a positive impact towards learning because it develops understanding among different individuals working in an organisation as well as different functional areas to create a structured learning process (Senge, 1990; Shein, 1993).

Knowledge interpretation provides a shared understanding among key personnel in an organisation so that policies or objectives developed are consistent and can be disseminated to the rest of employees in an organisation. However, different individuals and agents of learning often have different targets and evaluate information differently (Levitt & March, 1988). Thus, if information is interpreted ambiguously, learning will suffer.

Organisational memory in most firms are placed in records, documented financial statements, objectives, mission and vision, standards of professional practices and in the culture of organisational stories and shared through the consistent way of doing things in an organisation. Organisations also learn from the experience of others (Huber, 1991). Organisational memory is a collective body of knowledge that contains theories in use, shared mental models, information databases, formalized procedures, standard operating practices and formal cultures that guide the behaviour of individuals. The knowledge memory formalize procedures and routines to ensure new processes are adopted for decision-making and process improvement (Hayes, Chrishe, Mill & Lingard, 2004).

**Leadership Styles**

Vera and Crossan (2004) established that leaders are the guiding principles and force for organisational learning. It is an accepted understanding that learning organisations are likely to be created in a top-down system. Learning must be embedded from the top; thus the style of leadership plays an important role in organisational learning. Senge (1990) in his book "The Fifth Discipline" emphasized the importance of leadership in learning organisations. Yukl (2010) described leadership as vital for paving the way for a learning culture and competitiveness. Support from top management is essential to set the right tone for learning to occur at every level in an organisation (Goh, 2003).

Managers at the highest rank today stress the importance of Transformational and Transactional form of leadership styles in order to motivate employees to achieve organisational goals (Keegan & Hartog, 2004). Similarly, Brownell (2010) highlighted that the concept of leadership have gone through changes that focus on transformational as well as transactional styles, where leaders seek support from subordinates. Even the definition of leadership has gone undergone changes from diversification to the concept of transformation (Brownell, 2010). According to Moss, McFarland, Ngu and Kijowska (2007), leadership lies in individual behaviour which reflects an openness to experience in the work setting. The scholars further postulated that even with scarce resources, employees may exercise creativity and originality if they were empowered with a new confidence and hope through transformational leadership styles. Muijs, Harris, Lumby, Morrison and Sood (2006) however provided a different approach whereby employees still prefer structured form of leadership at work and favoured transactional leadership over transformational leadership. Nevertheless, many scholars agree that both transformational and transactional leadership styles show a positive correlation towards commitment and work performance (Bourantas, 1988). Transactional and transformational leadership styles remain at the forefront of influencing subordinates to contribute towards learning and work performance in organisations (Bass, Avolio, Jung & Berson, 2003; Yukl, 2010).

Transformational and transactional leadership can be distinguished by behaviour. The original formulation of a leadership theory was developed by Bass (1985) who created the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) using the characteristics of transformational and transactional leadership behaviour. Transformational leadership comprises four important elements: idealized influence or charismatic, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual consideration. Prior to the transformational leadership style, transactional leadership provide a contingent reinforcement as the core component of effective leadership if organisational goals were to be achieved (Bass et al., 2003).

Bass (1985) postulated that leaders who exercised transformational leadership styles are seen as better leaders compared to transactional leaders. Frenkel, Schechtman and Koening (2006), however found that there are variations in the types of leadership styles found in the hospitality industry. In studying competencies for effective leadership, Spendlove (2007) found that leadership competencies include good attitude, knowledge of how systems work, role-model behaviour, engagement with people, motivation and mentorship as key elements that will bring about the success in hotel operations.

Denton (2004) in his study postulated that transformational leadership leads to positive organisational learning. His findings indicate trust and motivation as the key drivers for transformational leadership, together with the empowerment of individuals that will allow self-actualization and creativity to be realised in organisations. Martinette (2002), on the other hand, described that the best suited leadership for learning organisations are transactional leadership, transformational behaviours and transformational characteristics. The general consensus is that successful leaders create learning organisation through transformational leadership style (Senge, 1990). Bass (1985) views leadership styles as distinct dimensions, which makes a leader transactional and transformational, both or neither. In a nutshell, transactional leadership motivates individuals primarily through contingent-reward while transformational leadership, on the other hand, is inspirational and individually considerate (Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1999). Empirical studies by scholars on transformational and transactional framework have found a high correlation between transformational leadership and transactional leadership styles (Egri & Herman, 2000) and concluded that the best leaders are those who practice both transformational and transactional styles and behaviours.

**Service Quality Improvement**

Service quality improvement has become a vital concern for many companies and organisations to stay competitive in the marketplace. The intensity of competitiveness has forced hoteliers to continuously renew and improve their service operations to attract customers. In this context, service quality improvement is considered as one of the most important factors in deciding the success of tourism and hotel businesses (Kuo, 2011). According to Baterson and Hoffman (2011), American businesses are beginning to conceptualize that poor service quality cost companies a 20% drop in sales nationally and that improved quality of good and services work in tandem with improved productivity and increased profitability. Improved leadership and management leads to greater improvement in costs (Goh, 2003).

Service quality is considered a foundation for any service organisation in procuring customers (Parasuraman, Zeinthaml & Berry, 1994). According to Parasuraman et al. (1994), service quality focuses on quality perception by comparing customer expectations and actual performance. Service quality is also regarded as the difference between guest expectation and the actual outcome through continuous improvement. The smaller the differences, the higher the perceived quality. The narrow difference is basically due to continuous improvement. Among the various service quality models developed, Parasuraman's SERVQUAL is considered to be the base model. Parasuraman et al. (1994) in their research established five dimensions of service quality in their assessment of service: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles, which represent how customers organize information on service quality to allow organisations to establish models for performance improvements. Interesting key findings from the framework include improvement of customer satisfaction, positive word of mouth and growth profitability. Researchers also highlighted the importance of service quality improvement as an outcome of leveraging knowledge gap and level of management (Parasuraman et al., 1994).

Organisational service quality improvement is actually influenced by a multitude of factors that blend together in unique ways of operating and getting customer support. According to Asree, Zain and Razalli (2010), performance improvement is related to the survival and success of an organisation and is measured objectively and subjectively. Some prior studies also refer to service quality improvement as organisational effectiveness. Objective measures of performance use hard data or actual figures while subjective measures refer to individuals' perceptions. Some of the frequently used objective measures used are sales, market share, profits and return on investment or ROI (Sanchez et al., 2010) or return on assets (Garcia-Morales, Jimenez-Barrionuevo, & Gutierrez-Gutierrez, 2011).

Some specific subjective measures used to assess organisational service quality improvement or organisational effectiveness include perceptual statements relating to service quality improvement and customer satisfaction (Kuo, 2011), achievement of hotel goals and customer loyalty (Yang, 2010), increase or decrease in hotel revenue (Asree et al., 2010) as well as managers' perceptions of their organisation's performance in comparison to that of their competitors (Garcia-Morales et al., 2011; Palacios, Rebeiro-Soriono & Gil-Pechuan, 2011). Perceptual measures of organisational service quality performance were used in past studies due to difficulties in obtaining objective measures (Yang, 2010) as information pertaining to these measures may be deemed confidential (Asree et al., 2010).

Scholars have established a high correlation and concurrent validity between objective and subjective performance data implying that both types of measures are equally valid when measuring an organisation's service quality improvement (Aragon-Correa, Garcia-Morales, & Cordon-Pozo, 2007; Garcia-Morales et al., 2011). Service quality is an important factor that enables an organisation to differentiate itself from competitors and therefore gain a sustainable competitive advantage. Studies have found that organisational service quality relates to better performance improvement, therefore it can be assumed that better service quality enhances better performance despite numerous conclusions about service quality failures. Most studies have also concluded that quality service significantly contributes towards operational improvement and at the same time, customer perception has become a vital concern for organisations in their effort to improve service quality within a highly competitive marketplace (Terziovski & Samson, 2000).

## Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Theory building on organisational learning was an evolutionary trend from the early theories of management developed by practicing managers such as Taylor and Fayol as well as social scientists such as Mayo and McGregor (Cole, 2004). Argyris and Schon (1978) presented a theory that organisational learning takes the phase of individual action through shared models of routines in an organisation. The introduction of single loop learning (routine learning process) and double loop learning (change of norm) by Argyris and Schon (1978) provided a theory of action on how individuals learn in an organisation. Further, the establishment of the SERVQUAL instrument by Parasuraman (1994), provided researchers the possibilities of measuring service quality improvement and performance.

DeFillipi and Ornstein (2005) first postulated that the underlying theories of organisational learning take the form of psychological perspectives. As individuals are agents for organisational learning, these individuals are exposed to behavioural and cognitive development. The basis of analyzing the individual learning process depends on five distinctive learning perspectives that are commonly referred to as biological perspective, learning perspective, cognitive perspective, socio- cultural perspective and psychodynamic perspective. The biological perspective of learning theory emphasizes that human learning relies on the biochemistry and genetic makeup of the human brain, thus the neurophysiologic approach focuses on the brain and nervous system in providing a valuable understanding of people's behaviour that encourage or motivate individuals to learn. Interestingly, the limitation of brain stimulation and damage can limit an individual's memory and restrict the impact of learning (Huang & Shin, 2011). The underlying theory through the integration is linked with the application of double loop learning (Argyris, 1999) that formulates organisational learning. However the effectiveness of organisational learning must involve leadership that is responsive towards change (Yukl, 2010), along with a learning culture (Marsick & Watkins, 1997) and service improvement programme (Parasuaraman et al, 1994) which leads to organisational performance improvement (Castenada & Rios, 2007). Based on the service quality theory (Parasuraman, 1994), the conceptual gap in the model of service quality and expectation with actual service improvement involves evaluation of the process and outcome of service delivery with expected improvement.

## Relationship between Leadership Style and Organisational Learning

Past studies have shown the significant relationship between leadership and organisational learning. Compared to authoritarian leadership styles which inhibit organisational learning, transformational leadership stimulates organisational learning by promoting intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and self-confidence among employees (Aragon et al., 2007). According to Gracia et al. (2011), transformational leaders have a vision, inspire followers to pursue that vision, change systems to adjust to their vision and subsequently, coach followers to take on greater responsibilities for their development.

Using the structural equation modelling approach, Choe (2004) empirically examined the simultaneous relationships between transformational leadership, organisational learning, innovation and organisational performance among a sample of 408 firms in farming, manufacturing, construction and service sectors. The study demonstrated that transformational leadership had a strong, significant positive influence on organisational learning. In addition, organisational learning positively affects performance.

Leading organisational learning requires knowledge leadership that creates the process of transferring knowledge from one individual to another. The influencing factor must be created by leaders in order to orientate learning, encourage a learning climate and support and act as a role model. The leadership style develops a transformation among employees through confidence, mission and goals by creating strong feelings and involvement through cohesiveness and most importantly, commitment towards the organisation's work performance in terms of quality service (Bass et al., 2003). Much of the scholarship confirmed the impact of transactional and transformational leadership on organisational learning (Yukl, 2010).

However, insights on the relationship between leadership styles and organisational learning is lacking (Waldman, Berson & Keller, 2009). Thus this research intends to investigate the following hypothesis:

> H1: There is a positive relationship between leadership styles and organisational learning.

**Relationship between Organisational Learning and Service Quality Improvement**

While the significance of organisational learning for an organisation's survival and effective performance has been established theoretically, limited empirical attention has been given to this relationship (Garcia-Morales et al., 2011). While organisational learning may not always lead to improvement in organisational performance (Garcia-Morales et al., 2011), previous studies have verified the existence of a positive relationship between organisational learning and service quality performance and improvement, be it in hospitality or other industries (Kuo, 2011; Palacios et al., 2011; Sanchez et al., 2010; Yang, 2010).

Using electronic manufacturing companies in Taiwan as his study sample, Kuo (2011) investigated the relationships among human resource management, organisational learning, organisational innovation, knowledge management capability and organisational service quality improvement. His findings showed that organisation learning positively affected organisational performance. In this study, service quality is one of the seven elements used to measure the organisational performance construct.

Customer satisfaction and service quality are two significant aspects of organisational performance in the hospitality industry, especially in the case of hotels which emphasize excellent service culture and repeat guest patronage to enhance sales and profitability. According to Hays and Hill (2001, p.337) as "customer expectations change from customer to customer as well as over time, organisational learning is needed to achieve and maintain superior service quality". Furthermore, they asserted that service quality is an important predictor of market share and profitability.

Hays and Hill (2001) conducted an empirical study that investigated the inter-relationships between employee motivation, organisational learning and perceived service quality among a sample of 25 North American hotels. They conceptualized organisational learning as learning through service failure. Hays and Hill (2001) gauged perceived service quality in terms of customer perceptions to a question "how willing are you to return to a brand hotel". According to them, customer revisit intention is a good indicator of the level of service quality received by customers as the more willing customers are in revisiting the hotel, the higher the customer perceived service quality improvement. Further, Hays and Hill (2001) found that learning through service failure (or organisational learning) had a significant positive effect on perceived service quality. Based on the literature discussed, as insights on organisational learning and service quality improvement for hospitality industry is still scarce, the following hypothesis was formulated.

> H2: There is a positive effect between organisational learning and organisational service quality improvement in the hospitality industry.

**Relationship between Leadership Styles and Organisational Service Quality Improvement**

Studies on leadership styles over the decade have produced empirical evidence on the positive relationship between leadership styles and organisational performance, emphasizing on service quality improvement by individuals that reflect on effective and high performance achievement (Bass et al., 2003), transformational and transactional (Bass et al., 2003), instructional leadership (Yukl, 2010), knowledge management leadership (Waldman et al., 2009), supportive leadership (Hodgkinson, 2000), general leadership styles which include supportive, and instructional leadership styles (Spendlove, 2007; Yukl, 2010; Argyris, 1999). Leadership styles in the hospitality industries have yet to establish strong correlation on how leadership styles could influence service quality performance, thus the third hypothesis investigates how leadership styles could positively influence service quality improvement in the hospitality industry.

> H3: There is a positive relationship between organisational leadership styles and service quality improvement.

**Organisational Learning Mediates the Relationship between Leadership Styles and Service Quality Improvement**

The success of service quality improvement solely depends on organisational learning culture and knowledge sharing (Waldman et al, 2009). The learning embedded in an organisation focuses on key leadership trust and knowledge sharing culture among workers as important elements in mediating for service quality improvement. Also, organisational learning focuses on the significance of bridging members from the workplace to collectively promote the norm of knowledge sharing among subordinates and leaders to achieve organisational goals; in this case, it appears to be improving organisational financial performance (Sanchez et al., 2010). In addition to organisational learning, various studies have shown a positive significant relationship between firm financial performance through improved service quality and customer satisfaction. We should also note that leadership and management influences the development of organisational learning (Vera & Crossan, 2004). When the top leadership promotes the introduction of organisational learning, members become motivated with knowledge absorption. As a result, organisational learning acts as a mediating variable between leadership and service quality improvement. In this context, the following hypothesis was developed.

H4: Organisational learning mediates the relationship between leadership styles and service quality improvement.

Theoretical arguments related to the influence of leadership styles, organisational learning and service quality improvement continue to be explored by scholars. Vera and Crossan (2004) postulated a theoretical model where good leaders are those who know how to switch between transformational and transactional styles in accordance to the situation to facilitate organisational learning thus providing positive performance outcomes. The theoretical literature explains the association between organisational learning and leadership styles that enhances the service quality improvement in the hospitality industry in Klang Valley. Figure1 illustrate the hypothesis of the research framework.

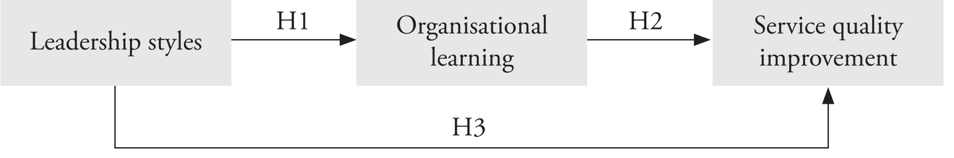


**Figure 1.** Research framework of organisational learning, leadership styles and service quality improvement.

## Research Methodology

The study employed the seven step method (Sekaran, 2010), which investigates structurally through observation, preliminary information gathering, theory formulation, hypothesizing, data collection, data analysis and deduction. As the study focused on leadership styles related to service quality improvement for hotels with 3 to 5 star ratings in Klang Valley, the unit of analysis used was personnel who are involved in decision making at operational and corporate levels. The sample included managers, assistant managers, supervisors, human resource managers and administrative managers who are involved in the day-to-day running of the business.

## Sample Location

To provide generalizability, the chosen study area was Klang Valley, considering that the hospitality and tourism hub is found mainly in Selangor and Federal Territory. Most of the popular hotels with star rating of 3 stars, 4 stars and 5 stars are located here. The locations of these hotels are due to strategic competitiveness and at the same time, these two states are the focal points of business in Malaysia.

## Population and Sampling Frame

The population for this study consists of hotel managers, assistant managers and supervisors from hotels in Klang Valley which include Selangor and Wilayah Persekutuan. Based on the Malaysian Association of Hotels Malaysia statistics, the majority of the hotels are listed in Selangor (81) and Wilayah Persekutuan (131), ranging from 5 stars to 1 star. However, only 5 star, 4 star and 3 star hotels were considered for the study. Based on an estimation of 20 managers, assistant managers and supervisors per hotel and the total number of 3-5 star hotels (Selangor 88 & W. Persekutuan 56), the total population was estimated at 2880 (Table 1). Based on the table provided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), the estimated sample size based on a population size of 2880 was 338.

**Table 1.** Number of hotels based on star rating in Malaysia

| West Malaysia | Star ratings | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| **Perlis** | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| **Kedah** | 9 | 10 | 16 | 12 | 8 | 55 |
| **Penang** | 7 | 19 | 8 | 17 | 4 | 55 |
| **Perak** | 1 | 7 | 11 | 21 | 13 | 53 |
| **Selangor** | 13 | 12 | 16 | 19 | 21 | 81 |
| **N.Sembilan** | 0 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 28 |
| **Melacca** | 3 | 6 | 12 | 15 | 14 | 50 |
| **Johore** | 4 | 8 | 21 | 28 | 20 | 81 |
| **Pahang** | 4 | 14 | 24 | 23 | 11 | 76 |
| **Kelantan** | 1 | 1 | 6 | 13 | 2 | 23 |
| **Terengganu** | 4 | 3 | 9 | 14 | 4 | 34 |
| **W. Persekutuan** | 24 | 19 | 27 | 34 | 27 | 131 |

Source: Malaysian Association of Hotels (www.hotels.org.my)

## Research Instruments

The instruments were adopted from previous studies which were validated and had obtained more than 0.70 for the Alpha Cronbach value. They were then modified to meet the objectives of this study pertaining to service quality improvement. The constructs for organisational learning were adopted from Sanchez et al. (2010), leadership styles from Vitalla, (2004) and Hartog, Muijenm and Koopman (1999) while that of organisational service quality improvement from Ramayah, Samat and Lo (2011) and Hays and Hill (2000). The questionnaire consisted of four sections, namely section A comprising of items related to organisational learning, section B on leadership styles, section C on organisational service quality improvement and section D on respondent's profile.

## Measurement scale and reliability

Based on a combination of nominal and ordinal scale (Sekaran, 2010), the questionnaire utilised a 5-point Likert scale for all sections A–D. The Cronbach coefficient alpha measures the reliability of constructs and dimensions and a value of more than 0.7 provides substantiated validity of the items tested (Sekaran, 2010; Nunally, 1978). The three important variables for the study were tested for reliability, which denotes consistency of the instrument. For the organisational learning construct, all the dimensions recorded more than 0.7 for reliability: information acquisition (0.831), information distribution (0.841), information interpretation (0.856) and organisational memory (0.842). Elements under types of leadership produced higher values: transformational leadership (0.927) and transactional leadership (0.914). For service quality improvement, a value of 0.814 was obtained. The results show that all the constructs and variables evaluated are highly reliable which in turn confirmed the consistency of the instrument (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Reliability coefficient and Cronbach alpha

| Constructs and Dimensions | Reliability coefficient Cronbach alpha | Construct adopted from |
|---|---|---|
| Organisational learning | | |
| Information acquisition | 0.831 | |
| Information distribution | 0.841 | Sanchez et al. (2010) |
| Information interpretation | 0.856 | |
| Organisational memory | 0.842 | |
| Leadership styles | | |
| Transformational leadership | 0.927 | Hartog et al. (1999) |
| Transactional leadership | 0.914 | Vitalla (2004) |
| Service quality improvement | 0.814 | Ramayah et al. (2011) and Hays & Hill (2000) |

**Data Collection**

The primary data collection method was employed for this study. Questionnaires were distributed to 43 hotels. Initial distributions of questionnaire was conducted via online. 10 hotels were selected at the initial stage, however poor responses from the senior managers necessitated the need to visit them personally to explain the objective of the research. In the end, data were collected from 26 hotels within the region of Klang Valley: 16 hotels in Selangor and 10 hotels in Wilayah Persekutuan. The hotels included in this sample ranged from 3 star to 5 star. Senior Managers, Managers, Assistant Managers, Supervisors, and Human resources managers overseeing various departments include food and beverage, Housekeeping, Front office, Maintenance, Human Resource Management Accounting and others made up the study sample. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, and 173 individuals responded (response rate of 38%). Questionnaires were personally collected from each representative of the hotels.

**Data Analysis**

Of the total number of respondents, 57.2% was male (99), while 42.8% was female (77). With regard to ethnicity, 41.6% of the respondents were Malay, Chinese (31.7%), Indians (24.4%) and others (foreigners) (2.3%). The age of the respondents ranged from 20 to 69. The majority of the respondents (72%) were working executives aged 30 – 49 years. As far as nationality is concerned, 99.4% were Malaysians and only 0.6% were foreigners. With regard to marital status, 35.3% were single and 64.7% were married. In terms of educational qualifications, 38.7% were diploma holders, 26. 6% degree holders, 8.7% with a professional qualification and 3.5% were holders of Master's degree.

The section on organisational profile was divided into four categories, which collected information on the various departments within the hotel, position held by respondent, working experience in the hotel industry and star rating. The information for working experience refers to the overall working experience of respondents so that it can reflect better their contribution for organisational learning and performance. The results show that the majority of respondents have 5–10 years of work experience in wide range of hotels ranging from 3 stars to 5 stars. A total of 7 departments were listed in the questionnaire ranging from Food and Beverage, Front Office, Housekeeping and Sales. Additionally, results showed that 22% of the respondents worked in 3 star hotels, 65 from 4 star hotels and 70 from 5 star hotels (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Organisational profile

| Department | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Sales and Marketing | 25 | 14.5 |
| Food and Beverage | 40 | 23.1 |
| Banquet | 9 | 5.2 |
| Front Office | 35 | 20.2 |
| House Keeping | 24 | 13.9 |
| Maintenance | 9 | 5.2 |
| Human Resource Management | 14 | 8.1 |
| Accounting and Finance | 10 | 5.8 |
| Others | 7 | 4.0 |
| **Positions held** | | |
| General Manager | 3 | 1.7 |
| Manager | 49 | 28.3 |
| Assistant Manager | 62 | 35.8 |
| Supervisor | 49 | 28.3 |
| Administrator | 7 | 4.0 |
| Human resource manager | 3 | 1.7 |
| **Working experience** | | |
| Less than 1 year | 5 | 2.9 |
| 1-4 years | 39 | 22.5 |
| 5-10 years | 72 | 41.6 |
| More than 10 years | 57 | 32.9 |
| **Star Ratings** | | |
| 3 stars | 38 | 22 |
| 4 stars | 65 | 37.6 |
| 5 stars | 70 | 40.5 |

## Hypothesis Testing

The first statistical test (hypothesis 1) was conducted using regression analysis to investigate the relationship between leadership styles and organisational learning. The results indicate a significant relationship. Based on the results shown in Table 4, the adjusted $R^2$ value shows 0.326, indicating 32% of variation on organisational learning is explained by leadership styles. The beta coefficient value of 0.575 indicates a strong relationship between leadership styles and organisational learning. The finding can be attributed to the initiatives and commitment of leaders to create a organisational learning culture that improves individual performance and by extension, organisational performance.

**Table 4.** Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std Error of The Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.575 | 0.330 | 0.326 | 0.3195 |

**Table 5.** Coefficients

| Model | B | Std Error | Beta | t | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 ORGLE | 0.458 | 0.072 | 0.575 | 6.384 | .000 |

Regression analysis models were used to test the relationship between organisational learning and service quality improvement for Hypothesis 2. The results show a significant relationship. Table 6 shows that the adjusted $R^2$ value is 0.336, indicating 33% of the variation on service quality improvement is explained by organisational learning. The beta coefficient as shown in Table 7 is 0.439, indicating a strong relationship between organisational learning on service quality improvement. The result indicates that the knowledge sharing process contributes towards organisational service quality improvement.

**Table 6.** Model summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std Error of The Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0.439 | 0.343 | 0.336 | 0.0.3659 |

The relationship is shown to be overall significant at $p < 0.05$. The result also confirms that Hypothesis 2 is supported as there is a positive relationship between organisational learning and service quality improvement.

**Table 7. Coefficients**

| Model | B | Std Error | Beta | t | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 ORGLE | 0.458 | 0.072 | 0.439 | 6.384 | .000 |

Similarly, regression analysis was used to test the relationship between leadership styles and organisational service quality performance (Hypothesis 3). The model summary from Table 8 shows that the $R^2$ value of 0.303 indicates a strong correlation between predictors of leadership styles and organisational service quality improvement. The variability measured at 30% (Table 9) explains that transformational leadership style and transactional leadership style contributes to 30% of the variance shown for service quality improvement. Further, the beta value of 0.555 explains a strong relationship between the variables, indicating effective leadership styles can enhance service quality improvement.

**Table 8.** Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std Error of The Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .555 | .315 | .303 | .3386 |

**Table 9.** Coefficients

| Model | B | Std Error | Beta | t | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 LEAST | 0.500 | 0.057 | 0.555 | 8.733 | .000 |

The results support Hypothesis 3, that is, leadership styles can significantly affect organisational service quality improvement.

## Mediation Analysis

Regression analysis was used to test the mediation effect of organisational learning on leadership styles and organisational service quality performance to confirm Hypothesis 4. The mediation analysis was conducted based on the conditions set by Baron and Kenny (1986) below:

- The independent variable significantly affects the mediator.
- The independent variable significantly affects the dependent variable in the absence of the mediator.
- The mediator has a significant unique effect on the dependent variable.
- The effects of independent and dependent variable shrink upon the addition of the mediator to the model.

Leadership styles was significantly related to service quality performance (Table 10) and it was also significantly related to organisational learning. The final step of regression in Table 10 revealed that both leadership styles (beta = 0.453, $p < 0.05$) and organisational learning (beta = 0.178, $p < 0.05$,) have significant impacts on service quality performance. The relationship between leadership styles and service quality improvement is significant even after the direct effect of organisational learning on service quality improvement was controlled. Leadership styles was found to still significantly affect service quality improvement although the beta value has been reduced from 0.555 to 0.453. Thus this outcome is consistent with partial mediation.

**Table 10.** Regression analysis for mediation

| | Without Mediator | With Mediator |
|---|---|---|
| **Leadership styles** | 0.555 | 0.453 |
| **Organisational learning $R^2$** | 0.458 | 0.178 |
| **Adjusted $R^2$** | 0.315 | 0.330 |
| **Significant at $p < 0.05$** | 0.303 | 0.322 |

Dependent variable: Service quality improvement

## Discussions and Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate the significant relationships between organisational learning, leadership styles and service quality improvement and yield important implications for management especially in relation to operational management and decision-making in the hospital industry. The findings also suggest that the strong relationship between leadership styles and organisational learning is mainly due to management teams who create a learning culture that enhances organisational learning (Denton, 1998) and Dimorski and Skerlavaj (2005). The findings also imply that senior managers are strong advocates or champions of learning, and tools used in their modelling of organisational learning is the most powerful way to communicate an organisation's vision and inspire others towards achieving them. This conforms with Senge's (1990) finding that contends leadership roles as being critical for organisational learning.

In a nutshell, the strong relationship between organisational learning and service quality improvement is supported by leadership styles in hotels. This positive relationship concurs with findings from past studies that have highlighted the positive impact of organisational learning on a business' performance (Choe, 2004). Hospitality practioners are strongly encouraged to adopt a mental model or management philosophy which looks at how guestology experiences can be enhanced to retain customers. These mental models, however, should be updated or revised to include new knowledge or development that can further enhance individual performance and ultimately, organisational performance (Kim, 2004). The sharing and integration of a learning culture should be treated as a continuous initiative in organisational performance improvement (Egan et al., 2004). With governing variables changing continuously according to guest expectations for hospitality services, the operational level must adhere to effective information dissemination for learning. Management should consistently monitor for corrections to ensure that service quality performance is maintained at all times (Egan et al., 2004).

Results for mediation analysis confirms that organisational learning does significantly improve service quality. With strong support from leadership, continuous learning with new knowledge provides a pathway for improving hospitality services. Further, as the hospitality working environment is considered to be very stressful with long working hours, inspirational motivation proves to be vital. Previous studies confirm that transformational leadership style in the hospitality industry is strongly associated with leadership trust and performance outcome (Kennedy & Anderson, 2005). Consistent with Cheung, Ng and Lam (2001), the present study concurs that transformational leadership is the stronger component of the two leadership styles studied.

The findings concur with Senge (1990) that organisational learning is driven by leadership to produce superior service quality in order to achieve its goal and vision. The present study also demonstrates the positive implications of organisational learning in terms of knowledge acquisition, knowledge dissemination, knowledge integration and knowledge memory towards performance and at the same time, confirm that the driving force behind this is leadership style (Yukl, 2010; Dimovski & Skerlavaj, 2005). In summary, both organisational learning and leadership styles play a vital role towards improving an organisation's service quality. Thus, hotels should continuously practice decentralization of knowledge so that employees are empowered at various levels to carry out their functions effectively. Further, hospitality businesses should strive to embrace organisational learning coupled with transformational leadership style to achieve their goals.

## Conclusion and Limitations

This study demonstrates the strong relationship between leadership styles and organisational learning to organisational service quality improvement. In this context, the findings confirm that transformational and transactional leadership are supportive toward organisational learning and together, these two can improve service quality in the hospitality industry. Further, the predictors explored and measured for this study can serve as a guideline for senior managers on enhancing overall service quality and performance.

One of the limitations of this study is the focus on Klang Valley where the majority of hotels are located. While this is for purposes of generalizability, the study could have covered more locations throughout Malaysia to include variation. Further, more meaningful findings could have been derived with the inclusion of organisational commitment as a mediating factor towards service quality improvement. For future research, more attributes related to organisational learning and decision-making among senior managers can be included to understand better how organisational learning is effectively executed in the hospitality industry. Longitudinal studies are also recommended and variables related to organisational citizenship behaviour can be replaced with the current dependent variable.



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Research Paper

# Staging a National Dish: The Social Relevance of *Nasi lemak* in Malaysia

Laurance Tibère, Cyrille Laporte and Jean-Pierre Poulain
*Taylor's Toulouse University Center (TTUC), University of Toulouse - Jean Jaurès, CNRS*

Elise Mognard
*Taylor's University, Malaysia*

Marcella Aloysius
*Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Malaysia*



**Abstract:** This article examines the social construction process of *nasi lemak* as a national dish in Malaysia. Considering its institutional valorisation, especially in the field of tourism, the study attempts to understand the social imaginaries related to the dish as well as its practical status in the day-to-day food habits using empirical data from the Malaysian Food Barometer (MFB) study. The Malaysian historical and social context is also taken into consideration in elucidating institutional actions on *nasi lemak*. Findings reveal that the emblematic status of *nasi lemak* is not only supported by institutional actions, but also by social imaginaries and practices. The paper also highlights the importance of commensality and consumption contexts around national dishes such as *nasi lemak*. Finally, it points out the social 'relevance'- using UNESCOs' notion — of some emblematic dishes especially in multicultural contexts and in particular, Malaysia.

**Keywords:** *Nasi lemak*, national dish, tourism, collective identities, food habits, commensality.

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Correspondence: Laurance Tibère, Taylor's Toulouse University Center (TTUC), University of Toulouse - Jean Jaurès, CNRS. Email: *tibere@univ-tlse2.fr*

## Introduction

*Nasi lemak* is a Malaysian dish of rice cooked in coconut milk and served with gravy, boiled egg, peanuts, cucumber, and fried anchovies as a condiment. While its historic origin is rooted in the Malay food culture, it is consumed today by all groups of the Malaysian society[1]. *Nasi lemak* is featured as a national dish in most of the country's tourism brochures and promotional materials. Numerous scholars (e.g. Mennell, 1985; Appadurai, 1988; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Belasco & Scranton, 2014; Ray, 2008; Hassoun, 2010; Cardon & Garcia-Garza, 2012; Adell, Bendix, Bortolotto, & Tauschek, 2016; Ichijo & Ranta, 2016) have analysed the social construction of 'national dishes', focusing on the role and contribution of political bodies, leaders or elites, certain social groups such as middle-class women, and even the agro-food industry. The role of tourism has also been pointed out in some of these analyses. Some others identified tourist guides and country websites in addition to cookbooks and cooking shows on radio and television as involved in the construction process (Cusack, 2000). Others highlighted visitors and their expectations and attitudes about food (Cohen & Avieli, 2004), contending that national dishes are created through interactions with others, i.e. tourists, foreigners, colonisers, and invaders. Furthermore, the role of tourism in the production of local cuisines has been studied as the dynamics of food heritage-making in the context of globalisation (Wilk, 1999; Rutenberg, 2003; Wilson, 2006; Poulain, 2008, 2012; De Robert & Van Velthem, 2008; Henderson, 2009; De Soucey, 2010; Bessiere & Tibère, 2013; Mognard, 2018). In the context of Malaysia, Tibère and Aloysius (2013) explored the role of food in tourism sustainability. Similarly, Ramli and Zahari (2014), as well as Omar, Ab Karim and Omar (2015) analysed the status of food in Malaysia's tourism activity by linking it to the development of the collective identity.

Recognising that tourism is involved in the construction of national dishes as emblems of destinations, the paper attempts to explore this through the framework of the social status of food and its role in building and maintaining spaces for sharing, and 'feeding' collective identities which we refer to as 'in common' in multicultural societies (Tibère, 2015). In other words, apart from its institutional construction, the social 'relevance' of *Nasi lemak* is also examined, in reference to UNESCO's terminology on intangible cultural heritage: "to be kept alive, intangible cultural

[1] According to heritage historian Ahmad Najib Ariffin, founder of *Nusantara, Academy of Development, Geocultures and Ethnolinguistics (NADGE)*( http://www.nadge.org/). As a direct translation, it literally means "fatty rice" or "rice in cream." It is prepared by boiling rice in coconut milk, with *pandan* leaves added for flavour. The basic version of the dish (*Nasi lemak bungkus biasa*) is prepared with eggs, fried anchovies (*ikan bilis*), cucumber slices, grilled peanuts and chili paste (*sambal*). It is served on a plate or in a banana leaf folded into a cone to eat on the go.

heritage must be relevant to its community" (UNESCO, 2010, p. 4). In addition to the Malaysian historical and social contexts, we also consider the social representations and practices of this dish in Malaysia to answer the following questions: 1) how Malaysian people consider *nasi lemak*, 2) what are their consumption practices, and 3) what can we conclude about its social relevance as an emblem of Malaysia in tourism?

For the methodology, we used empirical data from the 2012-2013 Malaysian Food Barometer (MFB) study. The data was collected through questionnaires distributed to a national representative sample of 2,000 individuals[2]. Some of the questions were related to the dish's place in the everyday diet of the local population. For example, one question looked at 'dishes and food that best represent Malaysia' to capture social representations of food as an identity builder. In addition to this quantitative approach, we also examined the social imaginaries activated by *nasi lemak* using data collected between 2013 and 2015 from 3 focus groups (24 people) and 33 semi-directed interviews with locals and institutional actors from the tourism sector. Additionally, the analysis also included print media (newspapers, magazines) and audio-visual material related to food heritage.

## One Malaysia: Food as a Symbol of Unity in Diversity

### The Institutional Promotion of *Nasi lemak*

Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 as a former British colony[3]. It has a population of 31 million which is divided into four major ethnic groups: 1) the indigenous populations (e.g. Orang Asli, Orang Ulu, Kelabits), 2) Malays (people who came to Malaysia in 14th and 15th centuries and converted to Islam)—this group is now the dominant majority and are called *Bumiputera* (a Malay term meaning 'sons of the soil') as they are considered the country's historic population, 3) Chinese and 4) Indian who originally came in as migrants and have since lived in Malaysia for several generations. The Chinese and Indian migrants gradually mastered the Malay language in addition to their original languages. Despite inter-ethnic barriers and maintenance of numerous specific cultural traits within each group, all groups have undergone cultural transformation to some degree through borrowing and adaptations over time (Shamsul, 1986, 2015; Olmédo, 2015). In terms of food,

[2] The methods used are presented in detail in: Poulain J.-P., Smith W., Laporte C., Tibère L., Ismail M.N., Mognard E., Aloysius M., Neethiahnanthan A.R. & Shamsul A.B. (2015). Studying the consequences of modernisation on ethnic food patterns: Development of the Malaysian Food Barometer (MFB). *Anthropology of Food*, April 2015.

[3] Before England, Malaysia had been colonised by Portugal and Holland.

the different cultural influences have transformed and blended to create Malaysian versions of 'original' cuisines and dishes. These dishes, which were originally eaten by one component of Malaysian society, have been adopted and adapted by others as well. *Nasi lemak* is one such dish, which originated from labourers on the west coast of Peninsula Malaysia. Other examples include *roti canai* and *tosai* (Indian dishes), and *mee goreng* and *chicken rice* (Chinese dishes). The specificity of *nasi lemak* is highlighted as a local and institutional dish, especially by national media. In the tourism industry, this dish is always featured in promotional websites and leaflets. In 2012, an article in Malaysia Airlines' inflight magazine listed *nasi lemak* as one of the 'dishes that Malaysians should be most proud of", and promoted as one of its meal menus[4]. In 2017, Miss Universe Malaysian wore a *nasi lemak*-inspired evening gown at the international competition, which had been designed by a famous Malaysian Chinese fashion designer. In addition, an annual cooking competition for *nasi lemak* vendors was created a few years ago.

Not surprisingly, this dish is also popular on TV. For example, the FriedChillies Food Network hosted a special episode on *nasi lemak* on their *Malaysians eat: That's what we do* show and launched an annual one-day event called *I eat Nasi lemak* in 2014. These programmes not only highlight the dish's nutritional qualities, but also show the excellent taste and practicality of the dish, which makes it an enjoyable dish at any time for Malaysians. The main message of the programme was: "You know... we should make *nasi lemak* our national dish. You can get all your protein, carbohydrates, fiber and vitamins in one dish, which gives you different types of chili kicks and swings depending on the sambal they serve".

Over the years, *nasi lemak* has found a special place in the lives and hearts of Malaysians. From being just a breakfast meal, it can now be enjoyed anytime throughout the day and night by all races in Malaysia, which is totally unique. This is particularly important in the multicultural context of Malaysia, and is often promoted by the local media. For example, the director of a Malaysian movie in 2011 entitled *Nasi lemak 2.0* at the movie premiere proudly asserted that "*Nasi lemak* symbolises national cohesion". One of the stars quipped: "My message is that the system in Malaysia is unequal ... But when we live together, we eat together, there is no racism" (Fred Chong, Wee Meng Chee, 2011). This leads us to ponder on the role of food as a marker of national unity which is a national aspiration in Malaysia.

[4] *Going Places*, Malaysia Airlines' inflight magazine, August 2012, p. 74.

## The Political Status of Food in Malaysia

The cohesion among the different ethnocultural groups which makes up the Malaysian society, in addition to the political dynamics intended to create unifying symbols, are major concerns in Malaysia. This was manifested in the slogan of One Malaysia of the previous administration, which encouraged 'unity in difference'. This promotion takes place in competitions with Singapore and Indonesia, who equally proclaim some of the common dishes such as *nasi lemak* as part of their cultural natural heritage. For about a decade, the "gazetting or certification of heritage food by the Department of National Heritage become a significant national agenda" (Ramli & Zahari, 2014, p. 410). The institutional and media consensus surrounding the dish highlights the role that institutions, particularly govermental, play in the construction of national symbols. Ramli and Zahari (2014) highlighted the role of food in a nation's construction of their uniqueness and common belonging by proposing the word 'Gastropolitic' (García & Matta, 2017) and 'Gastronationalism' (De Soucey, 2010). In multicultural societies, national cohesion and strong ties between different cultural groups are particularly important. Prior research have shown the central role played by unifying symbols (Taylors 1994; Kymlicka, 1995; Semprini, 2000). In Malaysia, like many Southeast Asian societies where ethnic and religious plurality is the norm, the political management of diversity is crucial (Ganesan, 2005; Kymlicka & Baogand, 2005; Bideau & Kilani, 2012; Olmédo, 2015). For example, Chong (2009, 2012) pointed out the importance of strengthening ties with neighbouring countries, especially Indonesia, by increasing food heritage awareness in Malaysia over the 'Indonesia-Malaysia dispute'. However, Yoshino (2010) argued that the poor presence of Malaysian cuisine on the international stage denotes the lack of a strong national food identity.

All the aforementioned studies reveal that food, as a heritage builder, carries "a consequence for, and in, the day-to-day lives of individuals beyond the provision of a collective identity" (Smith, 2006, p. 276). Wilson (2006) contended that the role of eating and drinking in the construction of collective identities is indisputable. He also mentioned their role in the preservation of social cohesion and differentiation mechanisms, reminding us that eating and drinking represent far more than simple nourishment. Cusack (2000) cited Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' to highlight the symbolic construction of unity in everyday life through food (Cusack, 2000). Moreover, according to Anderson (1991), if the ties that bind the populations within a society are largely imaginary, how do food dishes or drinks contribute to the creation of these shared imaginaries? In their work on the social construction of reality, Berger and Luckmann (1966) highlighted that each society needs a social reservoir of knowledge and symbols, whereby 'language' is the most powerful symbol. Lévi-Strauss (1968) posits cuisine as a language, or more precisely as a symbolic system that elucidates shared representations, where food takes on an important dimension.

In addition, Rozin and Fallon (1980), Rozin and Nemerof (1990) and Fischler (1990, 1993) highlighted three 'principles of incorporation' involved in eating: 1) the physical incorporation of foods and their biological characteristics, 2) the incorporation of the symbols associated with them, and 3) incorporation into a group. The incorporation of certain foods or drinks cements strong ties with others, and with one's circle of family or friends. Based on this viewpoint, we investigated if a popular or "vernacular" regulation and political management including the tourism promotion of collective belonging (Chua, 1991), exists in food. In this context, the following questions emerged at this stage: 1) what is the symbolic status of *nasi lemak*? and, 2) what is its place in the collective imaginary, and in the concrete social life? Answering these two questions could help to strengthen the argument of its relevance as an emblematic dish, or otherwise, unravel the artificiality of its status. From a theoretical and methodological view, it also reveals the wide range of applications of Food Sociology in understanding better social and life events.

## The Social Valorisation of *nasi lemak* in Collective Representations and Imaginaries

The analysis of the quantitative data reveal the importance of *nasi lemak* in collective representations. This dish was chosen as the best dish to represent Malaysia by 42% of respondents, followed by *roti canai*[5] and chicken rice, each receiving 22% of responses and *satay*[6] at 9.5%. The preference for *nasi lemak* is relatively homogeneous across the country's ethnocultural groups, i.e. 43.7% among Malays, 38.2% among Indians and 35.6% among Chinese. It scored even higher (50%) among non-Malay Bumiputeras (those who stay in East Malaysia). On further enquiry, it was found that *nasi lemak* was introduced and popularised in these regions by hotels and restaurants run by West Malaysians[7]. It is possible that East Malaysians have wholeheartedly adopted this ubiquitous dish and have come to see it as a powerful symbol for "Malaysians".

[5] *Roti canai* (or roti prata) is a flatbread popular in Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Singapore), inspired by the Indian Naan. It is part of the traditional breakfast, and its filling is made from a vast range of foods: fruit, cheese, curry, meat, etc. *Chicken rice* is a dish of Chinese origin, generally associated with the Hainan region, Singapore and Malaysia, although it is also common in Thailand.

[6] *Satay* is a Southeast Asian delicacy. Its condiment is peanut sauce, saté sauce, or bumbu kacang in Indonesian. It is available in powder, paste, or sauce form and is used with meat and fish.

[7] We met with two hospitality professionals, one from the Peninsula and the other from Sabah. Both agreed on this point.

During interviews conducted in East Malaysia one woman highlighted this aspect:

> *"I cooked the rice and bought this* ikan bilis *(dried anchovies) because it is the most inconvenient for me to bring. Sambal, I did that. I cook the eggs. We have for vegetable a lot, tomato, cucumber, they have a lot. I cook the rice. My friend put a box there and one tablespoon is two Euros […] Yes, it is* nasi lemak*. […] That's the national (dish). Because of that."* (Kelabit woman, 42).

Not surprisingly, *nasi lemak* with pork *(nasi lemak babi)* or wild boar curry (Menon, 2017) in East Malaysia by non-Muslim groups is another example of the appropriation of this dish.

Finally, we examined the socio-economic characteristics of those who have a strong favourable view of *nasi lemak*. We know that the middle and upper classes of a society often drive the promotion of local cuisines in response to increased food modernisation and the accompanying fear of the erosion of cultural markers (Poulain, 1997; Ray, 2008; Cusack, 2000). In India, Appadurai (1988) showed the role played by the Indian urban middle class, particularly women, through the development of cookbooks and the social construction of a national Indian cuisine beyond regional and ethnic differences. The rise of Malaysia's middle class is likely to induce similar effects (Embong, 2002; Lange & Meier, 2009; Shamsul, 2015). Findings from the quantitative survey show that the upper class and highly educated segments as well as young people made up the majority of those who responded that *nasi lemak* was the "dish that best represents Malaysian food"[8]. Respondents generally associated the popular dish with two qualities: flexibility and availability. With regard to the flexibility, *nasi lemak* is perceived as easy to cook, and garnished according to one's tastes. This allows different ethnocultural groups to make different adjustments according to their specific palate. For example, Indians are reputed to make the spiciest *sambal* (chili paste), while Malays prefer to add coconut milk and sugar, and the Chinese highlight its salty flavours. The other point related to flexibility is the adaptability of *nasi lemak* to religious or health dietary restrictions (pork-free for Muslims, beef-free for Hindus, with mock meat for vegetarians). Respondents highlighted the accessibility of *nasi lemak*, which refers to it being available and sold everywhere. Next, we examine the presence of *nasi lemak* in Malaysians' daily diet.

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[8] The question posed: According to you, which dish(s) best represent Malaysian food? Categorical data were analysed using Chi squared test in the SPSS Software (VS 14.0). Statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

## The Social Valorisation of *nasi lemak* in Everyday Food Practices

*Nasi lemak* is consumed in almost the same way by the different ethnic groups in Malaysia. It primarily makes up 12.4% of Malaysian breakfasts. In a study on the status of beef in Medieval Great Britain, Mennell (1985)[9] revealed that beef became a symbol of the English nation based on the food they ate. Mennell (1985, p. 63) also argued that "the emblematic value of a food product is in the quality, not the quantity". It is also possible that the status of *nasi lemak* can be attributed more to its symbolic qualities than to its actual consumption. In the MFB study, for breakfast, *nasi lemak* came in second place behind bread (13.7%) and before Chinese fried noodles (*mee goreng*) (11.4%) and *roti canai* (6.8%). It is also consumed in 3% of mid-day meals, and 1.5% of evening meals, fairly far behind other dishes like mixed rice (25% of the other meals), noodles (12.5%), dish served in a sauce with rice (12%), and fried rice (7.8%). In terms of social class, consumers were primarily made up of lower-middle and middle class individuals which supports the hypothesis of heritagisation based on the social practices of the lower and lower-middle classes, and the more symbolic promotion at higher classes. The working class is perhaps more likely to eat *nasi lemak* on a daily basis outside the home. An Malaysian Indian taxi driver in Kuala Lumpur expressed his attachment and patriotism to the dish in these terms:

> *"without* nasi lemak*, no life in Malaysia!"* (Indian man, 32).

These words, which highlight the vitality of the dish and its nourishing role, also reveal the important symbolic role of *nasi lemak* for Malaysians. Additionally, in their study of public consumption spaces and habits that reflect interactions between different ethnic components in Malaysia and Singapore, Duruz and Knoo (2014) showed that all Malaysians, regardless of their social and ethnic backgrounds, generally eat out. They explained that the policies promoted by the NEP (New Economic Policy)[10] and the increasing trend of islamisation of Malaysian society have led to a decrease in interethnic meal sharing or commensality particularly in Chinese and Indian communities, which was common in the 1960s and 1970s.

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[9] According to Mennell (1985), beef's symbolic qualities were at least as important, if not more important than, its nutritional value, since it encapsulated certain positive British values (the simplicity of British cooking, promoted by Protestantism, in opposition to the sophistication and trickery of French cooking; the 'bleeding dish nation' and the 'warrior nation' as opposed to the 'sauce nation').

[10] For an overview and better understanding of the NEP (New Economic Policy) implemented in the 1970s, we recommend that the reader refer to *The New Economic Policy in Malaysia :Affirmative actions, Ethnic inequalities and Social justice* by Gomez E.& Saravanamuttu J. (2012). NUS Press, Singapore.

However, according to Duruz and Knoo (2014), eating out remains common and highlights the role of work, schools, and restaurants in driving this. The findings of MFB's quantitative data showed that 46.12% of meals of the previous day were taken outside the home. This is much higher compared to France (13.6%) and the United Kingdom (21%) (Poulain & Laporte, 2014). Therefore, we examined the contexts in which *nasi lemak* is consumed, and particularly interethnic commensality during which it may be consumed. We found that 56% of *nasi lemak* consumption took place outside the home, and was mainly (61.7%) shared with others. This result suggests social interactions around *nasi lemak* meals, which if we consider the interethnic commensality, reaches 36% of the shared meals. In summary, the status of *nasi lemak* is not only due to its daily consumption, but also to the commensality and social interactions that it enables outside the home with relatives, friends, and colleagues. Eating out and sharing meals outside the home with other ethnic groups carries a special role in Malaysia's multicultural society.

## The Social Importance of Commensality

Durkheim (1912) suggested that repetition of rituals gives individuals a strong feeling of connection to others in the present and in the past (heritage). He highlighted the unity created by a shared meal: "Now in a multitude of societies, meals taken in common are believed to create a bond of artificial kinship between those who partake in them" (1912, p. 481). For Simmel (1997), sharing food and meals makes up a part of the social forms that build commonality. Similarly, Douglas and Isherwood (1979) stressed that food consumption constitutes a ritual process whose primary function is to give meaning to a series of events. Even if the ritual processes change or disappear with modernisation, meals and the food paradigms that they make up still contribute to the maintenance of collective identities and values.

Moreover, Poulain (2017) compared meals to a "compass" which orients our food-related decisions and our routines, particularly meal locations and times. In that regard, Bringéus (2001, pp. 9-10) contended that "we eat at certain times, in certain places, and often with certain people. Furthermore, the different dishes are eaten in a certain order (...) eating and drinking are socially important for all members of a society, and are activities which order the world, whether as a part of everyday life or during special festive events". Therefore, what people consider as the national dish materialises in their social imaginary and collectively, represents and unites them despite their differences. National cuisines and dishes are a part of the construction of social representations as "socially developed and shared knowledge (...) which contributes to the construction of a shared reality" (Jodelet, 1997, p. 53). In certain cases, these constructions, which form a part of social life, are paired with other social and political dynamics which amplify or complement them. However, in spite of differences and distances in all cases, they contribute to preserving the shared imaginary and identity. Food is used as a way to regulate, both politically and socially, in the multicultural context of Malaysia.

In addition, beyond the consumption of *nasi lemak*, we noted other types of socialisation around meals that maintain interethnic social ties. First, meals taken at food courts (spaces for eating out) represent a multi-ethnic characteristic. Malaysians meet to share meals at the same table, with the ability of selecting their choice of food based on their preferences and religious/health dietary restrictions. Second, the unique concept that is open house, which refers to Malaysians inviting friends and acquaintances from other ethnic and religious communities into their homes to celebrate their religious or cultural festivities. For example, during Hari Raya (the first day after the Ramadan month), Malays invite Indians and Chinese and other ethnic groups to their houses for a merry celebration. The same happens for Christmas, Deepavali or Chinese New Year. Food is often served in the form of a buffet, without overlooking guests' religious or health dietary restrictions (e.g. halal, no beef). These festive occasions are considered very important for social cohesion in Malaysia with its increasingly segregated society. These meals, which bring Malaysians together from different ethnic groups, take unique forms and have a very strong symbolic status. One interviewee highlighted this:

> *"When you're invited, you can't say no (...) it's just not done, and even if you have 4 invitations for the same day you go and you stay as long as you can, everyone understands"* (Chinese woman, 37).

Her comments emphasise the meals' status as a social institution and the reciprocal social commitments which invitations create. This is relevant not only with emblematic dishes such as *nasi lemak* but also other Malaysian dishes in their social contexts of consumption. It should be noted that *nasi lemak* is not the only emblematic dish. There are other dishes, which have been contributed to the whole community by Chinese, Indians, Bumiputeras, and non-Malay Bumiputeras, that could be counted as 'in common' (Tibère, 2015) food symbols. Next, we look at food events and food commensality for its supportive function in interactions and coexistence in Malaysia.

Essentially, the social constructions around *nasi lemak*, its economic accessibility, practicality, adaptability to religious dietary restrictions and social ties, and reactivation of certain essential values in Malaysians' social imaginary all make this dish the ideal example that builds common cultural representations (Lévi-Strauss, 1968). According to Anderson (1991), the ties that bind the populations within a society or country are largely imagined: "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion" (p. 6). While it is in fact the object of a social consumption, particularly at breakfast in urban areas, and among the working classes, the power of *nasi lemak* lies in its ability to manifest this connection amongst all Malaysians. This is largely the reason why *nasi lemak* is promoted at all stages and levels from tourism promotion to the political process as a symbol of Malaysian food culture in building "social cohesion".

Finally, Malaysia is not the only country to claim *nasi lemak* as its national dish. Indonesia and Singapore too can legitimately claim it as their own national dish. It is quite difficult to pinpoint exactly something about the recipe, ingredients, culinary techniques, and its consumption that uniquely belongs to Malaysia. However, its difference lies in the context of the dish's social functions which provides its "relevance". In the multi-ethnic society of Malaysia, *nasi lemak* is considered both a native dish of the Malay community and a dish, which is not only enjoyed but also recognised as 'their own' by other communities (e.g. Indians, Chinese, and Other Bumiputeras). These groups, with their own complex and intertwined cultural histories and live side by side, have adopted this dish (sometimes with difficulty), and made it an "in common" dish, which attests to their coexistence. Besides *nasi lemak* and other symbolic dishes such as *roti canaï*, *tosai*, *mee goreng*, *chicken rice*, *satay*, strong commensality which also exists in everyday life or in celebrations (especially during open houses), reinforces social interactions and interethnic links around food. Such social events that contribute to building the "in common" identity not only enrich tourism promotion considerably, but also support hospitality and catering by providing a true "story to tell" to visitors as well as a respectful local valorisation of Malaysian culture(s).



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## Appendix

**Photo 1.** *Nasi lemak* with wild boar curry. Source: Priya Menon

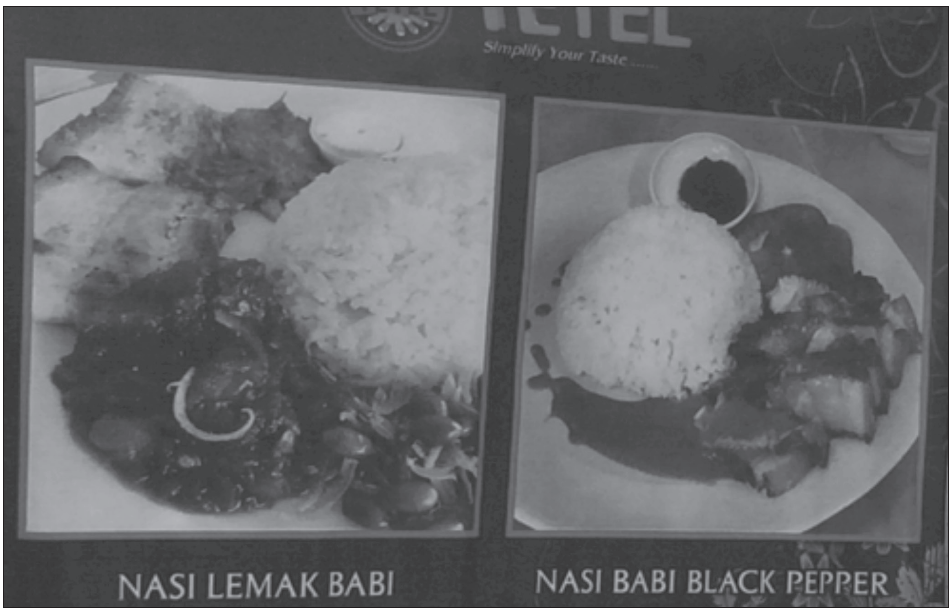


**Photo 2.** *Nasi lemak babi* (pork) (Kelabit Highlands). Source: Elise Mognard


**Photo 3.** Malaysian food court.

**Photo 4.** Hari Raya open house —the host and his guests. Source: Elise Mognard

## <u>Reviewers</u>

Appreciation is extended to the following reviewers for the review of the articles published in APJIHT, Volume 8, Issue 1, 2019.

- Vikneswaran Nair Sehkaran, University of Bahamas, Bahamas
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6. Research news (are welcome submission) should feature individuals who make the news with breakthrough research, are/have been involved in outstanding scientific endeavors or conferred with internally recognized awards. Categories of news are: newsmakers, science events, patents from research, commercial products from research and scientific conferences/workshops/symposia (no more than 750 words, and 1 snapshot).
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**Print Sources**

*Book by one author*
Tribe, J. (2004). *The economics of recreation, leisure and tourism* (3rd Ed.). Oxford: Elsevier

*Book by two authors*
Mathieson, A. & Wall, G. (1982). *Tourism: economic, physical and social impacts*. London: Longman

*Chapter in an edited book*
Buhalis, D. (2000). Trends in information technology and tourism. In W.C. Gartner & D.W. Lime (Ed.), *Trends in outdoor recreation, leisure and tourism* (pp.47-61). Oxon: CAB International

*Article in a journal*

Karatepe O.M. & Avci, T. (2002). Measuring service quality in the hotel industry: Evidence from northern Cyprus. Anatolia: *An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 13(1), 19-32

Churchill, A.G. (1979). A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 16(1), 64-73

*Article in a journal with DOI*

Kling, K.C., Hyde, J.S., Showers, C.J. & Buswell, B.N. (1999). Gender differences in self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 125, 470-500. Doi: 10.1037/0033-2909.125.4.470

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*Article in a weekly magazine with DOI*

Hoff, K. (2010, March 19). Fairness in modern society. *Science*, 327, 1467-1468. Doi: 10.1126/science.1188537

*Article in a print newspaper*

Wrong, M. (2005, August 17). "Never gonna give you up," says mayor. *Toronto Sol*, p. 4.

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Marlowe, P., Spade, S. & Chan, C. (2001). Detective work and the benefits of colour versus black and white. *Journal of Pointless Research*, 11, 123-127.

*Article in an Internet-only journal*

McDonald, C. & Chenoweth, L. (2009). Leadership: A crucial ingredient in unstable times. *Social Work & Society*, 7. Retrieved 15 March 2012 from *http: //www.scowork.net/2009/1/articles/mcdonaldchenoweth*

*Article with no author identified (the title moves to the "author" position)*

Britain launches new space agency. (2010, March 24). Retrieved on 15 March 2012 from *http://news.ninemsn.com.au/technology/1031221/britain-launches-new-space-agency*

*Article with no author and no date identified (e.g., wiki article)*

Harry Porter. (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved on 15 March 2012 from *http://en.wikipedia/w/index.php?title=Harry_Porter&oldid=380786432*

*Entry in an online dictionary or reference work, no date and no author identified*

Verisimilitude. (n.d.) In Merriam-Webster's online dictionary ($11^{th}$ Ed.). Retrieved from *http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/verisimilitude*

*E-mail or other personal communication (cite in text only)*

Monterey, personal communication, September 28, 2001

ATRA ASEAN TOURISM RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

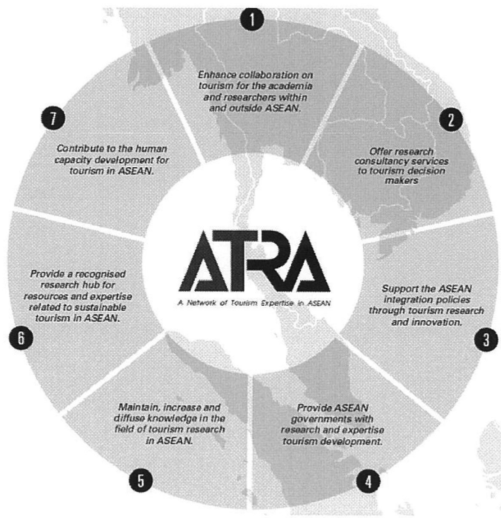
**ASEAN TOURISM RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (ATRA)**

ATRA or Asean Tourism Research Organization aims to support the ASEAN integration policies through tourism research and innovation, enhance collaboration on tourism for the academia and researchers within and outside ASEAN by establishing a network of tourism research clusters in Institutions of Higher learning from the region.

*Mission and Vision*

- Establishing a network of Tourism research clusters in ASEAN Universities.
- Developing links between ASAEAN researchers in tourism with common projects.
- Providing a recognized multi-site resource and expertise related to ASEAN Tourism.
- Contributing to the development of the Tourism Human capacity for ASEAN Countries.
- Supporting the ASEAN integration policies.

*Objectives*




*Scope of Activities*

In pursuance of the aims and objectives defined above the Association shall:

- Carry out research related to tourism in ASEAN.
- Organize seminars, forums, symposiums, exhibitions, workshops and conferences, carry out studies, research and raise issues in accordance with the objectives of the Association.
- Integrate, publish and disseminate materials, such as books, research reports and periodicals relevant to the tourism industry in ASEAN and other activities pertaining to the promotion of the objectives stated above.
- Maintain a database of tourism research expertise with a focus on ASEAN.
- Assist members of the association to find the right expertise and clusters for research collaborations in compliance with the objectives of the association.
- Accept and raise grants, endowments and financial support from available legitimate sources in support of its programmes and activities.
- Collaborate with other recognized associations or bodies within or outside ASEAN, which subscribe to the associations objectives.

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Centre for Research and Innovation in Tourism
Faculty of Hospitality, Food and Leisure Management
Taylor's University, Lakeside Campus, No. 1, Jalan Taylor's, 47500 Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.
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