THE LINK BETWEEN QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND MUSLIM CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the relationship between quality management (QM) and Muslim customer satisfaction. Data were gathered from 276 respondents from business and public firms. This study was motivated by claims about QM as a universally applied strategy having achieved mixed result, as revealed by previous studies. However the effect of QM on Muslim customer satisfaction has yet to be empirically reported. From this study, results indicated the outcome of hypotheses for the relationship between QM and Muslim customer satisfaction was mixed. Out of three QM practices tested (management commitment, customer focus, and continuous improvement), only customer focus was found significant. In addition to testing the relationship which is relatively unexplored in the literature, this study also enriches the literature by measuring customer satisfaction from the Islamic perspective. Although customer satisfaction has been extensively investigated in the literature, there are very few studies, if any, that have developed and used the Islamic perspective in measuring customer satisfaction, what more a study on the Muslim customer. This paper also discusses about the implications related to the findings.

Keywords: Quality Management; Muslim Customer.

1. INTRODUCTION

Quality Management (QM) consists of various critical factors such as continuous improvement and customer focus, and aims to deliver the best possible product or service to the customers so as to increase the level of customer satisfaction. The literature revealed that benefits of QM in improving customer satisfaction has been found true both for service and product based firms (Kumar, Garg & Garg, 2011; Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008). How customers perceive quality and how customers measure quality would determine whether QM has been successfully executed or otherwise. Therefore, many studies had investigated the usefulness of QM by using customer satisfaction as a criterion measure. As a reference point, the measurement used to evaluate customer satisfaction must be a valid and reliable measure so the results of QM can be concluded with confidence. In their effort to test customer satisfaction, previous authors were aware that the dimensions for measuring customer satisfaction vary and are diverse. As

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such, the customers of service have different points of view compared to customers of physical products in determining the elements that lead to customer satisfaction. The situation is also valid in discussing the differences between expectations of customers of business entities and clients of the public service. However there is another interesting niche that is yet to be widely empirically tested, which involves Muslim customers. Previous authors revealed that study of quality related issues in Islamic based institutions have been left behind, where most evidence stem from conventional based institutions (Estiri *et al*., 2011).

The reference point of Muslim customer satisfaction is likely to be different from non-Muslim customers due to the fact that Muslim customers have certain religious obligations that cannot be compromised. In a text by Zakaria and Abdul Talib (2010), the authors claimed that firms that intend to capture the Muslim customer market may need different business strategies when compared to the non-Muslim market. According to them, the business strategy used by firms must be in harmony with the Islamic teaching. However, most of the discussion and criticism by previous authors were in anecdotal form, which suffers from the lack of empirical testing. The call for more empirical studies to test Muslim customer satisfaction is needed, so as to lessen doubts on the validity of prescription by previous authors. Rehman and Shabbir (2010) reported that religiosity issues among the Muslim customer in contemporary management literature had received inadequate attention. Thus, a study that is specifically conducted on Muslim customers or Islamic business entities may result in new discovery that is associated with the Islamic teaching as a way of life. As such, previous study in corporate social responsibility had revealed that Shariah supervisory board is a significant stimulator of corporate social responsibility among Islamic banks (Farook, Hassan, & Lanis, 2011). This finding attests the uniqueness of the Islamic business entities that have religiosity embedded in the way business is conducted.

Research on Muslim customer satisfaction is recently unearthed due to the majority of studies on customer satisfaction in Muslim countries (Agus, Barker, & Kandampully, 2007) or studies on customer satisfaction of Islamic services or halal products (Estiri *et al*., 2011; Taap *et al*., 2011), all of which measured customer satisfaction using measures that were developed based on the perspectives of non-Muslim (e.g. Agus *et al*., 2007). Although there is growing evidence about the association between customer belief and customer perception towards service quality, research that considered religious aspects of the Muslim customer in QM literature is very rare (Gayatri, Hume, & Mort, 2011). Previous authors tagging Islamic business entities as non-traditional entities (Farook, Hassan, & Lanis, 2011), have alternatively indicated that the research area of Islamic business in contemporary market is relatively novel and still at the infancy stage.

Therefore, this study stretches the boundaries of the literature by measuring the effect of QM on Muslim customer satisfaction. It unearths important evidence for both proponents and skeptics of QM, since this study would prove whether QM would have a positive relationship with Muslim customer satisfaction, or otherwise. In other words, this study extends the literature on the benefits of implementing QM. Abundance of literature on this matter had reported the benefits that can be drawn from QM in the forms of higher product quality, lower cost of production, increase productivity, and improved customer satisfaction (Antony

et al., 2004). Sadly, almost none of previous studies had tested the effectiveness of QM on customer satisfaction by taking into consideration the perspective of religious obligation of any particular group of customers. In other words, there exists a void that deserves attention from researchers. The rising number of Islamic based products is the result of customer demands towards product that are Shariah compliant (Devlin, 2002). In other words, Shariah compliance is regarded by Muslim customers as the most critical characteristics of quality products before other characteristics can have weight (Alam *et al*., 2011). Due to religiously concerned customers who use their religion as guidelines in selecting and using services and products (Abdullah, Abdurahman & Hamali, 2012), criteria related to religious obligation of customers should be part of the overall criteria that are considered important by a firm in their efforts to fulfill customer satisfaction. However, until today, this issue seemed to have received scant attention from researchers.

The significance of this study is also very much associated with the promising development of Islamic based businesses, such as halal industries, and Islamic financial and banking sectors. Taking Islamic finance products as an example, a wide range of Islamic financial products is now being offered in more than 75 countries, including both Muslim and non-Muslim countries (Al-Ajmi, Hussain, & Al-Saleh, 2009). Malaysia as one of the leading Muslim countries in this arena is committed towards becoming a center of excellence for Islamic financial products as well as being a well-respected halal hub in the world. In addition to having excellent products, legal framework, support systems, and human capital, issues related to Muslim customer satisfaction has never been less important. Therefore, this study would enable stakeholders to examine the validity of QM in the environment populated by Muslim customers. Proponents of QM strongly argued that this strategy is universally applied (Kumar, Garg & Garg, 2011) however evidence about the impact of QM on satisfaction of the Muslim customer is relatively less available, thus leaving this issue untouched. The arguments narrated in preceding paragraphs clearly identify the gap in the literature that would be able to be addressed by this present study.

2. OBJECTIVES

This study was conducted based on this reference point as a research objective, namely to test the relationship between QM (management commitment, customer focus, and continuous improvement) and Muslim customer satisfaction. In other perspectives, findings of this study would be able to respond to the crowd who are skeptical towards the ability of QM practices to capture the issue related to the needs of the Muslim customer.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses about the critical factors of QM and Muslim customer satisfaction.

3.1. *Critical factors of Quality Management*

The practices of Quality Management (QM) within an organization had been investigated through the conceptualization of its critical factors (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008). This refers to a bunch of management practices that are adopted in-house within QM-organizations, among which are management commitment, customer focus, and continuous improvement.

Commitment of the management towards QM is reflected in their managerial activities. For committed managers, they build a solid QM plan, allocate adequate resources to support its implementation, play active roles in mobilizing the activities, and become a role model for the entire organizational team (Das *et al.,* 2011). Although QM literature has documented customer satisfaction as the end shoot of QM (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008), commitment of managers towards QM is also very much related to the potential of QM as an enabler in increasing profits of businesses (Das *et al,* 2011). In other words, they are motivated towards QM due its relationship with dollars-and-cents matters. They work very hard to satisfy their customers due to income generated from customers as source for profit maximization. The positive effect of management commitment towards QM implementation is not a speculative statement. As such, Das *et al*. (2011) revealed that management commitment towards QM would be very much associated with the results obtained. In their study, they reported that unsuccessful implementations of QM were affected by less committed managers.

The success of QM is consistently evaluated by using customer satisfaction as a criterion measure (Das *et al.,* 2011; Voon, Hamali & Ranggai, 2012). Therefore, customer focus is regarded as one of the main pillars in the implementation of QM (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008). In other words, all resources invested in implementing QM are directed towards achieving the objective of satisfying customers. Many activities that have direct or indirect effect on customer satisfaction are housed in QM-firms. To implement all customer-focused activities effectively, a firm would work closely with the customers in order to understand the complexities and dynamics of their demand and expectation (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008). The closeness between customers and the business allows customer-focused entities to keep track of changes that occur in the market. The effectiveness of customer focus in improving customer satisfaction has been empirically reported by many authors (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008). According to them, successful implementation of QM should be measured from the perspective of customers.

Additionally, another critical factor of QM is continuous improvement. The implementation of QM requires a firm to continuously improve the whole aspect that would contribute to the improvement of the planning, process, and/or output. It is a continual journey towards achieving quality objectives, thus demands a long-term view from managers. Although the positive effect of continuous improvement is likely to be subtle in the short run, many authors have revealed the benefits of this practice to the firm (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008).

3.2. *Muslim Customer Satisfaction*

Increasing expectation by customers has led many mangers to scrutinize their service or product quality from every aspect so as to satisfy their customers, among others, by turning their entity into a customer-focused entity (Estiri *et al.,* 2011). This scenario is no different in the Muslim market, due to promising opportunities for businesses in this market. This potential is made a fact with a world population of more than 1.5 billion Muslims. Therefore, understanding the unique expectations of Muslim customers is expected to become an interesting phenomenon for research, particularly for people in Islamic marketing. Although research on customer satisfaction is reported abundant in the literature (Anderson & Mittal, 2000), many issues related to Muslim customer satisfaction had been neglected (Gayatri *et al.,* 2011).

Religion is found to be one factor that influences the perception of customers towards quality and also selecting a product (Imrie *et al.*, 2002; Gayatri *et al.*, 2011; Naser *et al.*, 1999). For Muslim customers, they need products or services that adhere to Islamic rules. It contains specific requirements and guidelines that obviously do not fall into the framework of conventional QM, which avoids this aspect. Although QM is effective in improving business performance (Kumar, Garg, & Garg, 2011), its relationship with the function of meeting religious obligations has never been discussed in great detail in the literature. The most common example is about the slaughter of animals for food. In Islam, there is a specific and must-do list that needs to be followed before the product of slaughter of animals can be considered halal for consumption. It exceeds the general measures of a quality food, which is measured in terms of price, packaging, healthiness, cleanliness, and taste. For a Muslim, there is no other issue that is more important than food being halal. In discussing about the elements needed to measure product quality and service quality, many publications had been uncovered. However, the measures developed by these authors to measure product quality (Garvin, 1987) and service quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), had never recognized or even acknowledged the religion requirements as part of the critical elements of measuring service or product quality. However, Hanzaee and Ramezani (2011) claimed that halal is not an issue limited to religious discussion, and yet is has not been regarded as a symbol of quality. The demand towards halal product is not only among Muslim customers, but it has reached out to customers from other religions as well since they recognize the quality associated with halal products. Although halal has been regarded as part of quality criteria, the effort to conceptualize it as part of quality measures is still rare. The literature indicated that most researchers (Estiri *et al.*, 2011) still applied measures that were not developed from Islamic perspectives in investigating customer satisfaction of Islamic-based products. Their studies were very much associated with two main conventional perspectives in measuring service quality, namely Nordic and American schools of thought (Brady & Cronin, 2001). A product that satisfies the criteria of good quality has no value in Islam if it does not strictly conform to the Islamic guidelines. As such, a product is regarded halal if, among others, it satisfies the condition of not containing prohibited materials, no exploitation of employees, no negative effects on environment, and not harmful to society (Hanzaee & Ramezani, 2011). Therefore, without taking into account the needs of Muslim customers, the conclusion derived by previous authors on customer satisfaction of Muslims are questionable. In addition, Muslim customers perhaps do not choose a product based on those measures only. In contrast, Islamic religious belief is found to be a significant factor for Muslim customers in selecting a product (Alam *et al.*, 2011; Al-Ajmi, Hussain, & Al-Saleh, 2009). The knowledge on how customers in the market select a product is critical for a firm to sustain their competitiveness.

3.3. *Generation of Hypothesis*

Researchers (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008) argued that QM strategy consists of generic factors that had been proven by many researchers as an effective strategy for improving customer satisfaction in various kinds of organizations, covering both business firms and public service organizations (Kumar, Garg & Garg, 2011). Previous studies also reported that QM has been a successful strategy for business entities involved in Islamic-related products, such as Islamic banks (Estiri, *et al* 2011).

Management commitment determines the successful planning and execution of QM (Das *et al.,* 2011). They provide adequate resources, monitor the employees, receive feedback from both employees and customers, and find ways to achieve the objective of customer satisfaction. For committed managers, QM is more than a management strategy but a continuous effort in seeking the best possible ways in doing the job, which would result in better financial and non-financial performance. Customer satisfaction is one of the benchmark in evaluating the effectiveness of QM (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008). Among the challenge of fulfilling customer satisfaction is the nature of customer's expectation and needs that keep changing and vary over time. For committed managers, they should have no problem in handling different types of customers, including Muslim customers. They would definitely consider the uniqueness of their Muslim customers in their business activities, thus would possibly improve the satisfaction among Muslim customers.

QM also involves customer focus where a firm institutionalizes the customer-first culture. It does not only demand commitment from the managers but also all employees firm wide. A firm would be able to satisfy their customer by fulfilling the expectations, needs, and wants of their customers (Zakaria & Abdul Talib, 2010). A firm that fails to achieve the objective of deploying customer expectation is considered unsuccessful in their QM initiatives (Sullivan, 1986). Therefore, the practice of continuous improvement under QM is considered critical due to the fact that quality is very much associated with customer habits and behavior (Gayatri, Hume, & Mort, 2011) that is dynamic across time. It indicates that quality is not a one-off agenda and does not have an ending point.

Based on the above discussion, this study postulates that QM is universally applied, thus would also have a significant relationship with Muslim customer satisfaction. The Muslim customer is similar to other groups of customers, where they demand quality products and services for use. The difference is only related to the matter that the product and service must be Shariah compliant (Hanzaee & Ramezani 2011). Thus, this study undertakes to investigate the following hypotheses:

> *H1:* There is a significant relationship between management commitment and Muslim customer satisfaction.
>
> *H2:* There is a significant relationship between customer focus and Muslim customer satisfaction.
>
> *H3:* There is a significant relationship between continuous improvement and Muslim customer satisfaction.

3.4. *Research Framework*

The research framework under study was developed accordingly from the results of literature review and it was governed by the research objectives laid down in this paper. As narrated in the preceding section of hypothesis development, the Muslim customer satisfaction (MCS) is a result of management commitment (MC), customer focus (CF), and continuous improvement (CI). While Muslim customer satisfaction is regarded as a dependent variable in the model, the three critical factors of QM is treated as independent variables. The link between these

independent variables and dependent variable is represented by the following mathematical equation:

$$MCS = a+bMC+bCF+bCI+e$$

where, e = error

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Development of Instrument

The instrument for measuring critical factors of QM was adopted and adapted from previous authors. The literature on development of measurement for QM has a long history and the instrument to measure QM is considered well developed and tested. Many authors (Ahire et al., 1996; Black & Porter, 1996; Powell, 1995; Saraph et al., 1989; Tamimi, 1995) had developed a sound, reliable, and valid measure that can be applied by other researchers. However, the scale to measure the construct of Muslim customer satisfaction is relatively unexplored. The articles that offer instruments that can be used for research on Muslim customer satisfaction are almost none. Therefore, this study constructed a scale for measuring Muslim customer satisfaction based on descriptive text of scholars within or close to this area.

Table 1: Items used to measure constructs under study

Construct – Items (coding)	Sources
Management Commitment – *MC* • commitment of managers towards QM activities – *MC1* • active participation of managers in QM activities – *MC2* • managers encourage staff to execute QM activities – *MC3* • managers monitor progress of QM activities – *MC4* • managers give serious attention towards customer complaints on QM issues – *MC5*	Ahire *et al*. (1996); Powell (1995); Saraph *et al*. (1989); Tamimi (1995); *Das et al*. (2011)
Customer Focus – *CF* • customer complaints used as input for planning – *CF1* • develop medium for customer complaints – *CF2* • staff trained to be customer friendly – *CF3* • customer complaints handled effectively – *CF4* • intensify the use of IT for customer management – *CF5*	Ahire *et al*. (1996); Black & Porter (1996); Powell (1995); Das *et al*. (2011); Mehra & Ranganathan (2008)
Continuous Improvement – *CI* • QM activities is continuously executed – *CI1* • QM is not one-off activity – *CI2* • QM is not seasonal but continuous – *CI3*	Black & Porter (1996); Sureschandar *et al*. (2002); Das *et al*. (2011)
Muslim Customer Satisfaction – *MCS* • service/ product is Shariah compliant – *MCS1* • service/product is not harmful – *MCS2* • adequate time to assess the product before buying – *MCS3* • price is reasonable – *MCS4* • no pressure for customer to buy – *MCS5*	Alam *et al*. (2011); Estiri *et al*. (2011); Rehman & Shabbir (2010); Zakaria & Abdul Talib (2010)

4.2.　Sampling, Respondents, and Unit of Analysis

Data of this study were collected from 300 employees of various firms. They were asked to provide response on behalf of their firm about the practice of QM in their respective firm. They were also asked to respond about how their products/services have met criteria that are likely to contribute to the satisfaction of the Muslim customer. Their responses were used as a surrogate to represent the score of customer satisfaction. Convenient sampling was used to select the samples, where the data collection was exercised on respondents attending a management seminar at a university. Out of 300 questionnaires distributed, only 276 were usable for further analysis. The balance feedback of 24 was incomplete with no response for many items. Due to the fact that the respondents of this study were not prescreened before distributing the questionnaire, non-response may likely be due to the respondents having no adequate knowledge about the items asked in the questionnaire. Non-response is unlikely due to problem related to the instrument, as any problems that may relate to the design or content of questionnaire was identified, rectified, and ironed out during the pilot study.

5.　FINDINGS

This section reports the descriptive statistics, test on the reliability and validity of the instrument, as well as hypothesis testing. Table 2 indicates that 62.7 percent of respondents are working as public servant, and the rest are employees of business firm.

Table 2: Type of firm represented by respondents

Type of firm	Frequency	Percentage
Public	173	62.7
Business	103	37.3

Table 3 reports the descriptive statistics of all four constructs under study. Based on the mean score, it can be concluded that the implementation of QM in the firms sampled are encouraging. Out of a perfect score of 5.00, mean score for management commitment (MC) and customer focus (CF) are 4.0696 and 4.0283, respectively. However the mean score for continuous improvement (CI) is relatively lower with the value of 3.7754. The score of Muslim customer satisfaction is also high with the value of 4.0739.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
MC	276	1.80	5.00	4.0696	.68952
CF	276	1.60	5.00	4.0283	.65610
CI	276	1.00	5.00	3.7754	.70972
MCS	276	1.40	5.00	4.0739	.57339

Reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Based on the minimum benchmark of 0.60 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), Table 4 reports that all constructs under study surpassed this value for satisfying the reliability test conditions. In addition to coefficient alpha, the reliability of instrument was examined using items-constructs correlation. This test is to confirm either each items had been correctly assigned to their parent construct or otherwise. An item is said to have been correctly assigned to a particular construct if the correlation between the item and its parent construct is higher that the correlation between the item with the other constructs. For example, item 1 of management commitment (MC1) has correlation of 0.846 with the construct of management commitment (MC). This value is higher compared to the correlation between MC1 with customer focus (CF) (0.542), continuous improvement (CI) (0.527), and Muslim customer satisfaction (MCS) (0.194). Thus, it can be concluded that the assignment of MC1 to the construct of MC is correct. The same results were achieved for all items tested.

Table 4: Reliability Tests

| | Items-Constructs Correlations | | | | | Reliability Test |
	Items	MC	CF	CI	MCS	Coefficient-alpha
MC	MC1	**0.846**	0.542	0.527	0.194	0.873
	MC2	**0.880**	0.595	0.505	0.241	
	MC3	**0.802**	0.489	0.387	0.184	
	MC4	**0.849**	0.609	0.446	0.240	
	MC5	**0.694**	0.647	0.358	0.270	
CF	CF1	0.603	**0.757**	0.342	0.249	0.816
	CF2	0.594	**0.832**	0.394	0.245	
	CF3	0.462	**0.670**	0.246	0.203	
	CF4	0.549	**0.768**	0.461	0.369	
	CF5	0.491	**0.767**	0.343	0.176	
C1	CI1	0.578	0.504	**0.747**	0.259	0.636
	CI2	0.362	0.345	**0.737**	0.171	
	C13	0.318	0.239	**0.795**	0.107	
MCS	MCS1	0.142	0.208	0.229	**0.652**	0.777
	MCS2	0.278	0.277	0.171	**0.778**	
	MCS3	0.140	0.177	0.116	**0.769**	
	MCS4	0.202	0.191	0.090	**0.757**	

Table 5 reports the exploratory factor analysis. It indicates that all items have factor loadings of higher than 0.50 (Hair *et al*., 1998) on their respective constructs. In other words, all items are statistically significant to represent their respective construct. All the values of eigenvalues had also surpassed the benchmark of 1.00 (Hair *et al*., 1998). Thus, the statistical data reported in Table 5 testifies to the validity of all constructs under study.

Table 5: Factor analysis results

Constructs	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained	KMO	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Sig)
MC	0.653-0.896	3.346	66.912	0.823	0.000
CF	0.632-0.851	2.900	58.001	0.820	0.000
CI	0.756-0.764	1.736	57.781	0.652	0.000
MCS	0.593-0.807	2.664	53.280	0.787	0.000

Table 6 reports the correlation between independent variables and dependent variable. It indicates that all correlations are significant at p value <0.05. However, the coefficient correlation values are very small with the highest value being the correlation between CF and MCS, which is 0.323. A further examination on the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable was conducted using regression analysis.

Table 6: Correlation between independent variables and dependent variable

Independent Variables	MCS (coefficient)
MC	0.278*
CF	0.323*
CI	0.230*

Note: * Sig. at p<0.05

In order to draw conclusive findings from the regression analysis, all assumption tests related to this statistical analysis were performed. From the examination done, it seems that all assumptions were not violated, i.e., data was normally distributed, no outliers, assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were met, and multi-collinearity was not a problem. The presence of multi-collinearity was examined using VIF (variance inflation factor) measures. The VIF measures for all constructs under study, as given in Table 7, were below the threshold value of ten (Hair *et al.,* 1998).

Furthermore, Table 7 shows that the regression model was significant at p<0.05 with R^2 of 0.104. Examination on every single independent variable indicated that only CF is a significant predictor of MCS with p<0.05 and b=0.239. In other words, H2 was supported.

However MC and CI were found to be insignificant predictors of MCS. In other words, H1 and H3 were not supported during this investigation.

Table 7: Regression Analysis

IV	Muslim Customer Satisfaction (MCS)			
	VIF	b	t	sig
Management commitment (MC)	2.282	0.063	0.726	0.469
Customer Focus (CF)	2.054	0.239	2.924	0.004*
Continuous Improvement (CI)	1.449	0.084	1.229	0.220
Constant			12.170	0.00
Durbin Watson = 1.785; Adjusted R² = 0.104; F statistics = 11.682; sig = 0.00				

Note: * Sig. at p< 0.05

Further discussion on the findings of this study is elaborated upon in the succeeding section.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the effect of QM practices on satisfaction of the Muslim customer was mixed. Only customer focus was found significant, while management commitment and continuous improvement was found insignificant. Therefore, this study testifies that conventionally developed QM failed to achieve the objective of customer satisfaction for Muslims. These findings are likely to be consistent with a premise stated in the text by Gayatri, Hume, and Mort (2011), where they reported that religion was considered an important factor by Muslims in evaluating service quality. Quality is judged by customers (Ghobadian *et al*., 1994), thus it is important to consider input from customers in implementing QM. Implementing QM using a non-Islamic model without willingness to accommodate the needs of Muslims is likely unable to fulfill the expectations of the Muslim customer. As critiqued by Hoover (1995), QM should not be over claimed as a solution for all management problems.

In this study, the findings indicated that customer focus was a significant predictor of Muslim customer satisfaction. It testified to the findings of Mehra and Ranganathan (2008), which reported the effectiveness of customer focus activities on increasing customer satisfaction across industries and cultural settings. The feedback from customers is used to implement QM, thus this would bring positive effects on customer satisfaction. Inputs from customers are deemed important due to each customer having their own belief and dogma, which may likely effect their action, decision, and perception (Smith & Reynolds, 2001). For the Muslim customer, they use Islamic teachings as a reference point in their consumer behavior and purchasing decision (Alam *et al*., 2011). Other researchers such as Gayatri *et al*. (2011) noted that there were three service quality dimensions associated with Muslim customers, namely halal/haram, honesty, and attention to Islamic religious activities. Given that highly religious

Muslim customers are likely to associate religious factors in selecting a brand or product (Alam *et al.,* 2011), it is imperative for firms to incorporate Islamic value in their products or services. As such, the advertisement they use should not be offensive to the Islamic people (Fam *et al.,* 2004).

7. LIMITATIONS

All stages and procedures involved in this study were performed with care. However, there are still limitations which need to be taken into account in implying the findings of this study. Firstly, factors and issues related to Muslim customer satisfaction are generally an untouched area. As a consequence, the literature on this subject is limited and inadequate to provide a sound basis for the current study. The instrument used to measure Muslim customer satisfaction relied much on these limited documents. Future researchers might consider developing a more sound research instrument by using feedback from Muslim customers in the market. In addition, more studies on this subject matter are urgently needed as Muslim customers represent a significant portion of the world market. Secondly, respondents in this study were not selected using probability sampling, thus this limits the findings from the generalization viewpoint. Thirdly, this study used a questionnaire instrument to survey data from the respondent, thus all drawbacks attached to the survey method should not be put aside, such as the aspect of non-response bias.

8. IMPLICATIONS

This study has implications for firms that aim to enter the Muslim market. A strategy of QM that is widely practiced by many firms has been mainly developed from the perspective of non-Muslim scholarly works. The philosophy of QM is to deliver services or products that can satisfy the customers. However, the literature regarding QM seems less associated with the goal of fulfilling religious obligations. Although this study revealed that the practice of customer focus is a significant predictor of Muslim customer satisfaction, the correlation is not strong. Other factors of QM were not significant predictors of Muslim customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study implies that a firm that aims to capture the Muslim market cannot rely solely on QM as their business strategy. In contrast, they need to give further attention towards the needs of Muslim customers. Although efforts had been initiated to implement Islamic QM systems, non-Islamic based QM seems to still receive a wider acceptance by the business community, both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. QM that is widely discussed in the literature does not go against the Islamic teaching, but it is not comprehensive enough to capture the needs of Muslim customers. Therefore, customer focus strategy, which is a strategy that is promoted under the practice of QM, is a good strategy that must be tailor-made to the needs and demands of Muslim customers. Customer focus strategy should be effectively used by engaging Muslim customers at planning and development stages of a service or product. A Shariah board or committee should be established so as to safeguard the interest of Muslim customers.

9. CONCLUSION

This study provided evidence on the relationship between QM and Muslim customer satisfaction. Although QM has been debated as a universally applied strategy, this study indicated that the usefulness of QM in predicting Muslim customer satisfaction is still open for debate. On the one hand, the findings of this study support the proponents of QM that implementation of QM must be customized, so as to gain the highest possible positive results. On the other hand, this study indicated that QM practices that did not tailor to the teachings of Islam are unable to be a significant predictor of Muslim customer satisfaction. Although the philosophy of QM, such continuous improvement and customer being first are consistent with Islamic teachings, the focus is only limited to satisfying the customer. In western-based QM, customers are the group that determines the benchmark of quality. However for Muslim customers, the quality benchmark set by them must adhere to the Islamic requirements. In Islam, the criteria of a quality product or service are beyond the criteria of timeliness, usefulness, reliability, completeness, durability, uniformity, and measurability. Instead, Muslim customers need a product or service that conforms to what is said to be halal or permitted, while at the same time avoiding what is said to be haram, or forbidden.

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