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## Can Servant Leadership and Perceived Organisational Support amplify Organisational Commitment among Operational Hotel Employees in Malaysia during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic? A Correlation Analysis

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### Abstract

The aim of this study called for identifying a correlation, and, if present, the kind of correlation present between the elements of servant leadership, perceived organisational support, and organisational commitment among hotel employees in Malaysia. The underpinning data was based on the opinions of 52 hotel employees selected via stratified random sampling from four operational departments, namely the Front Office, Food and Beverages (F&B), Housekeeping, and Kitchen segments. Post-data analysis subjected to data obtained during the study, servant leadership and perceived organisational support were both found to highly correlate with organisational commitment in facing the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak unleashed in December 2019. Thus, the output would undeniably contribute to the hotel industry, leaders of said industry, and hotel employees alike in amplifying the level of commitment directed to organisations in the face of a tough situation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic that had occurred worldwide. Accordingly, recommendations for field-adjacent future studies were also furnished to aid the hotel industry in the future.

**Keywords:** Organisational Commitment, Servant Leadership, Perceived Organisational Support, Hotel Industry, Operational Hotel Employees, COVID-19, Pandemic

### Introduction

The United States of America (USA) has boasted a significant tourism industry supporting relevant activities henceforth further shaping their local economy, thereby leading to the hospitality industry employing a significant number of workers worldwide (Holston-Okae & Mushi, 2018). Prior studies have stated that the industry contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Vasquez, 2014) and directs significant benefaction to the economic development of countries around the globe (Hemdi et al., 2015). In Malaysia itself, the

increment observed pertaining to the tourism volume year by year is deemed as a good milestone as seen in the table depicting tourism arrivals into the country below.

YEAR	ARRIVAL	RECEIPTS (RM)
2019	26.10 million	86.1 billion
2018	25.83 million	84.1 billion
2017	25.95 million	82.1 billion
2016	26.76 million	82.1 billion
2015	25.72 million	69.1 billion
2014	27.44 million	72.0 billion
2013	25.72 million	65.4 billion
2012	25.03 million	60.6 billion
2011	24.71 million	58.3 billion
2010	24.58 million	56.5 billion
2009	23.65 million	53.4 billion
2008	22.05 million	49.6 billion
2007	20.97 million	53.4 billion

*Table 1: Tourist Arrival (Adapted from the My Tourism Data).*

Table 1 above reflects the increasing number of tourist arrivals from 2007 to 2019. Chronologically, 2019 was the year in which COVID-19 was detected; on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2019, the government of Wuhan, China announced the news of viral outbreak, following which its spread spanned the whole world (Davahli et al., 2020). This marked the starting point of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has further resulted in a high level of pressure in the hospitality industry due to high turnover rates. Accordingly, the current study is poised to address the issue by identifying the way to aid the industry in overcoming the problem. Multiple hotels in the USA, United Kingdom (UK), and some European counties had announced the temporary suspension of normal operations. Such move has placed the estimated loss of jobs at 24.3 million globally, while 3.9 million cases occurred in the USA alone due to the decline in hotel occupancy during the pandemic period (Moraa & Kipngetch, 2021).

### **Hotel and COVID-19**

The hotel industry is one of the industries that particularly contributed to the national economic development, wherein placing a focus on local tourism would heavily aid the economy. A prior work has particularly proven that the revenue from tourist arrival in 2019 led to a 6.8% increment that range of the tourist is all around the world (Zubair & Shamsudin, 2021). However, the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2) pandemic had extensively impacted the tourism industry. Employees of the industry could feel the change acutely upon the management's legislated instructions to restrict their tourist welcoming processes due to governmental directives (Hanafiah et al., 2021). The said impact on the hotel and tourism industries has spurred global scholarly interest towards its assessment. In particular, a prior work has implemented the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) technique and revealed that the negative impact of said pandemic is not limited to a certain country; in fact, it affected all nations globally (Davahli et al., 2020). Based on a report from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), a 3.5 % decrease of recruitment

was observed in 2020 following the viral outbreak (Kementerian Perdagangan Antarabangsa dan Industri Malaysia, 2021).

In view of its grave impact, this study directs its attention to the element of organisational commitment among hotel employees, which have directly faced the COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenon has shifted the world on its axis, requiring all employees to adapt with a new style of work life and underlining the need for an excellent and understanding leader to helm an organisation. Theoretically, a previous study conducted on COVID-19's impact on leaders and employees has highlighted that the current time calls for a change in leadership style (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2022). A well-chosen leadership style will inevitably amplify the organisational commitment consistently discussed in prior works, wherein a good leader is always known to effectively exchange their understanding with employees accordingly (Edros et al., 2021). Mentally and psychologically, the employees of an organisation will be disrupted by the pandemic, thus necessitating the presence for a good listener, holistic leader, and organisational support (Nanno, 2020).

### **Problem Statement**

The hospitality industry has been faced with an increasingly competitive environment due to the economic downturn that began in 2007-2008. In general, the industry is highly related to human attitudes, particularly the commitment issue that would result in a turnover. Figure 1 below reveals that the hospitality industry (blue line) has been extensively researching on time-related issues behind the COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit the industry differently during the time span. The outbreak has instigated constantly increasing turnover rates, following which the hotel industry particularly calls for an investigation to solve this matter. Alternatively, a prior work has discussed the loss of livelihood and occupations by millions of people due to unexpected travel restrictions and border closures in most countries globally in tackling the pandemic. Lengthy travel restrictions and Movement Control Orders (MCOs) imposed by various nations have rendered the loss of 100 million jobs in the tourist and hospitality sector, while another 197 million jobs are now at risk (Sangaran, 2021).

Theoretically, one of the well-studied strategies capable of reducing the turnover rates has linked organisational commitment with turnover, among others (Sahni, 2019). Here, organisational commitment is a strategy extensively investigated to boost employee engagement and minimise the turnover rate. Unfortunately, such studies that are focused on the hospitality industry is insufficient compared to others (Aruştei, 2016; Zhao, 2019).





**Hypothesis**

This study attempts to analyse the following relationship between the selected constructs, yielding the following hypotheses:

Ha 1: There is a significant correlation between Servant Leadership and Organisational Commitment.

Ha 2: There is a significant correlation between Perceived Organisational Support and Organisational Commitment.

**Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership has been explored and discussed frequently across various literature instances up until the 21st century (Qiu et al., 2020). This type of leadership represents a comprehensive approach that engages with the emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of their followers, as theorised by Greenleaf (1977). Servant leadership has emerged and grew following the publication of the scholar’s personal journal, which details his own experience and journey. The most important thing about servant leaders is rooted in their drive to serve the followers first before consciously aspiring to lead since the introduction of concept during the 1970s (Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014).

	Autocratic Leadership	Potentialistic Leadership	Transformational Leadership	Servant Leadership
Focus of Leader	Tasks	Needs of Organization	Organizational Objectives	The Needs of Followers
Role of Leader	To Command Followers to Fulfill the Tasks	To Treat Followers as Children	To Inspire Followers to Pursue Organizational Goals	To Serve Followers
Role of Follower	Obey the Commands, Orders, Rules and Regulations	To be Obedient	To Pursue Organizational Goal	To Become Wiser, Freer, More Autonomous
Expected Outcomes	Achievement of Tasks and Objectives	Loyalty and Commitment to the Leader and Organization	Increased Effort, Satisfaction and Productivity; Organizational Gains	Follower Satisfaction, Development, Empowerment, Commitment to Service, Societal Betterment

Figure 2: Types of Leadership. Adopted from: (Akdol & Sebnem Arikboga, 2017).

The figure above shows a comparison of several leadership types in which servant leadership is underpinned as a holistic leadership approach compared to others, especially in the context of hospitality industry preferences.

**Perceived Organisational Support**

Perceived organisational support has served as an important topic across current literature throughout time. From 1986 and up until the 21st century, it has been consistently discussed as either a predictor, mediator, or moderator towards an organisational outcome. Conceptually, it denotes an important element in ensuring a highly committed employee throughout the long duration of employment (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Much of the literature available has proven that the aspect can ensure an effective lead in a job and help to overcome stressful situations among employees since the organisation values and is concerned about them. This echoes the theory of Social Exchange by Blau (1964), wherein the level of repayment or reciprocity from one to another is based on the treatment between both parties (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Besides, a UK-focused study has agreed that

organisational support is one of the indicators aiding the organisational commitment during the COVID–19 outbreak (Mihalache & Mihalache, 2021).

### **Organisational Commitment**

In general, organisational commitment can be defined as an indicator in organisational behaviour literature. According to Meyer and Allen (1998), it describes retaining a relationship of two parties such as between employees and their organisation that is henceforth influencing their psychological state. In the current study, the organisational commitment of employees is investigated pertaining to sustained loyalty to their organisation, whereby in return, the rate of employee turnover will reduce in time. Concurrently, the pandemic extensively reflects employees' need for support from their leaders, namely their manager or supervisor, in order to remain committed and stay in the hotel industry. This emerges worldwide following the hospitality industry fast becoming one of the vulnerable industries during COVID–19 (Mohsin et al., 2021). Therefore, this study is an insightful picture into the strategy to retain organisational commitment among hotel employees, especially in handling the COVID–19 outbreak that is hugely impactful globally.

### **Methodology**

This study engaged the population of operational hotel employees serving in different operational departments at 3- to 5-star hotels located in the northern region of Malaysia, specifically the states of Perlis, Kedah, and Penang. It utilised a sample size of 60 respondents, following which 52 respondents gave feedback following data screening and yielded a response rate of 86%. Accordingly, this number was deemed appropriate as per Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb as cited by Sekaran and Bougie (2010): a sample size larger than 30 respondents and less than 500 respondents are suitable for most types of research (Eissa & Nizam, 2019). Here, the stratified sampling technique in view of the different departments of hotel engaged for feedback.

A survey was implemented in this study in which the human resource training segment was approached for help in distributing the study questionnaires equally to each department with operational employees. Due to nationwide MCO and social distancing order present, online methods such as emailing and phone calls were implemented to contact the selected hotels for survey link distribution. A follow-up contact was made two weeks in a randomised manner to ensure a good response rate. The data obtained were then analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to generate descriptive statistics and identify a correlation between the investigated variables.

### **Analysis**

#### **Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive analysis in this study included an assessment of the frequencies for the following respondent aspects, namely their gender, race, age, religion, educational level, job tenure, department, salary, hotel rating, and hotel location (state). In total, 52 respondents made up of 31 male and 21 female workers reverted their feedback, wherein they consisted of 16 Chinese, 12 Indian, and 24 Malay individuals. Their average age spanned between 31 to 35 years in which most of the respondents had been working for more two years and more in their respective organisation. Furthermore, the educational level of respondents involved comprised 20 diploma holders, three-degree holders, and 29 high school-leaver respondents,

whereby they consisted of the following departments: F&B (16 respondents), Front Office (18 respondents), Housekeeping (8 respondents), and Kitchen (10 respondents). Classifying the respondent's hotels involved according to rating revealed the following: 3-star hotels (12), 4-star hotels (35), and 5-star hotels (15), which were in three states, namely Perlis (12 respondents), Kedah (20 respondents) and Penang (20 respondents).

*Normality Test*

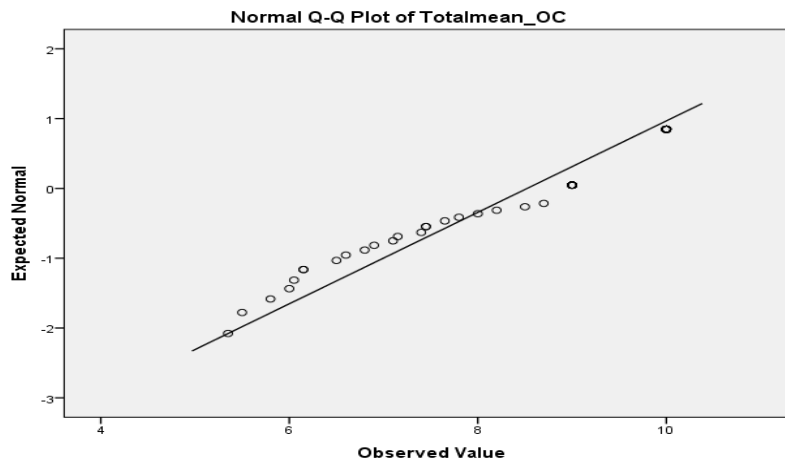
Based on the Z value (statistic /std.error), an acceptable value of skewness typically falls between - 3 and + 3, while the value for kurtosis ranges between - 10 to + 10 when utilising Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (Brown, 2006). Therefore, the results obtained upon analysis revealed that all values representing the data were normal in which data normality was assessed via skewness and kurtosis and a normality plot.

**Descriptive Statistics**

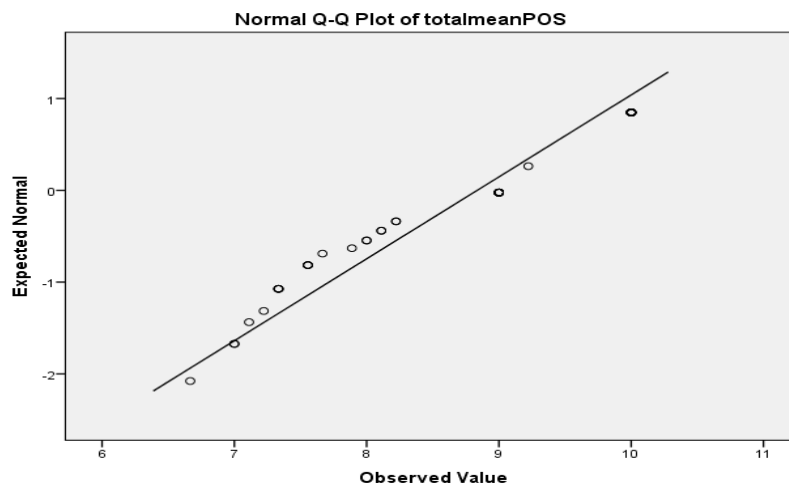
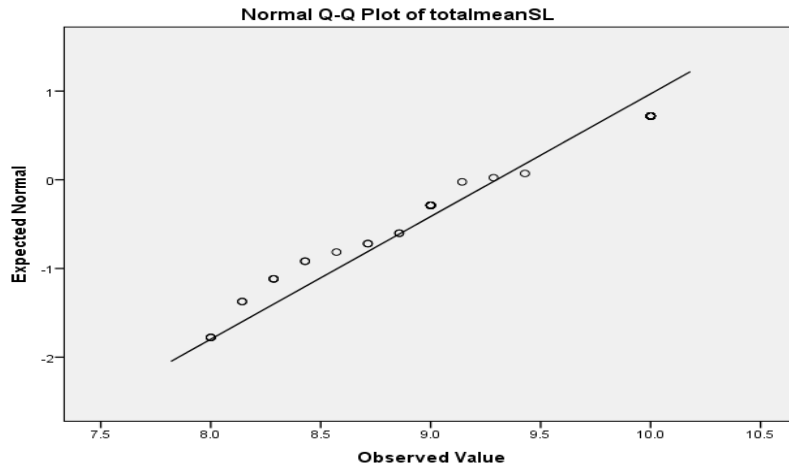
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
totalmeanSL	52	8.00	10.00	9.2995	.72306	-.383	.330	-1.337	.650
totalmeanPOS	52	6.67	10.00	8.8355	1.12011	-.361	.330	-1.361	.650
Totalmean_OC	52	5.35	10.00	8.5231	1.52645	-.616	.330	-1.008	.650
Valid N (listwise)	52								

**Table 2: Skewness and kurtosis tests.**

Furthermore, an assessment of the normal Q-Q Plot was carried out in which all variables yielded data points along a straight line, which showed that the data would be normally scattered.







**Reliability Test**

The Cronbach’s Alpha value for three variables assessed in this study was deemed acceptable due to the values being above 0.7 each, ensuring the scale considered reliable with the current sample (Pallant, 2010). In particular, the measurement scales used to assess the organisational commitment consisted of the Three-Component Model (TCM) Scale, specifically the revised version by Meyer and Allen (1997, 2004) for the item normative commitment, and Liden et al.’s (2014) shortened version of the Servant Leadership Scale (SLS). Meanwhile, the perceived organisational support scales implemented included those of Eisenberger et al (2002) and items no 9 adapted from (Masoud, 2013).

Variable	Items	Coanbach’s Alpha
Servant Leadership	7	0.876
Perceived Organisational Support	9	0.878
Organisational Commitment	20	0.950

**Table 3: Reliability Test**

Based on the reliability test using alpha cronbach , all variable are above 0.7 and its consider accepted for the reliability test in order to used in this study.

Correlation Test

**Correlations**

		totalmeanSL	Totalmean_OC
totalmeanSL	Pearson Correlation	1	.713**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	52	52
Totalmean_OC	Pearson Correlation	.713**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	52	52

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Correlations**

		Totalmean_OC	totalmeanPOS
Totalmean_OC	Pearson Correlation	1	.838**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	52	52
totalmeanPOS	Pearson Correlation	.838**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	52	52

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*Table 4: Correlation test*

<b>r</b>	<b>Level of Correlation</b>
0.00 - 0.25	Very Low
0.26 - 0.49	Low
0.50 – 0.69	Moderate
0.70 – 0.89	High
0.90 – 1.00	Very High

*Table 5: Level of Correlation. Sources: (Kalayci, 2010)*

Both hypotheses generated in this study were henceforth considered as accepted as per the results from the correlation analysis performed. Here, the value of correlation between Perceived Organisational Support and Organisational Commitment was 0.838 and yielded a positive relationship. This allows the premise wherein the more Perceived Organisational Support is applied, the higher organisational commitment can be seen among employees.

Meanwhile, the strength of the relationship was valued at 0.838 and thus classified as a high level of correlation. Alternatively, the correlation analysis yielded a value of 0.713 between Servant Leadership and Organisational Commitment, following which its positive relationship allowed the premise that a higher application of the former would ensure higher level of organisational commitment among employees. Similarly, the strength of the relationship was valued at 0.713 and classified as a high level of correlation.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, one might conclude that the COVID-19 pandemic was highly stressful for employees and the general population alike. It further proved that the presence of a servant leader and extensive perceived organisational support would ensure the organisational commitment among operational hotel employees, thus aiding in minimising turnover rates and reverting the good image of the hospitality industry in the future. To the best of the authors' knowledge, efforts of the leader and organisation are equally and immensely critical in ensuring employees feel cherished and that they belong to the hotel. This further supports a prior study that has indicated the need for space and attention for all levels of hotel employees in sustaining their momentum and interest to continue working in the hotel industry (Filimonau et al., 2020).

Regardless, this study is also with certain limitations. For example, the sample size was small and the respondents bound to specific geographical locations limited to the northern region of Malaysia. Therefore, it is suggested for future works to include a bigger sample size and engaging respondents from more geographical locations such as the south and west regions of the country.

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