Quality Management Practices towards Customer Satisfaction in Local Authority Public Services Website

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian national government undertook a comprehensive initiative in total quality management (TQM) that led to extensive implementation of TQM process in many of the government agencies. However, after more than 20 years of the 'Excellence Work Culture' program has been launched, the performance of local governments in Malaysia still receives much criticisms and complaints, suggesting the inability of these institutions in delivering high quality services to meet the expectation of public at large. Hence, this paper investigates the effectiveness of such program via its objectives of determining the current implementation of Quality Management Systems (QMS) at local governments' organization and evaluating the effect towards the improvement of the Malaysian public service organization. This paper adopts questionnaire survey, websites observations and interviews as its research methodology. Respondents are selected from the people that involved as customers in Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council public services website. There are various backgrounds of people such as executives, non-executives and self-employs. Questionnaire forms were sent out to 100 people throughout Kuala Kangsar. From 63 copies of usable questionnaire, the overall service quality is rating agreeable. The assurance dimension has the highest gap difference between perception and expectation. However, overall results have high expectation on all dimensions of quality management practices towards customer satisfaction in Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council public services website. The outcomes of the study will help local governments in Malaysia understanding better for a process that leads to continual improvements in the organization that, in turn, result in customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Quality management, Customer satisfaction, Local authority, Public services, Website.

1. Introduction

The innovative system of communication and accountability is important for local government. This statement is supported by Hezri (2004) who claims that "good governance requires better communication within society". Mohd-Ali *et al.* (2006) in the study on corporate social responsibility (CSR) awareness among local government accountants in Malaysia also reveal that the most popular means of communicating CSR information so that it is better communication within the society is via the local government webpage. Hence, this paper observes local government webpage plays an integral role in quality management practices towards achieving fulfilling society's need, or in this paper, towards customer satisfaction in public services.

An information society is one that makes the best possible use of webpages. Martin (1995) supports this view by describing it as a society in which the quality of life, as well as prospects for social change and economic development, depending increasingly upon information and its exploitation. In such a society, living standards, patterns of work and leisure, the education system, and marketplace are all influenced by advances in information and knowledge. This is evidenced by an increasing array of information-intensive products and services (Martin, 1988).

Annan (2002) notes that the information society is a way for human capacity to develop, build up, nourish, and liberate by giving people access to tools and technologies, with the education and training to use them effectively. There is a unique opportunity to connect and assist those living in the poorest and most isolated regions of the world. Informing of society is a major hurdle that most nations, especially developing countries, are encountering. The information society or information age is a phenomenon that began after 1950, which brings challenges as we seek to integrate and expand the universe of print and multimedia sources. The two terms are often used to describe a cybernetic society in which there is a great dependence on the use of computers and data transmission linkages to generate and transmit information (Bruce, 1995).

As for Malaysia, after more than 20 years of the 'Excellence Work Culture' program has been launched, the performance of local authorities in terms of technologies (specifically the website) still receives much criticism and complaints, suggesting the inability of these institutions in delivering high quality services to meet the expectation of public at large (Ibrahim *et al*, 2004). The Minister of Housing and Local Government has made a statement that the Malaysian local authority was unable to deliver a good service to the public via the website (Nathan, 2004) which eventually leads to poor customer's satisfaction.

In Malaysia public sector, several efforts have been made before that focused on evaluating performance of the agencies and individual through Annual Work Objective (SKT), competency evaluation under Malaysia Pension Scheme (SSM), as well as assessment on efficiency of Quality Management System through ISO 9000 and TQM. The effort has also been proved to increase the ability to resolve problem innovatively through Quality Circle Group (KMK) and benchmark best practices through Quality Awards in civil service. These efforts have been undertaken in line with the quality manifesto where as claimed by Deputy Minister of Human Resource, Datuk Abdul Rahman Bakar (2007) "the perception of superiority or sense of appreciation by customers to satisfy their needs".

However, the issue that is still controversial from the literature on QM is the definition of quality. To date, there is no consensus on this definition (Wicks, 2009). Public Complaint Bureau (PBC, 2014) mentions that there is quite a high number of complains field by the public due to delays in taking actions and providing services to them by the Malaysian public services organization which is also affected by the failure in mutually defining quality.

Hence, this paper is carried out with the aim of appraising the QM practices towards customer satisfaction in local authority (LA) public services website. This aim can be achieved by determining the problems of QM practices towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website and proposing the improvements measures for QM practices towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website by answering the questions of: (1) What are the problems of QM practices towards customer satisfaction in the LA public services website?; and (2) How to improve the QM practices towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website?

This paper focuses on quality management practices of public services website by Kuala Kangsar municipal Council, Perak towards their customer satisfaction. The internet and local authority website provide the sources of data and details apart from other studies from papers, conferences and journals. The respondents of this paper were officers of Kuala Kangsar municipal Council and the people of Kuala Kangsar as they are most familiar with their department's practices and performance results.

The local government public services organization will benefit to undertake with understanding for better process that leads to continual improvement in terms of quality management practices in the organization that in turn result in customer satisfaction. It is essential to assist Malaysian local authority to provide better information through the digital information transparency of public wealth management in order to enhance trust and confidence level of the residents in particular, and the public as a whole.

2. Local Authority Public Services Website

Ibrahim (2004) claims that as a forefront organization, performance of Malaysian local authority becomes very crucial. Sim (2012) mentions that government weakness in monitoring of services delivery quality and the lack of state level independence has come up as sources of contention. Zeithaml (1990) notes that reliability is consistently the most important service quality dimension or largest "gap" to improve across service industries. Gronroos (1990) says that services are more intangible than products, making them hard if not impossible to count, measure, inventory and test. Zeithaml (1990) agrees that due to more intangible than products, makes it difficult for customers to understand service quality and, as a result, difficult for firms to understand how customers perceive and evaluate a service.

Sureshchandar (2001) argues that, in service organizations, there is a very frail and permeable layer between the organization's employees and the customers that they serve. Thus, a firm characterized by the qualities of reliability, responsiveness, and empathy within the relationship of front-line employees and managers which will likely to manifest those traits to external customers. Geralis (2003) have conducted research on employee empowerment practices as they related to service quality. Empowerment is based on a Theory Y conceptualization , which assumes that all of the employees have an underlying desire, if appropriately tapped, to produce good quality work and take pride in that service delivery to customers towards customer satisfaction.

Sureshchandar (2001) argues that although firms may be tempted to invest heavily in technology as a means of gaining an advantage, in service settings, they must remember that it is the interaction between the service provider and the customer that eventually determines the quality perception and satisfaction of the consumer. Sureshchandar concludes that employee involvement in quality improvement efforts is vital for effective quality services implementation.

3. Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council Website

The Malaysian Government Portals and Website Assessment (MGPWA) first conducted in 2005 by E-Government with the objective to analyse the performance of more than 900 government portals and websites. Hence, MGPWA has become an annual project that has contributed to tremendous improvement of the Government portals and websites. In 2012, MGPWA has listed Kuala Kangsar District Council (KKDC) website, of which the KKDC was formed on January 1, 1980 under the restructuring campaign under Local Government Act 1976, Act 171. This resulted in a big strong local authority. In the year 2000 census, 154,048 people reside in Kuala Kangsar District. The administrative area is 204.94 km sq.

On February 18, 2004 the District Council was awarded the Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council (KKMC) status where it promises to provide a better quality service to the society as KKMC motto: Customer First Our Commitment. The KKMC vision is towards a quality municipal development and missions are to promote economic development policy, to plan and control the development in a well-organized and economical approach, to provide municipality services with efficient, effective and quality safe comfortable environment.

The objective of KKMC is in realization to create a town living condition that is cheerful and harmony by providing the public with facilities and further to improve the environmental management and cleanliness. In achieving this objective, KKMC has outlined 11 Customer Charter that encompass all areas to improve the quality and fulfil customer needs. Relevant problems from the local authority website services will be analysed related to quality management practices towards customer satisfaction.

However, the official website of KKMC as of March 2013 is still showing Christmas wishes celebrated 3 months ago as shown in Figure 1. KKMC should have up-to-date excellent practices in order to meet or exceed customer satisfaction in their innovative efforts of using website technology services.

Figure-1. The official website of Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council as of March 2013 is still showing Christmas wishes celebrated 3 months ago

Source: KKMC (2013)

On the other hand, KKMC online services also show problem in process maintenance and service disruption as illustrated in Figure 2.
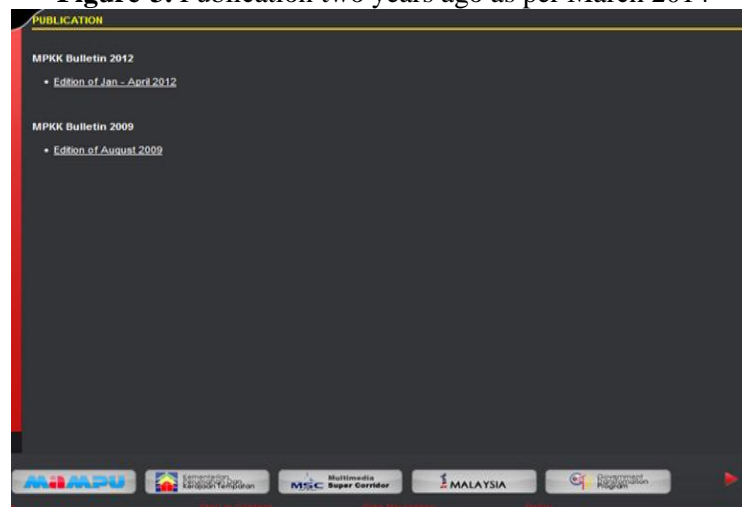
Figure-2. Online services show problem in process maintenance and service disruption

Source: KKMC (2014)

Besides, KKMC online services also show publication two years ago as per March 2014 as demonstrated in Figure 3.

Figure-3. Publication two years ago as per March 2014

Source: KKMC (2014)

Table 2 illustrates frequency of complaints from the client charter achievement from 2009 to 2013, which is not-up-to-date as per March 2014.

Table-2. Complaints receipt and resolved reported, January to October 13, 2013

KKMC	Total Complaints				
	Receipt	In-action	In-action percent	Resolved	Resolved percent
January	45	0	0.00	45	100
February	48	2	4.16	46	95.8
March	51	5	9.80	46	90.2
April	62	8	12.9	54	90.0
May	71	25	35.2	46	64.7
June	65	8	12.3	57	87.6

Continue

July	77	10	12.98	67	87.0
August	78	31	39.74	47	60.25
September	69	27	39.13	42	60.87
October	77	24	31.17	53	68.83
November	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
December	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	566	130	22.97	436	77.03

Source: KKMC(2014)

A total of 566 complaints receipt in 2013 and 130 complaints remained unsettled by KKMC, which illustrated a 23 percent from Table 2. It is reported four months ago and it shows that there is lack of quality management practices related towards customer satisfaction on achieving to meet the latest information. Besides, two months (for the month of November and December, 2013 respectively) of website facilities could not be available for end users to assess the complaints.

On top of that, a total of 482 complaints receipt in 2012 and 66 complaints remained unsettled by KKMC, which illustrates a 13 percent from the Table 3.

Table-3. Complaints receipt and resolved, reported from January to December 2012

KKMC	Total Complaints				
	Receipt	**In-action**	**In-action percent**	**Resolved**	**Resolved percent**
Total	482	66	13	416	86

Source: KKMC (2014)

Besides, a total of 394 complaints receipt in 2012 and 41 complaints remained unsettled by KKMC, which illustrates a 41 percent from the Table 4. The month of November (one month) shows no complaints from end-users indicate that the website not available during the time.

Table-4. Complaints receipt and resolved, reported from January to November, 2011

KKMC	Total Complaints				
	Receipt	**In-action**	**In-action percent**	**Resolved**	**Resolved percent**
Total	394	41	10.41	353	89.60

Source: KKMC (2014)

2010 and 2009 show no reports of complaints. Complaints from customers have significantly increases of about 30 per cent as shown from figures reported from 2011 to 2013. This indicates the website encourages communication between society and the organization that will improve QM practices towards customer satisfaction especially on the up-to-date issues. In addition, the increases in unresolved complaints of more than 65 percent from 2011 to 2013 require to improve further in term QM practices in LA website services towards customer satisfaction.

Table 5 illustrates responses to online services applications for approval within or exceed as promised in the KKMC Charter.

**Table-5.** Online services applications receipt and resolved, reported from January to October 2013

Type of Application	Receipt	Application in process (per cent)	Resolved (per cent) (a)=b+c+d	Resolved within Charter (per cent) b	Resolved exceeding Charter (percent) c	Undetermined (per cent) d
Ad hoc	0	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Scheduled	14	4(28.57)	10(71.43)	10(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Engineering Plan	20	14(70.00)	6(30.00)	6(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Building Plan	151	44(29.14)	107(70.86)	105(98.13)	2(1.87)	0(0.00)
Certificate Fitness of Occupation	0	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Total	185	62(33.51)	123(66.49)	121(98.37)	2(1.)63	0(0.00)

Source: KKMC (2014)

Table 5 shows some figures, which are not up-to date as per March, 2014 with missing data for the months November and December, 2013.A total of 185 applications with approval of 121 applications that is a 65.41 per cent of responses. It does not interact effectively to customers the requirements to apply and lack of prompt services. The updating of the LA website not appropriately undertakes by the employees, thus, QM practices are not being adopted in LA website services towards customer satisfaction.

Despite the above discussed problems of KKMC website, there are also some improvement initiatives undertaken by KKMC as a part of its customer satisfaction achievement. For instance, KKMC online services as in Figure 4 show features "one-click" available to access e-services, publication, client charter and various links to other major government link websites.

Figure-4. Show features "one-click" available to access e-services, publication, client charter achievement etc. and various links to other major government link websites
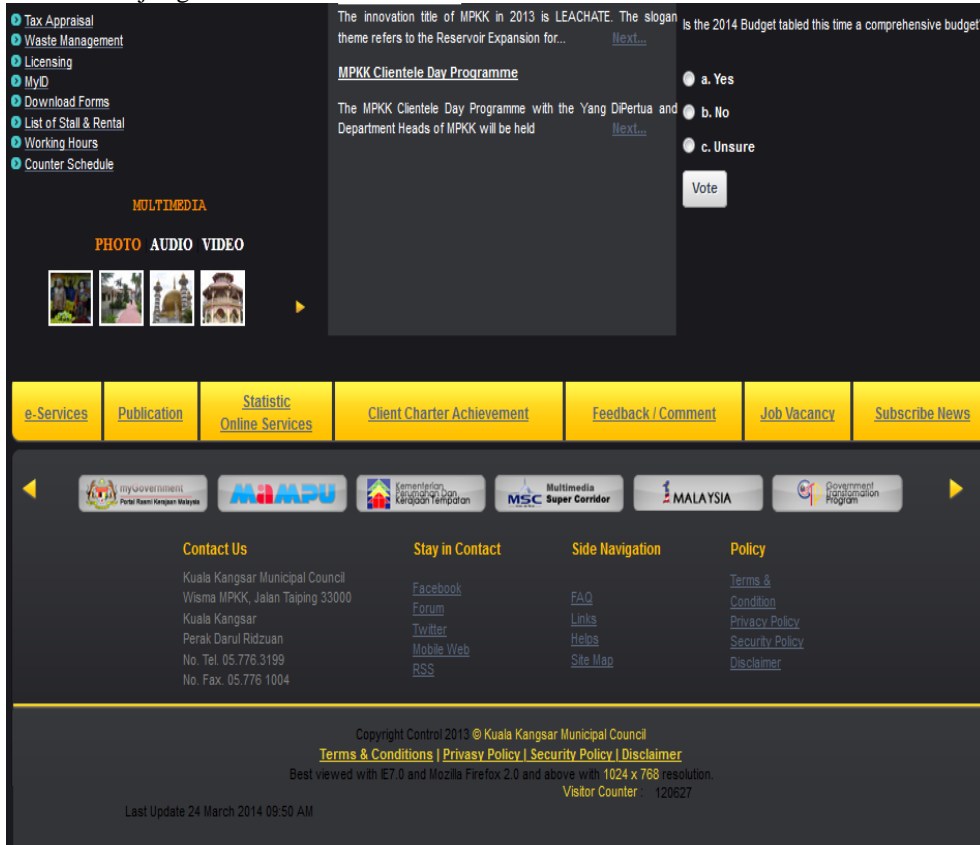

Source: KKMC (2014)

KKMC intends to develop Kuala Kangsar as a clean, beautiful and comfortable place to live and work in which is also competitive for investment. The KKMC and the people of Kuala Kangsar need an approach or method which will enable them to anticipate the future by taking into account several potential critical factors that may come into play in the future. In realizing the wish, strong and close collaboration between KKMC and the community must be established and enhanced to determine the position and roles of each entity in Kuala Kangsar.

4. Research Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this paper, three phases of research methodology were involved as shown in Figure 5. Phase 1, the initiation stage, involves determination of the objectives and scope of this paper and literature review. Phase 2 at the data input where data collection is important through the problems associated with local authority and literature review, list and forms, questionnaire to distribute among respondents internally and externally. The analysis of data embarked. In phase 3 at the reporting phase, it involves conclusion and recommendation for the quality management practices towards customer satisfaction in local authority services website.

Figure-5. Research methodology
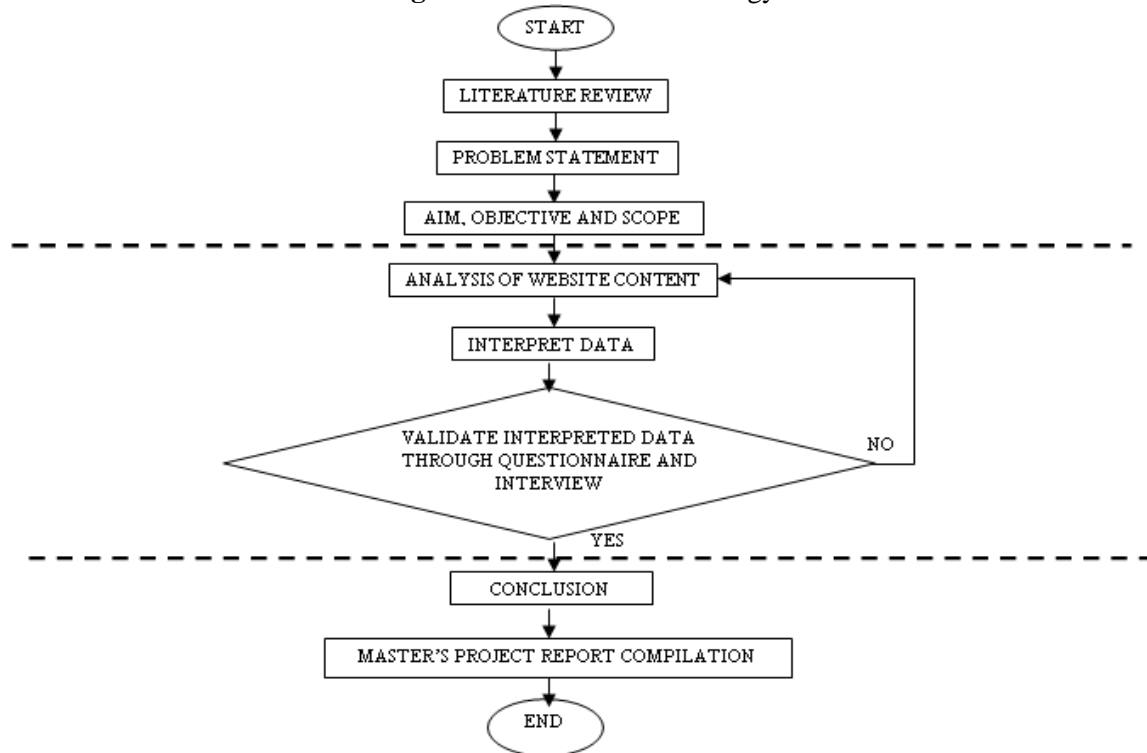
Questionnaire survey is aimed to investigate the extent of factors that influence customer satisfaction quality management practices towards customer satisfaction in local authority public services website. The questionnaire is divided into Section A, section B and Section C. Section A is meant for determining the respondent's background which included gender, age, race, status, monthly income and occupation as well as examining the general information including types of customers and what do encourage them to use website. Section B investigates the customer perception of quality management practices towards customer satisfaction in local authority services website, whilst Section C assesses the customer expectation of quality management practices towards customer satisfaction in local authority public services website. Each questionnaire is according to Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 which is strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree and strongly agree (Chua, 2006).

5. Analysis and Results

Respondents are selected from the people that involved as customers in Kuala Kangsar Municipal Council (KKMC) public services website. There are various backgrounds of people such as executives, non-executives and self-employs. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents by hand started 2st April to 30st April 2014. 63 respondents out of 100 from various backgrounds have responded. The percentage magnitude of the responses to the questionnaire is 63 per cent.

5.1. Reliability Statistical Testing

The summary of the reliability statistical tests are shown. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this paper is above the accepted value of 0.7.

Table-6. Summary of Reliability Statistical Test

No.	Section	Cronbach's Alpha Value	Number of Questions
1	A	-	6
2	B	-	2
3	C	0.9230	31
4	D	0.9610	31

5.2. Part A: Respondent's Profile

As shown in Figure 6, female is more compared to male which show that female gender has given more concern to the importance of QM practices towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website. Besides, the highest frequency age of respondents of the questionnaire survey is ranging from 31 to 40 years old with 41.27 per

cent as shown in Figure 7. In terms of race and marital status, 74.60 per cent are Malay and 65.08 percent are married as shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9, respectively. The highest frequency monthly income of respondents responded to the questionnaire survey as shown in Figure 10 is ranging from RM2,001 to RM3,000 with 52.38 percent, whom majority is executive with 34.92 percent as illustrated in Figure 11.
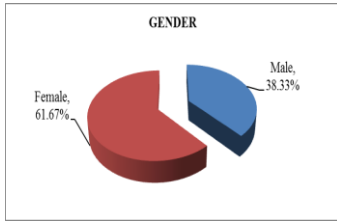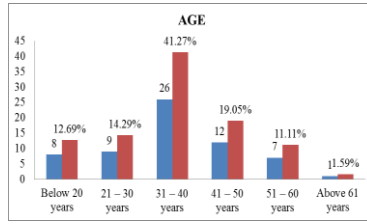
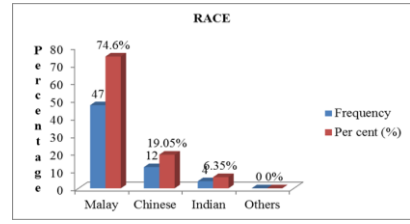
Figure-6. Gender

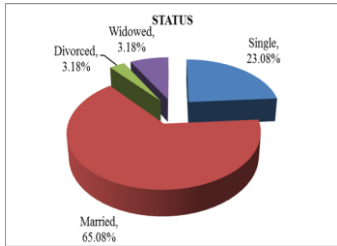
Figure-7. Age

Figure-8. Race
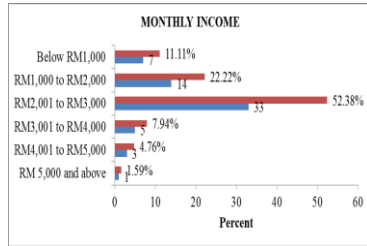

Figure-9. Marital status
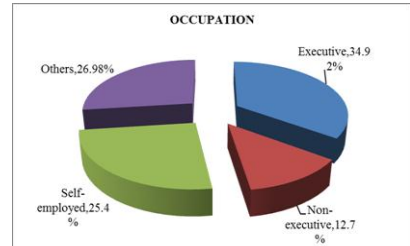

Figure-10. Monthly income

Figure-11. Occupation

Majority of the respondents are the industrial respondents with 36.51 percent as shown in Figure 12. Both residential and industrial respondents responded by giving input to the questionnaire survey with high expectations on QM practices towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website with almost 80 percent combined, respectively. Besides, from the study, 57.14 percent of respondents are recommended by friends or family to subscribe with Kuala Kangsar municipal council (KKMC) public services website as shown in Figure 13.
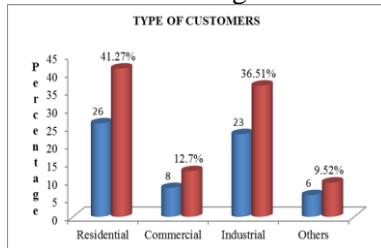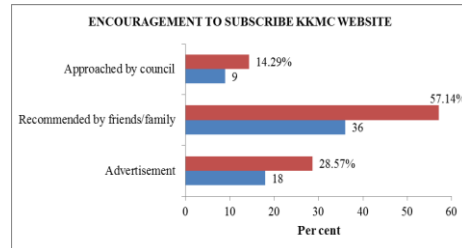

Figure-12. Type of customers

Figure-13. Encouragement received to subscribe to KKMC website

5.3. Section B: Customer Perceptions on KKMC Website on Quality Management Practices towards Customer Satisfaction

The survey from customer perceptions of QM practices towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website found that the sixth highest ranking of customer perceptions on the current KKMC website practices are: (1) employees look carefully to the feature needs in website services; (2) employees never too busy to respond to website services request; (3) employees give individual attention through website communication features; (4) website services are available 24 hours; (5) website services has employees who give personal attention; and (6) website services look attractive and appealing.

5.4. Section C: Customer Expectations on KKMC Website on Quality Management Practices towards Customer Satisfaction

The survey demonstrates that the sixth highest ranking of customer expectation in KKMC website are: (1) excellent website services will increase popularity in their services; (2) customers will choose excellent website services to their needs and interests; (3) excellent employees need to take action immediately when receive complaints from the website services: (4) impressive website services and features will enhance customer confidence; (5) excellent website services can solve the prioritized problems to customers: and (6) website must be provided with detail information accurately and update

Hence, as a part of improvement measures for quality management practices towards customer satisfaction in KKMC website, there are a total of 6 dimensions of problems to resolve associated with

quality management (QM) practices towards customer. The proposed improvement measures by the respondents are the followings:

1) Develop the necessary skills, knowledge and expertise to undertake the continuous improvement and is crucial. Building competence in improving assurance to meet and exceed customer expectation in LA public services website.

2) Provide training and infrastructure that will support the deployment of QM practices throughout the organization on a never ending basis towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website. Executive level managers must be involved personally and extensively. The responsibility for continual improvement cannot be delegated.

3) To lead by example in their areas, and to give democratic expression to the responsiveness of the communities they represent by helping towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website. Building the sensitivity to react quickly and effectively and sustain success.

4) Priority to give commitment to deliver services that are important to citizens and businesses towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website, that promote collaboration between LA and the people, and that reduce the administrative burden associated with doing business with the LA: Continue momentum with online services; Use new emerging technologies and media; Ensure that website is designed around real needs; Take steps to improve take up; Ensure that public service data is available for re-use; Digital mapping/geographic information systems; Identity and authentication; and Back-end integration. Building of excellence.

5) Provide proper layout that makes the look of the objectives more appealing to the customers. Layouts are able to enhance the aesthetic of the entire group of projects and moving towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website. Building of confidence and proud LA image into customers to a sustainable long haul of LA public services.

6) Making of the site more intuitive/easier to use, explaining what you do, explaining the services you offer, gathering visitor feedback, attracting or serving new audiences, reducing the number of phoned-in requests for assistance, boosting the number of applications from target groups or regions, increasing attendance at events, building a sense of community and capability towards customer satisfaction in LA public services website. Establish a customer contact center where the guide is to people who are currently working to improve the capability of customer services. Provide access services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a challenging target, which will require joined up working between departments, less reliance upon paper trails, and the development of new ways of working. Create a "customer-service culture" of knowledge, communication, purpose and empathy. Finally, provide the platform that allows public debate to be better informed and more productive. Building of the empathy engine turning customer service into sustainable advantage.

6. Conclusion

This paper has successfully achieved all of its objectives towards continuous improvement in QM practices in the organization and quality service website to the public. It is important to note that focusing on customer satisfaction is a component of good governance, and it is a priority. Customer satisfaction measurement has a critical role in informing service improvement. Since QM practices are regarded as being the key factor in the creation of worth and towards customer satisfaction, the local authority (LA) has to be strategically positioned to provide QM practices towards customer satisfaction. To provide improvement in QM practices, LAs need to investigate further the degree of customers' sensitivity and expectations towards achieving better QM practices. Although firms may be tempted to invest heavily in innovative technology (website services) as a means of gaining an advantage, in service settings, they must remember that it is the interaction between the service provider and the customer that eventually determines the quality perceptions and satisfaction of the consumer. Customers often equate employees with the service they are delivering. As employees are treated as valuable resources by their employers, they will, in turn, treat their customers as valuable and evolve into a committed workforce who is prepared to give their best toward accomplishing organizational goals.

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