

Customer Loyalty and the Impacts of Service Quality: The Case of Five Star Hotels in Jordan

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Abstract—In the present Jordan hotels scenario, service quality is a vital competitive policy to keep customer support and build great base. Hotels are trying to win customer loyalty by providing enhanced quality services. This paper attempts to examine the impact of tourism service quality dimension in the Jordanian five star hotels. A total of 322 surveys were administered to tourists who were staying at three branches Marriott hotel in Jordan. The results show that dimensions of service quality such as empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibility significantly predict customer loyalty. Specifically, among the dimension of tourism service quality, the most significant predictor of customer loyalty is tangibility. This paper implies that five star hotels in Jordan should also come forward and try their best to present better tourism service quality to win back their customers' loyalty.

Keywords—Tourism, Service Quality, Loyalty, Five Star hotels, Jordan.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE hotel industry, in particular, and all businesses whose service depend on building long term relationship need to concentrate on maintaining customer's loyalty. In this respect, loyalty is greatly influenced by service quality. As such, hotels often invest in managing their relationships with customers and maintaining quality to ensure that customers whose loyalty is in the short term will continue to be loyal in the long term. The growth in tourism is well anticipated as evident in the researches and analyses conducted by experts and relevant organizations in this industry. Burns and Holden [1] were among the early proponents of the idea where tourism is becoming one of the largest global export industries. Subsequently, Weaver and Oppermann [2] have observed that tourism has developed from a marginal local activity to a global economic giant representing about 6 per cent of the global economy and creating approximately 200 million jobs worldwide during the later decades of the twentieth century. With the rapid growth in the tourism industry, it is projected that global travel and tourism would generate US\$7.0 trillion in economic activity and 260 million jobs by 2011[3]. The robust growth is also attested to by the analyses conducted by the

United Nation's World Tourism Organization [4]. The above statistics have illustrated that the tourism industry has joined the ranks of agriculture and mining in terms of industry size.

Together with customer's loyalty, quality is an equally important factor and may lead to the success of the tourism business. Kandampully [5] has emphasized that quality will steer tourism firms to successfully encounter the competitive challenges of the future.

For Parasuraman et al. [6], service quality is both the significant differentiator and the most aggressive weapon possessed by many leading service organization. It has been discovered that leading service organizations endeavor to sustain a superior quality of service over their competitors in an effort to acquire and retain customer loyalty [7]. This is based on the concept where the service organizations' ability to expand and maintain a large and loyal customer base is essential for their long term success in a market. In the face of such critical importance of customer loyalty being vital for business survival [8], it is rather strange that the relationships between service quality and customer loyalty are not equally well-developed [9]; [10].

This paper is a part of an extensive study conducted on tourism service quality focusing on the importance of the relationship between tourism service quality dimensions and customer loyalty at five star hotels in Jordan.

II. CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY

As it is, feelings and attitudes experienced by customers via the service provided by hotels form the perception of service quality. Based on their personal perceptions of the services, customers generally form their experiences [11]. Many studies have investigated the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty [12]; [13], on the complaints received from customers [14]. Here a complaint is seen in the light of the customer's request for better service and possible continued usage of the product in the near future.

In addition, customer loyalty is seen as one of the major facilitators of service quality that emerged from the literature. Customer loyalty happens when there is repeated purchasing by the same customers and their willingness to recommend the product to other customers without any outright benefits [15], and eventually the repeated usages would generate positive and quantifiable financial results [16].

Among the economic benefits of customer loyalty are improvements in retention and increase in the share of a

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company. Customer loyalty means a customer would return or continue to use the same product or other products of the same organization, make business referrals, and intentionally or even unintentionally providing strong word-of-mouth references and publicity [17]. Loyal customers are those who are not easily swayed by price inducement from competitors, and they usually purchase more than those less loyal customers [18]. On the other hand, service providers must avoid being complacent as retained customers may not always be the satisfied ones and similarly not all satisfied customers may always be retained. There are many factors for such manner of loyal customers. Some customers may remain loyal due to high switching barriers or the lack of real substitutes, while others continue to be loyal because they are satisfied with the services provided. Past researches have pointed out that perceived service quality has an impact on customer loyalty. In their study on retail trade, Wong and Sohal [19] discovered a positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Other researchers had found a positive relationship between service quality and loyalty in the banking sector [12]; [20]. All the researchers have unilaterally agreed that service quality is related to behavioral outcomes, especially in the form of word-of-mouth, complaint, recommendation and switching. The methods to measure how service quality helps practitioners effectively manage the delivery of quality service have become the focus of other researchers [21]; [6]; [22]; [23]; [24]; [25]. Among the various measurement models/frameworks on service quality in the existing literature, SERVQUAL and SERVPERF are becoming quite popular.

Parasuraman et al. [6] developed SERVQUAL in their study, which includes tangibles, responsiveness, assurance-empathy and reliability. Subsequently, the SERVQUAL framework has guided numerous studies in the service sector focusing on various organizations, like hotels [26], tourism [27], dental services [28], hospitals [29]; [30]. However, critics have questioned and found faults with its conceptual appropriateness [31], low reliability [32], problems with discriminate validity [33] and also unstable dimensionality [22]; [34]; [35]; [36]; [37]; [14]. As a result, Cronin and Taylor [24] developed SERVPERF, a modified and improved version of SERVQUAL, which determines service quality by only measuring performance. Based on the literature review in the field of service quality, this study aims to address certain gaps that have been identified. For a start, there is a scarcity of empirical research investigating the association of all the variables of service quality and customer loyalty in the Jordanian hotel industry. Apart from this, the impact on the hotels' attitudes to provide better quality services in the face of economic changes need to be addressed as well.

The main objective of this study is to examine the strength of association between the variables of service quality and customer loyalty in five-star hotels in Jordan.

III. HYPOTHESIS

In the tourism sector, service quality has two aspects [38] in the form of basic service quality and responsiveness. The first is basic service quality, and it involves cycle time, on-time delivery, and inventory availability. The second aspect is

responsiveness, which is how an individual customer's requests are handled beyond traditional service measure [39]. Service quality measures how well the service delivered could match customer's expectations while delivery service quality refers to meeting and satisfying customer's expectation consistently and positively. Therefore, this research tests whether there is a positive relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. Therefore, the hypotheses of this study can be formulated as follow:

Hypotheses1: Tourism service quality positively affects customer loyalty in five star hotels in Jordan

H1.a: There is a significant positive correlation between tangibility and customer loyalty in five star hotels in Jordan.

H1b: There is a significant positive correlation between reliability and customer loyalty in five star hotels in Jordan.

H1c: There is a significant positive correlation between responsiveness and customer loyalty in five star hotels in Jordan.

H1d: There is a significant positive correlation between assurance and customer loyalty in five star hotels in Jordan.

H1e: There is a significant positive correlation between empathy and customer loyalty in five star hotels in Jordan.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A self-administered questionnaire, an adapted version of SERVQUAL scale, was used in this paper to measure the perceived tourism service quality of the hotel guests. There are various models used by researchers to assess service quality, i.e. SERVQUAL [40], SERVPERF [24] and Non-Difference [41]. This study used the SERVQUAL model to measure the study dimensions due to its high reliability and validity in previous studies. Our research instrument design is based on the five dimensions of service quality and the 23 service items of the SERVQUAL model. Some modifications were made to the items in order to suit the context of hotels. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part of the questionnaire contained questions relating to socio-demographic data about the respondents. The second part was designed to measure the respondents' perceptions regarding quality of services offered by the hotel. Meanwhile, the third part of the questionnaire assessed the respondents' perceptions regarding loyalty on the same five-point scale. Seven customer loyalty items were adapted from Zeithaml et al., [7] and Ndubisi [42]. The researchers introduced the tool of measurement in such a way that it briefly illustrated the topic of the study and procedures of response. The measurement grades were placed according to the five-point Likert scale [43]. The scales were ordered regressively as follows: Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1).

The study was conducted in three branches of the Marriot Hotel chain situated in three cities in Jordan for three months in the summer of 2008. The target population selected for this study during the data collection period comprised tourists who stayed in all three branches of the Marriot Hotel. A convenience sampling approach [44] was employed, in which 322 questionnaires were distributed to the guests who agreed to participate in the survey. The guests completed the questionnaires in the presence of the researchers. The

completed questionnaires were then collected by the researchers immediately.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics analysis was used to measure customers' perception scores. To explore the dimensionality of the 23-item scale, a factor analysis was performed. Validity and reliability of the adapted scale were established. Validity tests determine how well an instrument measures a particular concept. Reliability of a scale, on the other hand, indicates the stability and consistency with which the instrument measures the concept and helps assess the goodness of a measure [45]. A reliability analysis was employed to have an idea on the internal consistency among the items and the convergent validity of the overall scale. Within-scale factor analyses were used to ensure that all indicators in the scale measured the same construct. This process is known as construct validity [46]. To test the internal consistency of each factor, a reliability analysis was conducted. Based on the new factors derived from the factor analysis, a multiple regression analysis was used to identify the relative importance of the factors in predicting customer loyalty with the service quality provided by the Marriot hotels in Jordan.

V. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The analyses of the collected data were carried out through various statistical techniques such as factor analysis, validity analysis and multiple regressions. The data were compiled and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 16) for Windows computer software.

Table I shows the demographics of the respondents. As can be seen from Table I, the gender distribution was 56.5% female and 43.5% male. The highest proportion of the respondents (18.3%) fell into >63 year age group, followed by the 27-32 year age group (14.9%). The majority of respondents were married (51.9%). The question on the educational level of customers showed that 42.5% of the respondents had a university degree, followed by diploma (20.2%), postgraduate (12.1), and others (Professional Editor, Specialized Market Research). A variety of occupations were reported by the respondents. The highest frequencies were private sector (45.5%), followed by government (18.9%). As for annual income, the highest rate was \$21000-\$30000 (32.0%), while the lowest rate was \$61000-\$70000 (2.5%).

Figure 1 show that the majority of respondents came from Europe (70%) followed by America (19%), while the number of tourists from Australia (6%) and Asia (5%).

TABLE I
PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS (N=322)

	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	140	43.5
	Female	182	56.5
Age	< 20 years old	11	3.4
	21-26 years old	28	8.7
	27-32 years old	48	14.9
	33-38 years old	43	13.4
	39-44 years old	33	10.2

	45-50 years old	41	12.7
	51-56 years old	28	8.7
	57-62 years old	31	9.6
	63> years old	59	18.3
Status	Single	106	32.9
	Married	167	51.9
	Divorced	22	6.8
	Widowed	27	8.4
Education	Primary School	25	7.8
	Secondary School	24	7.5
	Diploma College	65	20.2
	University Degree	137	42.5
	Postgraduate Degree	39	12.1
Occupation	Others	32	9.9
	Government	61	18.9
	Own Business	49	15.2
	Private Sector	145	45.0
	Retired	49	15.2
Annual Income	Others	18	5.6
	<\$20000	37	11.5
	\$21000-\$30000	103	32.0
	\$31000-\$40000	86	26.7
	\$41000-\$50000	35	10.9
	\$51000-\$60000	38	11.8
	\$61000-\$70000	8	2.5
>\$70000	13	4.0	

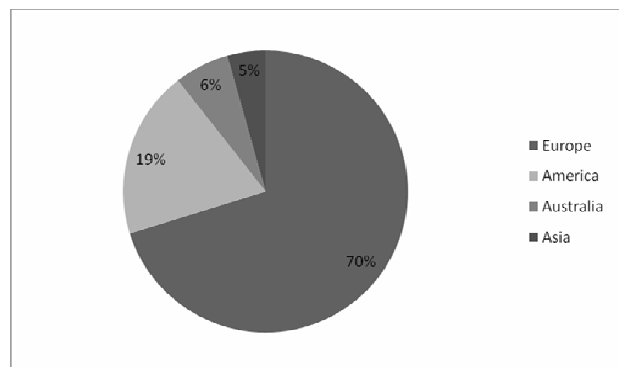


Fig. 1 Country of Origin of the Respondents

VI. FACTOR ANALYSIS

Factor analysis was used to reduce the items to several factors. Some items sometimes represent the same idea, thus these can be omitted if they are redundant or unnecessary. The number of participants in the present research is 322. According to Hair et al. [47], if the number of samples in the factor analysis is 100 or larger, factor loadings in the range of $\pm .30$ to $\pm .40$ are considered to meet the minimal level for interpretation of structure. Loading of $\pm .50$ or greater are considered practically significant, and loadings exceeding $\pm .70$ are considered indicative of well-defined structure and are the goal of any factor analysis. The adequacy of the sample size

was confirmed using both the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) test sampling adequacy and Barlett's Test of Sphericity. In fact, KMO for tourism service quality (0.86), customer satisfaction (0.89) and customer loyalty (0.89) exceeded satisfactory values. The retention decision of each item was based on factor loadings which were greater than or equal to 0.50; cross-loading with the other factors were generally smaller than 0.35[48].

VII. FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY

The results of the factor analysis concerning tourism service quality shows that all of the items is found to have a five-dimensional construct with 23 items. The results indicate that the five factor solutions with Eigenvalues were greater than 1.0, and the total variance explained was 72.91% of the total variance. The KMO measurement of sampling adequacy was .86, indicating sufficient inter-correlations. Meanwhile, the Barlett Test of Sphericity was significant (Chi square= 6.360, p<.001). By identifying whether or not the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, one can be certain if the variables are unrelated. The chi-Square significant level was less than .01. Therefore, a value higher than about .10 or so may indicate that data are not suitable for factor analysis as mentioned in Table II and Table III.

TABLE II
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST FOR TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY

KMO	Chi-Square	df	KMO
.862	6.3603	253***	.862

Note: ***p<0.001

VIII. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY

The KMO measures the sampling adequacy which should be greater than 0.5 for a satisfactory factor analysis to proceed. Looking at the Table (IV), the KMO measure is .904. From the same table, we can see that the Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant (Chi-Square = 1.4923; p<0.001).

Table (V) explain a factor loading is the correlation between a variable. Factor loading came from a factor that has been extracted from the data set. The loading for customer loyalty was ranging from .783 to .858. At the same time, the Eigenvalues is 4.76 and the total variance is 68%.

TABLE III
FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY

	Code	Component				
		X2	X1	X5	X3	X4
Tangibility (X1)						
Furniture in this hotel is modern and comfortable	Q1	-.010	.843	.096	.123	.128
The interior and exterior decoration in this hotel is quite appealing	Q2	.142	.618	.258	.331	-.091
The employees have neat appearances	Q3	.267	.627	.029	.002	.236
The hotel facilities are up-to-date	Q4	.299	.662	.011	.087	.291

The brochures and pamphlets are visually presented	Q5	.258	.607	.192	.201	.120
The hotel is clean	Q6	.043	.872	.088	.183	.102
Reliability (X2)						
The front-desk employee accurately verified the reservation requests	Q7	.838	.139	.261	.177	.039
The time it took to check in or check out is not too long	Q8	.701	.197	.060	.139	.273
The reservation system (e.g., telephone or internet reservation) is easy to use	Q9	.610	.181	.108	.145	.260
Transport facilities are available	Q10	.885	.096	.232	.140	.069
The employees provide error-free records	Q11	.860	.175	.270	.139	.062
Responsiveness (X3)						
The employees are courteous	Q12	.246	.192	.289	.601	.183
The employees gave us special attention	Q13	.190	.150	.213	.813	.285
The employees adapted services to our needs	Q14	.163	.238	.088	.830	.182
The staff are willing to help guests	Q15	.146	.160	.132	.889	.262
Assurance (X4)						
The staff in the hotel are polite	Q16	.103	.271	.118	.249	.670
The staff imparted confidence to the guests	Q17	.063	.220	.268	.285	.685
The staff are friendly	Q18	.163	.201	.183	.208	.797
The staff had sufficient support from the hotel to do their jobs	Q19	.305	-.011	.272	.165	.677
Empathy (X5)						
The employees quickly apologized when service mistakes are made	Q20	.238	.085	.873	.182	.200
The employees listened carefully when you complain	Q21	.216	.116	.906	.187	.165
The employees called the customers by name	Q22	.212	.122	.864	.184	.133
Employees understand the customer's requirements	Q23	.190	.204	.709	.078	.314
Eigenvalues		9.570	2.367	1.963	1.589	1.282
Total Variance (72.91%)		16.52	15.49	15.26	13.65	11.96
		7	8	8	2	8

TABLE IV
KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST FOR CUSTOMER LOYALTY

KMO	Chi-Square	df
.904	1.4923	21***

NOTE: ***P<0.001

TABLE V
FACTOR LOADING FOR CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Customer Loyalty (Y2)	Code	Y2
I would recommend this hotel to other people	Q31	.790
I would like to stay in this hotel next time	Q32	.843
I would like repurchase many services in this hotel	Q33	.783
I would encourage friends and relatives to visit this hotel	Q34	.853
I consider the performance in this hotel strong	Q35	.839
I would consider this hotel as my first choice when I need hotel service	Q36	.858
I intend to continue using this hotel	Q37	.805
Eigenvalues		4.762
Total Variance (percent)		68.028

Note: Underline loadings indicate the inclusion of that item in the factor

IX. VALIDITY ANALYSIS

Table (VI) presents the validity analysis for this research was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha. The validity for the potential variables were found to be 0.85 for tangibility, 0.90 for reliability, 0.90 for responsiveness, 0.83 for assurance, 0.93 for empathy, and 0.92 for customer loyalty. Since the results are significantly higher than the value of 0.7, the questionnaire is deemed to have excellent stability and consistency.

TABLE VI
RESULTS OF THE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY TESTS

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tangibility	0.85	4.02	0.59
Reliability	0.90	3.87	0.66
Responsiveness	0.90	4.00	0.69
Assurance	0.83	3.93	0.63
Empathy	0.93	3.82	0.80
Customer Loyalty	0.92	3.99	0.68

A regression analysis was used to further investigate the relative importance of the five tourism service quality dimensions in predicting customer loyalty. Table (VII) shows the results of the regression analysis.

The hypothesis testing that was conducted to check for the direct relationship between tourism service quality and customer loyalty showed that tangibility ($\beta = .413$, $p < 0.001$; t -value = 9.062), reliability ($\beta = .162$, $p < 0.01$; t -value = 3.437), responsiveness ($\beta = .099$, $p < 0.05$; t -value = 1.991) and empathy ($\beta = .219$, $p < 0.01$; t -value = 4.605) were found positively significant to customer loyalty. Nevertheless, assurance ($\beta = .072$, $p > 0.05$; t -value = 1.431) was found not significant with customer loyalty. An examination of the t -values for the five dimensions indicated that the most important factor in predicting customer loyalty evaluation is "tangibility" followed by "empathy." It appears that hotel managers should exert more attempt and focus to develop its service quality along these two vital dimensions as shown in Table (VII).

TABLE VII
REGRESSION RESULTS ON TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Service Quality	t-value	Standardized Coefficients Beta
Tangibility	9.062	.413***
Reliability	3.437	.162**
Responsiveness	1.991	.099*
Assurance	1.431	.072
Empathy	4.605	.219***
F		80.942***
R ²		.564
Adjusted R ²		.557
R ² Change		.564
F Change		80.942***

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

One of the major criticisms SERVQUAL has received from researchers is on the dimensionality of service quality. The most serious criticisms concern the number of dimensions, and their stability from one context to another [49]. When SERVQUAL is employed in modified forms for different service fields, researchers identified varying numbers and contents of dimensions according to the service sector under investigation [49]. Parallel to these claims, numerous studies have been conducted on service quality in the hotel industry [34]; [50]; [51]; [52]. These studies have produced several contributions to help gain an understanding of the dimensional structure of service quality of hotels.

This study was conducted in the five star hotels in Jordan and identified five service quality dimensions tourists use to evaluate service quality in these hotels. The findings confirmed the five-dimensional structure of SERVQUAL, but some of the dimensions found along with its components differed from that of SERVQUAL. These findings support the claim that the number of service quality dimensions is dependent on the particular service being offered; in addition, different measures should be developed for different service contexts [23]; [22]. The studies conducted in the hotel industry produced different outcomes with regards the hierarchy of dimensions in contributing to an overall assessment of service quality. Akan [26] reported that the most important dimension is the "courtesy and competence of hotel personnel," while Mei et al., [52] reported that "employees" comprise the most important dimension. On the other hand, Saleh and Ryan [34] reported that most important dimension was "conviviality," while Knutson et al. [53] found it to be "reliability." Ekinci et al. [54] stated in their study that "intangibles" were the most important dimensions influencing the perception of quality in the hotel sector. In this study, it was found that "assurance" is the most important factor in predicting tourists' service quality evaluation. This appeared to be different from that in Parasuraman et al.'s [6] study, wherein "reliability" is defined as the best predictor. This finding suggests that for the guests of hotels, the purpose of their stay may be an important determining element when evaluating the quality of hotels.

X. CONCLUSION

In this study, a scale for measuring the service quality of five star hotels was proposed through exploratory factor analyses. Having knowledge on these areas would definitely help managers meet the challenge of improving service quality in the hotel industry. The current paper contributes to the theoretical orientation of tourism service quality and tourists' satisfaction in hotel industry literature by determining some pivotal service quality levels. This study also identified five tourism service quality dimensions, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, all of which comprise the criteria tourists use to evaluate the service quality of five star hotels in Jordan. The findings of this study indicate that the most important factor in predicting tourism service quality evaluation was tangibility, followed by empathy, reliability, and responsiveness. The findings of this study suggest that among the five dimensions of service quality, assurance has emerged as the best predictor of tourism service quality. These results support the idea that despite the usefulness of the SERVQUAL scale as a concept, it should be adapted for the service environment as well.

Along with the important findings obtained in this study, the modified questionnaire itself is another important contribution. The questionnaire developed through this study is suitable for use for tourists staying in five star hotels in Jordan, allowing them to confidently identify the service areas of services which require action. At the same time, the modified questionnaire could also provide indicators through which managers and planners can plan service policies that would result in satisfied customers. Finally, the results of this study may not have been representative of the whole population, due to the fact that a convenience sampling method was used to collect the data. This study was conducted for only five star hotels. To be able to generalize the findings for this specific hotel segment, a study that would include more hotels in a variety of regional settings could be conducted.

Monitoring customer loyalty has become an important focus for all managers in the hotel industry. Failure to recognize the power of customer satisfaction, especially their emotions, could destroy the power of customer retention and loyalty [55]. Therefore, the hotel management's greatest challenge lies not only on attracting customers but specifically on identifying customer satisfaction individually. Customers may agree that the hotel provides high levels of service quality but not necessarily agree that the hotel ensures high satisfaction. If prices are perceived to be high, this may still have a negative effect on loyalty. Higher levels of quality are only meaningful to the extent that customers believe that value is being enhanced. Therefore, managers must carefully execute price competition and understand the value perceived by different market segments. Customers may sometimes refrain from purchasing when price is perceived to be too high, while some became suspicious of quality when price is too low. In summary, understanding the relationship among service quality and loyalty will help managers make decision and plan their strategies in the competitive hospitality market environment.

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