

Factors of Affecting Guests' Satisfaction and Their Loyalty — A Study of Luxury Hotels in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract—This study aimed to analyze and test the effects of tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, empathy, price, and hotel image on guests' satisfaction and their loyalty towards luxury hotels in Ho Chi Minh City. Quantitative research approach was main method applied with 255 questionnaires delivered directly to international tourists who were staying at 3-5 star hotels. The empirical results showed that factors of empathy and assurance, tangibility, and hotel image both directly and indirectly affected guest loyalty. Satisfaction directly affected guest loyalty while price negatively and indirectly affected guest loyalty. Reliability and responsiveness did not significantly affect guests' loyalty.

Index Terms—Service quality, guest satisfaction, guest loyalty, luxury hotels, Ho Chi Minh City.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to [1], Ho Chi Minh City with 2,095.6 sq. km of squares, which is located in the core of the Mekong Delta, is the largest city in Viet Nam. "It is not only a commercial center but also a scientific, technological, industrial and tourist center". In addition, Ho Chi Minh City is located in favorable commercial position and has available advantage of tourism (the national culture and beautiful landscapes), so the development of tourism and hospitality industry is strong and is given priority from government policy. Especially, it was reported that the total number of international visitors coming to the Ho Chi Minh City during the first 7 months of 2014 was estimated at 2.392.648 arrivals, increasing by 9.1% over the same period last year and reached 54.3% of the plan in 2014 (4.4 million visits). Total revenue from city tourism (travel, hotel, restaurants) was estimated at 51.965 billion VND, up to 8.5% over the same period last year [2]. Most visitors are businessmen and tourists and they choose to stay in the big hotels in the city center to facilitate the travel and enjoy the best service. However, the quality of service in the 3-5 star hotels are now not really meet the guest needs, making them feel dissatisfied and negatively affecting to their return intention. Therefore, improving the quality of service at the hotel is very necessary to make a good impression on tourists, promote the image of civilized city, and ensure the sustainable development of the tourism in Ho Chi Minh City in the future.

Manuscript received September 4, 2014; revised March 18, 2015.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Service Quality: [3] defined service quality as a mixture of three elements: (1) the quality of the consumption process itself; (2) the quality of outcomes of the process; and (3) the image of the provider of the service. Service quality was explained as the consumer's rating for the overall excellence or the superiority of the service offered [4]. Moreover, [5] also identified service quality as an important indicator for customer satisfaction and business performance measurement. In the hotel industry, [6] stated that "Quality means achievement of estimated standards and their constant maintenance, that is, an ongoing process. High class hotels render the highest standards and highest quality products and service, with the most extensive scope of expensive hotel service. Economy class hotels offer products and service of lower quality, with a limited scope of less expensive service". Previously, [7] studied on dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL) have provided an extremely valuable insight into measurement of service quality. These five different dimensions are tangibility, responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. This study model was also adapted from SERVQUAL model like previous studies such as [8]-[11] to analyze the effect of service quality on guest loyalty in the hotels.

Price: As the impact of increase in value is related to quality, price is an important determinant of satisfaction [12]. Determining pricing strategies can be difficult, but it's important for hoteliers to use the information available to make critical decisions [13]. To create effective price, they need to understand the guest response to change prices. Whether or not the guests are achieving the bookings, they also tell you if the price is reasonable or not [13].

Hotel image: [14] considered that store image is the functional and emotional mixture; that is, the prior experience of having contact with enterprises that include new information such as advertising, word-of-mouth effect, and prediction to meet expectations for the future that has a directive positive influence on satisfaction of the guests. Besides, building and sustaining a positive image is an important step in maintaining customer loyalty [15]. Using researches on service organizations, [16] found that service quality was the most important factor that influences customers' minds in regard to the hotel image. Similarly, [17], in their study on hotel brand loyalty in the free independent traveler's market, found that the hotel image was an important factor, and maintained a relatively high score rating among loyal customers. Image could be positively associated with guest satisfaction and guest preference (a dimension of guest loyalty) in luxury hotels

[18].

Guest satisfaction: According to [19] defined guest satisfaction as a psychological concept involving the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and/or service, or the visitor's state of motion after they experience their tour [20], [21]. Moreover, the positive relationship between service quality and guest satisfaction have been proved by [7], [22], [23].

Guest loyalty: [24] said that customer loyalty consists of both an attitudinal commitment to the relationship (such as price insensitivity), as well as, more-overt loyalty behavior (such as positive word of mouth and repeat patronage). Therefore, loyal customers or loyal guests are guests who hold favorable attitudes towards the hotel, commit to repurchase the product/service, and recommend the hotel to others [25]. From these concepts above, the hypotheses of this study are:

H1: Factors of tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, empathy, hotel image and price positively and directly affect guest satisfaction.

H2: Factors of tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, empathy, hotel image and price positively and directly affect guest loyalty.

H3: Guest satisfaction positively and directly affects guest loyalty.

H4: Guest loyalty is indirectly affected by tangibility, assurance, responsiveness, reliability, empathy, hotel image and price.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design and Data Collection

This research purpose was examining guest loyalty in Ho Chi Minh City, in which the sample size of 300 respondents. The target participants were international guest who was staying at 3-5 star hotels more than one day for business and leisure. Data was collected through questionnaires which was used seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 (1 is "Entirely disagree", and 7 is "Entirely agree"). Quantitative approach was applied as the main method in this study.

B. Factor Analysis and Reliability

TABLE I: SUMMARY OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable	No of Item	Cronbach's alpha
Empathy and Assurance (EMNAS)	11	.956
Tangibility (TAN)	6	.928
Reliability (REL)	7	.940
Price (PRICE)	5	.909
Hotel Image (HOTIMA)	4	.895

Factor analysis was loaded twice with rotation varimax to rearrange the components of independent and dependent variables. It divided into 2 groups: one for five independent variables including 33 items (group 1) and one for two dependent variables including 15 items (group 2). For group 1, the value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) coefficient was 0.943 that satisfied the condition $0.5 \leq \text{KMO} \leq 1$ [26], and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity had significant Sig = .000 (accepted the condition Sig < .05) [27]. It means that

there was the correlation among these components. They were renamed as EMNAS (empathy and assurance), TAN (tangibility), REL (reliability), PRICE (price), and HOTIMA (hotel image). Similarly, in group 2, KMO was also high at .907 and the significant level at .000. It means that this factor analysis was considered appropriate.

Testing the eigenvalues > 1, five independent factors (consisting of 33 items) accounted for 74.78% of the total variance and the Cronbach's coefficients ranged from .895 to .956, which considered good scale of reliability. In addition, two dependent factors (including 15 items) explained for 68.15% of variability and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .916 and .941 for GUESATIS (guest satisfaction) and GUESLOY (guest loyalty), respectively. It was high results of reliability.

TABLE II: SUMMARY OF DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Variable	No of Item	Cronbach's alpha
Guest Satisfaction (GUESATIS)	9	.916
Guest Loyalty (GUESLOY)	6	.941

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

TABLE III: GUESTS PROFILE (N=255)

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	164	64.3
	Female	91	35.7
	Total	255	100
Age group	<18	0	0
	18-25	51	20.0
	26-30	60	23.5
	31-40	58	22.7
	41-60	57	22.4
	>60	29	11.4
	Total	255	100
Nationality	Europe	101	39.6
	USA/Canada	47	18.4
	Australia/NZ	21	8.2
	Asia	79	31.0
	Latin America	4	1.6
	Other	3	1.2
	Total	255	100
Education	High school degree	21	8.2
	Associate degree	59	23.1
	Attending university	26	10.2
	Bachelor degree	95	37.3
	Master degree/higher	54	21.2
	Total	255	100
Purpose of visit	Business	156	61.2
	Leisure	47	18.4
	Visiting friends/family	37	14.5
	Other	15	5.9
	Total	255	100

B. Relationships between Guest Loyalty, Guest Satisfaction and the Independent Variables

Pearson Correlation (r) was used to identify which factors had relationship with guest loyalty. For this reason, Table IV presented that there were positive correlations between the dependent variables GUESLOY and GUESATIS ($r=.736$, $p<.01$), between GUESLOY and independent variables: EMNAS ($r=.696$, $p<.01$), TAN ($r=.663$, $p<.01$), REL ($r=.637$, $p<.01$), PRICE ($r=.515$, $p<.01$), HOTIMA ($r=.648$, $p<.01$). This meant that the better EMNAS, TAN, REL,

PRICE, HOTIMA, and GUESATIS; the higher GUESLOY.

TABLE IV: CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES

	GUESLOY	1	2	3	4	5
1. EMNAS	.696*	1				
2. TAN	.663*	.741*	1			
3. REL	.637*	.840*	.764*	1		
4. PRICE	.515*	.591*	.516*	.594*	1	
5. HOTIMA	.648*	.728*	.661*	.740*	.553*	1
6. GUESATIS	.736*	.806*	.706*	.753*	.455*	.650*
Mean	5.46	5.31	5.35	5.26	5.18	5.40
SD	1.054	1.062	1.077	.974	1.134	.891

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the .05 level

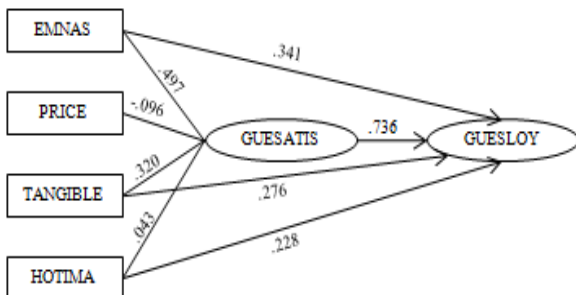
C. Factors Directly Affect Guest Loyalty

Using multiple regression analysis, standardized coefficients Beta (β) identified which independent factor has the strongest impact on guest loyalty. It could be concluded that empathy and assurance has the highest value of Beta ($\beta=.341$, Sig. $<.05$) so it can be considered as the most influential factor to guest loyalty. Next, the following are tangible and hotel image with ($\beta=.276$, Sig. $<.05$), ($\beta=.228$, Sig. $<.05$), respectively. Meanwhile, reliability and price have no effect on guest loyalty to all Sig. greater than .05.

Besides, simple linear regression was used to examine the relationship between two dependent variables. The correlation coefficient between GUESATIS and GUESLOY was equal to .736 at Sig. $<.05$, which concludes that they were strongly associated with each other positively. It proved that the more satisfaction of guests when they stayed in the hotel, the more they will prefer this hotel for the next trip and consider being loyal to it.

D. Indirectly Effects on Guest Loyalty

According to Fig. 1, the result of multiple regression analysis showed that guest loyalty was mainly affected by three important factors: EMNAS ($\beta=.341$), TAN ($\beta=.276$), and HOTIMA ($\beta=.228$). It proved that when guests felt satisfied to the elements such as empathy and assurance, tangibility, and hotel image, they were more likely to be loyal to the hotel. These three factors directly affected the intervening variable of GUESATIS and then GUESATIS directly caused an effect on GUESLOY ($\beta=.736$). Therefore, through the intervening variable of GUESATIS, the factors of empathy and assurance, tangibility, and hotel image created indirect effects on guest loyalty at (.365), (.235) and (.032), respectively.



Note: All coefficients in the model were significant at the .05 level
 Fig. 1. Path coefficients of GUESLOY model.

E. Total Causal Effects on Guest Loyalty

The total effect on GUESLOY of one variable could be direct and indirect effects. The Table V summarized the

effect of independent variables (EMNAS, TAN, HOTIMA, and PRICE) together with GUESATIS on GUESLOY. Regarding to the total effect, GUESATIS factor had the strongest effect on GUESLOY with $\beta=.736$ and according to [27], this was considered as very strong effect. Next is EMNAS factor with $\beta=.706$, which had a very strong effect on GUESLOY. The factor of TAN had a substantial effects on the dependent factor GUESLOY with $\beta=.511$. Lastly, HOTIMA factor had moderate effect on GUESLOY with $\beta=.260$. All of these factors including EMNAS, TAN, HOTIMA, and GUESATIS had positive effects on GUESLOY while PRICE had negative effect with $\beta=-.096$. The total effect of these factors on guest loyalty was 2.117.

TABLE V: DIRECT, INDIRECT AND TOTAL EFFECTS

Variables	Causal effects		
	Direct	Indirect	Total
EMNAS	.341	.365	.706
TAN	.276	.235	.511
HOTIMA	.228	.032	.260
PRICE	---	-.096	-.096
GUESATIS	.736	---	.736
Total	1.581	.536	2.117

V. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

A. Discussion of Findings

These results above showed that there were positive direct relationships between empathy and assurance, tangible, and hotel image to guest loyalty while price had negative indirect effect on it. Firstly, this is consistent with the fact that besides investing in upgrading infrastructure and qualified equipments, the hotel manager also needs to focus on training to improve skills for staff. Especially in the upscale hotels from 3 to 5 stars always requires from staff not only good expertise and deep understanding, but also need to become elegant and subtle to always satisfy guests from the smallest thing. By adapting and developing from SERVQUAL model of [30], this study examined and admitted the validity of it as other studies from [8]-[10] and recently is [11].

On the other hand, the guests can only evaluate these things when they are staying at the hotel, so hotel image is also an important factor determining the level of reputation and attraction of luxury hotels. Many researchers have shown the importance of images with customers' impressions such as [31], [32]. Moreover, [33] argued that image has a powerful effect on the way customers perceive and react to things. Therefore, this factor may impact directly (guest feedback after check-out from the hotel) on the loyalty of customers, or indirectly (potential guests will review online information of this hotel before decided to book a room at here) as shown in this study.

Typically, at the hotel from 3 to 5 stars, when guest check out and pay will include room charge and a 15% additional cost (10% VAT and 5% service charge). Meanwhile, price has a negative relation to guest loyalty indirectly through guest satisfaction. To clarify what this means, the author based on the actual situation of hotels from 3 to 5 stars in Ho Chi Minh City, and concluded that the disagreements about the price (mainly belongs 5% service charge) and quality of service is a reason annoying for guests. Specifically,

although classified in the same class but each hotel has variety standards for equipments and prices for the general basic services; or even guest have to pay the service fees for luxury hotel (5 stars) while the actual quality level this hotel achieved only as first class hotel (4 stars). [13] states that “whether or not you are achieving the bookings you would expect will help inform whether the customer reaction to a price change is what was desired” to remind the manager should offer reasonable prices. Because it will direct impact to guest satisfaction is proven by [10]. It also explains why the element reliability be completely removed in the final result, because of the lack of appropriate price that the guest hard to believe in quality of what they are served. This is a real concern that the author learned from the research process.

Furthermore, guest satisfaction is proved to have a positive direct relationship to guest loyalty. This result is matching to previous studies of [34] “customer loyalty depends critically on the overall level of satisfaction”, [35]-[37]. In conclusion, with the form of service business that, a hotel manager always trains his/her staff for a guideline is "not only makes them happy, but also surprises them." It "surprise" here includes elements satisfaction (happiness) and touching (surprise) is the attraction at the hotel to convince customers come back often and long term.

B. Limitations of the Study and Future Research

In fact, this study is limited in implementation time, location, the sample size and human resources. Besides, language of survey (English only) is also an obstacle to Asian tourists (Japanese, Korean, and Chinese). Therefore, the results of this study reflect only the opinions of 255 English-speaking guests in Ho Chi Minh City, a small part of the city visitors.

Therefore, the future research should expand the sample size in many tourist cities in Vietnam (Vung Tau, Nha Trang, Da Nang, etc), and investment in multi-language survey. In addition, the research model can be developed with elements of perceived service quality, perceived value, or customer expectations [31]. Qualitative analysis method is also a good choice to receive specialized comments and objectivity of the people working in hotels (hotel managers, staff) and tourists.

C. Recommendations

Actually, with available advantages of trade, transportation and huge benefits from tourism, the hotel industry in Ho Chi Minh City should establish separate the most appropriate standards to develop, integrate and compete around the country, as well as in the region and the world. Moreover, along with the trend of the world, the hotels in Vietnam should have the specific standards of safety and environmental protection. The evaluation system should be based on actual survey on common ground and development of each hotel, the infrastructure of the city, opinions of customers and professional platform in the hospitality industry as well as reference criteria from international standards. Since then, according to the agreed standards, the hotel will be able to change and improve the quality of services and equipment in a professional manner fully. Hotels of same class will synchronize with the basic standards which provide customers a basis for identification

and selection in accordance with their needs. On the other hand, improving professional qualifications for the hotel staff (human resources) is also an important issue, because they directly serve and satisfy the guest needs. Thereby, the hotel can build trust and support from customers at home and abroad, form the basis of their loyalty in the future. In conclusion, a good home should have a solid foundation. A hotel should build uniform standards more specifically and well enough to create confidence for guests. When they believe, they will become loyal to that hotel.

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