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Examining the Effects of Service Quality, Customer Expectations, and Relationship Marketing on Customer Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Customer Satisfaction

Dr. Jawad Ali [1*], Dr. Qasim Ali Qureshi [2], Dr. Amina Tariq [1], Sidra Jawad [1]

Authors' Affiliations:

[1]Department of Business Management, Air University, Kharian, Pakistan

[2]Management Science Department, COMSATS University Islamabad, Islamabad Campus, Pakistan

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Corresponding author(s):

Dr. Jawad Ali
Email: jawad.ali@kc.au.edu.pk

Co-author(s)Email:

Dr. Amina Tariq
amina.tariq@kc.au.edu.pk

Sidra Jawad
sidrajawad92@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Hotels need to focus on customer loyalty to develop a sustainable competitive advantage and survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Therefore, this study examined the effects of relationship marketing, customer experience, and service quality on customer loyalty. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design and a quantitative methodology. Data were collected from hotel customers in Pakistan using convenience sampling. The usable responses were analyzed using SmartPLS 4. The results revealed that service quality, customer experience, and relationship marketing have positive effects on customer satisfaction. Furthermore, customer satisfaction has a significant positive effect on customer loyalty. The mediating role of customer satisfaction was also supported. This study contributes to the existing literature by examining customer satisfaction as a mediator between service quality, customer experience, relationship marketing, and customer loyalty within a single framework.

Keywords: Customer Experience, customer Satisfaction, customer loyalty, Relationship Marketing, Service quality

1 | INTRODUCTION

In recent times the idea of customer satisfaction has gained significant attention, for every organization, customer satisfaction need attention by the management. It is because of enhanced significance of the fact that customer commitment can lead to development of competitive position in marketplace (F. A. Belhaj et al., 2025). Factor of customer satisfaction is important consideration for every type of organization that want to gain competitive position in the marketplace. It is important for organizations to identify factors that develop customer satisfaction including service quality, perceived ease of usage of services etc. Customers who are satisfied by the services prefer to purchase again from a certain service provider in future (F. Belhaj et al., 2025).

Customer loyalty is vital concept that shows customer's willingness to maintain long term relationship, positive attitude, and customer commitment towards a certain service provider, brand or organization (Singh, 2021). Customer satisfaction is vital to develop sustainability and long-term success of the organization as it helps the organizations to retain the customers and establish customer relationship. It is highly likely that loyal customer will make repeat purchase, recommend service or products to other through positive word of mouth, and prefer a certain brand over others. Also, loyal customers are willing to demonstrate greater tolerance towards service failure, share positive experiences, and trust service providers (Ali, Bakar, & Lestari, 2025). Development of business loyalty enables organizations to ensure sustainable business growth, increase revenue, improve customer retention, and competitive advantage.

In competitive business environment, relationship marketing is considered as one of the important strategies to develop customer loyalty and gain competitive advantage. studies have increasingly focused on importance to develop collaborative relationship and improve mutual value creation (Martins, Hilton, Quaye, & Khalid, 2025). Relationship marketing shows a strategic process by which organizations give value to the customers by understanding their preferences, exceptions, and needs. Opposite to traditional marketing, that has main focus on transaction volume, efficiency, and individual sales, the focus of relationship marketing is to strengthen, maintain, and establish long term relationships. Relationship marketing encourage organizations to develop long term relationship with stakeholders including customers (Rosário & Casaca, 2023).

In concept of marketing, the concept of customer experience has gained significant important as it effect how customers interact with organizations, services, and products. It also deals with customers evaluation and perception of a certain service or product (Zhou & Salleh Hudin, 2025). It is referred as overall responses, feelings, emotions, and perceptions that are developed among customers through the interactions among business throughout the consumption journey. Experience of customers also provides organizations with chance to develop point of difference by creating meaningful and unique interaction that exceed expectations of customers (Jaakkola, Becker, & Panina, 2022).

Service quality is considered as important factor in marketing as it effect customers overall experience with organization. service quality shows the level to which an organization exceeds or meets the expectations of customer through effective customer support, responsiveness, professional employee behavior and service delivery (Kurniawan et al., 2025). Its importance has enhanced with the passage of time in competitive service sector where customers mostly evaluate organization on the basis of quality of services they gain. Organizations can differentiate their products from competitors by using service quality factors (Munna, Febisatria, & Cantafio, 2025). Also, improving service quality enables organizations to enhance customer retention, address service failures, and reduce complaints. The purpose of this study is to examine effect of Service Quality, Customer Experience, and Relationship Marketing and customer satisfaction on customer loyalty in context of hotels.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Customer satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

Studies have conceptualized customer loyalty in a number of different ways. Generally, this concept is referred as strong commitment of the customers to purchase or prefer a certain product or service again in future without any influence. It also shows the long-term relationship between sellers and customers after the initial transactions (Singh, 2021). Customer loyalty is important for profitability of organization as retention of customers generate mostly generate regular sales that later develop sustainable business growth. Loyalty initiatives of the organizations contribute majorly to the financial success of the organization.

Literature has referred customer satisfaction as the overall evaluation of the customers regarding organization, brand, service, or a product (Girsang & Faadhil, 2025). Scholars explained satisfaction as emotional response of the customer that arise by comparing perceived performance on the basis of past expectations. Likewise, scholars linked satisfaction with feelings of excitement, relief, acceptance, and happiness. Satisfied customers are likely to recommend services, products, or brands to others through word of mouth, showing repeat purchase behavior and maintaining long term relationships (Ramasamy, Sivakumar, Vindy, & Husin, 2026).

Customer satisfaction is vital as it is highly likely that satisfied customer will not switch to any other brand. Ability of organization to retain customers and customers loyalty are highly dependent on factor of satisfaction. Customers who trust the organization are likely to be the potential loyal customers and are ready to pay the good price for the products (Nosirov, 2025). Scholars mentioned that satisfied customers stay loyal for the longer period of time (Danurdara & Masatif, 2025).

H1. *Customer satisfaction significantly impacts customer loyalty.*

2.2 | Relationship Marketing and Customer Satisfaction

Relationship Marketing involves strengthening, maintaining, and developing meaningful relationships between customers, organizations, and stakeholders. It plays vital role to enhance communication, commitment, trust, and satisfaction (Rosário & Casaca, 2024). All the factors contribute collectively to future purchase intention and customer retention. Increasingly technological development and globalization have intensified customer expectations, and market competitions, encouraging firms to adopt customer-oriented strategies for establishment of long-term customer relationships. It also incorporates personal interaction into activities of marketing allowing customers to take part actively in the process of relationship building (Mandal, 2023).

The effectiveness of relationship marketing becomes evident when customers are involved in activities of organization actively. Providing relevant information about product, considering suggestions from customers, and encouraging customer feedback in service development can also strengthen customer relationships and generate favorable perception (Rosário & Casaca, 2025). These practices improve organizational competitiveness and enhance satisfaction (Mohammed & AL-Ameri, 2024). Moreover, customer satisfaction is dependent on comparison expected between delivered and expected value alongside product attributes, reliability, responsiveness, and organizational image.

Additionally, studies have concluded that customer satisfaction is dependent on the way customer expectations are fulfilled by the organizations by having productive relationship with them (Sofi, Bashir, Parry, & Dar, 2020). The customers will get satisfied if the service experience and relationship with the form goes beyond the expectations. Otherwise, they will not be satisfied by the performance. Past studies showed that relationship programs improve the flow of information between organizations and customers; thus, customers are satisfied with the organization (Ridwan, Nur, & Mariah, 2021).

H2. *Relationship marketing tactics impact customer satisfaction.*

2.3 | Customer experience and Customer satisfaction

Customer experience has become an important concept in marketing as it is based on customers reactions, attitude, perception, and feelings throughout their consumption process and decision making. Customer experience shows the overall assessment of interaction between service providers and customers including satisfaction, emotional responses, communication, and product encounters (Jain, Aagja, & Bagdare, 2017). It incorporates both negative and positive evaluations that effect word of mouth intentions, loyalty, brand perception, and customer behavior. Understanding experience of customers enables organizations to identify elements that shape attitude of customers and achieve objectives on the long-term basis. Moreover, customer experience developed on the basis of services, personalized attention, employee interaction and attractive environments strengthen the overall evaluation of the customer (Abidin, Yudistria, & Haeba Ramli, 2025).

The concepts of satisfaction and customer experience are connected to each other on the basis of contributory relationships. Scholars suggested that experience creates satisfaction that in turn leads to customer loyalty (Yılmaz, 2025). Customer experience creates long term engagement of customer with the service or product, hence creating long term satisfaction leading to repurchase and loyalty. Studies have shown that customer satisfaction is developed on the basis of customer experience causing significant effect of customer satisfaction on customer loyalty (Wichitsathian & Suvittawat, 2025).

Therefore, current study refrain from stating following hypothesis.

H3. *Customer experience significantly impacts customer satisfaction.*

2.4 | Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service quality shows the combination of service delivery and different standards that are used for the evaluation of its effectiveness. Services are defied as benefits and activities that are intangible offered by one party to another without ownership transfer (Imam & Anwar, 2025). Meanwhile, quality serve as key mechanism to improve overall performance and organizational efficiency. In context of marketing, service quality is referred as ability of organization to deliver services that provide satisfactory experience and fulfill customer expectations. Customers mostly assess service quality by comparing the anticipated standards with performance on actual basis. Effective service delivery enhances perceived value, strengthen customer trust, and generate favorable perception. Service quality is also viewed as factor of customer loyalty, retention and satisfaction (Akram, Abbas, & Ahmad Khan, 2022). Therefore, organizations must maintain consistent service

standards and respond effectively to the expectations of customers. Providing superior services will strengthen service quality.

Service quality plays a key role to determine customer satisfaction as it shows overall evaluation of customers regarding services being provided by the organization. when services are received by the customers, which are of high quality, efficient, responsive, and reliable, that exceed or meet the expectations, they are likely to experience satisfaction (Gazi et al., 2025). Thus, organizations should give priority to provide high level of services so customers satisfaction level may enhance. The study by Wijaya, David, Mia, and Astarina (2025) mentioned that service quality plays key role to enhance customer satisfaction and develop customer loyalty.

Therefore, based on those empirical findings, hypothesis is proposed as below:

H4. *Service Quality significantly impact Customer Satisfaction.*

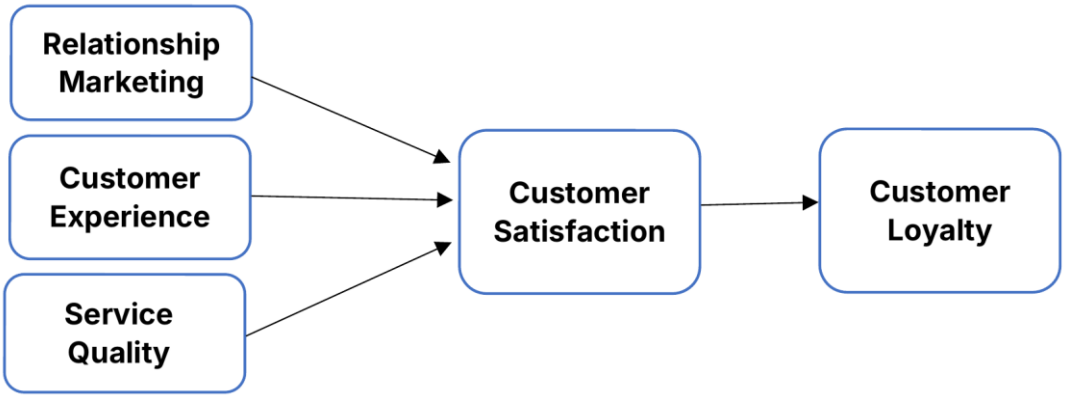
H5. *Customer Satisfaction mediates the relations between relationship marketing and customer loyalty*

H6. *Customer Satisfaction mediates the relations between customer experience and customer loyalty*

H7. *Customer Satisfaction mediates the relations between service quality and customer loyalty*

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework



3 | RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used cross sectional research design and quantitative research methodology. Data was collected from customers of hotels in Pakistan. Questionnaire was developed using past literature. The items of service quality were gathered from (AM et al., 2022), questionnaire of customer loyalty was taken from (Sasono et al., 2021), items of customer satisfaction were adapted from (DAHAL, 2022), items of customer experience was adopted from (Pei, Guo, Wu, Zhou, & Yeh, 2020), and questionnaire of relationship marketing was adapted from (Akbar, Siregar, & Asnawi, 2024). All these items were developed in five-point Likert scale format. Questionnaire was distributed using convenience sampling among hotel employees. Total of 384 questionnaire were distributed, and 205 usable responses were received. These responses were further analysed using Smart PLS 4.

4 | RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Measurement analysis is the stage 1 of the analysis through Smart PLS. At this stage factor loading, composite reliability, Cronbach Alpha, AVE and discriminant validity tests are conducted. The first test is the factor loading which must be more than 0.70 for every item to be retained. Table 1 shows that all items have loading of more than 0.70.

Table 1

Factor Loadings

VAR	Item	F Load	CR	AVE	Cronbach
Relationship Marketing (RM)	RM1	0.780	0.939	0.657	0.938
	RM2	0.810			
	RM3	0.830			
	RM4	0.790			
	RM5	0.850			
	RM6	0.820			
	RM7	0.760			
	RM8	0.840			
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	CS1	0.840	0.851	0.740	0.850
	CS2	0.880			
Customer Loyalty (LOY)	LOY1	0.790	0.916	0.686	0.916
	LOY2	0.830			
	LOY3	0.860			
	LOY4	0.810			
	LOY5	0.850			
Service Quality (SQ)	SQ1	0.760	0.910	0.671	0.910
	SQ2	0.800			
	SQ3	0.840			
	SQ4	0.820			
	SQ5	0.870			
Customer Engagement (CE)	CE1	0.780	0.902	0.699	0.902
	CE2	0.820			
	CE3	0.860			
	CE4	0.880			

After assessment of factor loading, reliability and validity of the variables was examined through CR and Cronbach Alpha. As per statistics given in table 1, all values of CR and Cronbach Alpha are higher than 0.70. furthermore, AVE was also assessed where minimum value required is more than 0.50. Table 1 shows all values of AVE are higher than 0.50

Table 2

Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

VAR	RM	CS	LOY	SQ	CE
RM	**0.811**				
CS	0.48	**0.860**			
LOY	0.51	0.62	**0.828**		
SQ	0.55	0.46	0.49	**0.819**	
CE	0.52	0.50	0.54	0.48	**0.836**

Later Fornell and Larker criteria was used for the analysis of discriminant validity. As per these criteria, the square root of AVE placed at the diagonal of table should be higher than the remaining values. Table 2 shows that all values at the diagonal (bold) are higher than the remaining values. This fulfills the criteria of discriminant validity.

Table 3

Results of Direct and Mediation Effects

HYP	B	SD	T value
RM → CS	0.21	0.061	4.08
SQ → CS	0.18	0.058	5.83
CE → CS	0.14	0.060	3.00
CS → LOY	0.52	0.064	5.56
RM → CS → LOY	0.132	0.035	3.72
SQ → CS → LOY	0.108	0.032	4.67
CE → CS → LOY	0.191	0.031	5.25

At this stage, structural model analysis was conducted using bootstrapping process. This stage is used for analysis of direct and indirect hypotheses. Also, study assessed values of R square at this stage. Table 3 shows the direct and indirect results on the basis of Beta and t values. The results show that RM have positive effect on CS (B=0.21, t=4.08), SQ has positive effect on CS (B=0.18, t=5.83), CE has positive effect on CS (B=0.14, t=3.00), CS has positive effect on LOY (B=0.52, t=5.56).

Study also examined mediating role of CS at this stage. CS mediates between RM and LOY (B=0.132, t=3.72), between SQ and LOY (B= 0.108, t=4.67), and CS mediates between CE and LOY (B=0.191, t=5.25)

Table 4

R-Square

Variable	R^2
CS	0.488
LOY	0.557

At the last stage of analysis, study also explored the R square value, the effect of independent variables on the outcome variables. Values of Table 4 shows that CS is affected 48.8% by the proposed IVs of the study and LOY is affected 55.7% by the IVs of the study.

5 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hotel sector is facing intense competition in Pakistan. Thus, it is important to look for strategies that can help in developing long term relationship with the customers. Thus, study explored the effect of service quality, relationship marketing and customer experience on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Results revealed that customer satisfaction has positive effect on customer loyalty. It is highly likely that satisfied customers will maintain long term relationships with hotels as positive experience of customers will strengthen the confidence of customers on the management of hotels. When customers as guests receives services that are satisfactory, develop positive perception for hotels. It increases their intention to revisit the same hotel again in future. Furthermore, satisfied customers also encourage others (family members, and friends) to visit same hotels in future. In the hotel sector of Pakistan, it is vital to provide customers with quality services on regular basis to retain them. Thus, customer satisfaction is vital to strengthen customer loyalty.

Results also showed that service quality has positive effect on customer satisfaction. Service quality is the vital consideration to shape the evaluation of hotel services by the customers. The positive association shows that customers will develop satisfaction when hotels deliver services that exceed or meet the expectations of customers. Specifically, reliability, cleanliness, professional conduct, staff responsiveness, and timely assistance as services can shape perception of guests. Mostly customers evaluate hotels on the basis of actual service encounter. Thus, any improvement in delivery of services can strengthen overall evaluation. In hospitality sector of Pakistan, hotels that give priority to customers create favorable experiences and develop positive perception among guests. Thus, maintaining consistent services can play important role to enhance customer satisfaction.

Customer experience effect customer satisfaction by shaping the way customers evaluate and perceive their overall stay at the hotel. Every interaction from the stage of process of reservation and services of reception to the room facilities, staff and dining communication, have major contribution to develop experience. When these encounters create positive, comfort, and convenience emotional responses, customers are likely to develop favorable evaluation of the hotel. Also, favorable memorable experience can create sense of value beyond the basic services, that makes the customers feel their expectations have been fulfilled adequately. For hotels that are operating in competitive hotel sector of Pakistan, it is important to provide pleasent and meaningful experience.

The findings also show that relationship marketing has positive significant effect on customer satisfaction. Findings show that relationship marketing contributes significantly to the customer satisfaction by establishing continuous and meaningful connection between hotels and customers. Irrespective of focusing exclusively on personal transactions, hotels that adopt relationship-oriented approach focus on customer interaction, long term engagement, trust development, and personalized attention. These practices make customers feel recognized and valued that can influence positively towards the evaluation of hotel services. Also, maintaining communication with customers, responding to their requirements, and understanding their needs can strengthen relationship with customers. In hospitality sector of Pakistan, development of customer

relationship can help the hotels to improve perception among guests. In other words, relationship marketing is important to develop customer satisfaction among guests.

Results also revealed that customer satisfaction mediates significantly between customer experience, relationship marketing, service quality and customer loyalty. When hotels provide experience that is memorable, deliver reliable services, and maintain customer relationships, customers develop greater satisfaction. This satisfaction later strengthens their intention to revisit and maintain relationship with hotel. Thus, customer satisfaction plays the role of vital mechanisms by which hotels can convert service-related activities into customer loyalty.

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