

Customer Satisfaction as a Mediator between Service Quality Dimensions and Behavioral Intentions in the Egyptian Hotel Industry

Dr. Ahmed Elbadawy Baiomy 1 Dr. Marwa Tarek Abdel Azeem 2

Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of service quality dimensions on behavioral intentions and using customer satisfaction as mediator in such a relationship. After detailed scanning of previous studies, a need to examine the impact of service quality dimensions on intention to switch is highly recommended. The SERVQUAL instrument was applied to detect the areas of needed quality improvements. The findings of this study indicated that the quality in the sampled hotels (in terms of reliability, assurance and empathy) was rationally good and influence positively on customers' intention to return or recommend the hotel to a friend or relative and prevent them to switch. The study recommends giving more attention to improve the quality of staff behavior attributes because of its strongest negative influence on customer satisfaction and in turn their behavioral intentions towards the hotel selection.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, SERVQUAL, service quality, reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, tangibles, behavioral intentions, intention to return, intention to switch, intention to recommend

1 Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, **Helwan University**

2 College of Management and Technology

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport

مستخلص الدراسة :

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد مدى تأثير أبعاد جودة الخدمة المقدمة في عدد من الفنادق الكبرى بجمهورية مصر العربية على التوجه السلوكي لدى العملاء ، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار تأثير رضا العميل كعامل وسيط لتلك العلاقة. ولتحقيق ذلك الهدف تم الاستعانة بمقياس SERVQUAL كأداة لتحديد أبعاد الجودة المختلفة والعمل على التركيز على نقاط الضعف فيها بغرض تحسين مستوى جودة الخدمة المقدمة. وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى أن الأبعاد التالية: (الاعتمادية - التأكد - التعاطف) هي من أهم الأبعاد المؤثرة بالإيجاب على جودة الخدمة المقدمة بتلك الفنادق ومن ثم التوجه السلوكي للعملاء نحو اختيار أو ترشيح الفندق المفضل لديهم. وقد أوصت الدراسة بضرورة الاهتمام بتحسين سلوك العاملين بتلك الفنادق لما كان له من تأثير سلبي على رضا العملاء الحاليين ومن ثم التوجه السلوكي لديهم نحو اختيار الفندق.

1. Introduction

El Saghier (2015) argued that improving the service quality levels through using SERVQUAL model is a critical factor to meet customer expectations. Increasing service quality is inadequate to induce customer satisfaction which in turn will impact his/her favorable behavioral intentions (Cronin *et al.*, 2000).

Hence, this study measures the performance and the importance of service quality in Greater Cairo hotels in Egypt. Such measurement will result in improving the overall service quality levels through recognizing specific service elements requiring improvement (Akbaba, 2006; Ebrahimpour and Haghkhah, 2010). This study also aims to identify the gaps between customer's expectation and perception of the services offered at which these gaps are considered as a source of dissatisfaction with services provided (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; 1998; Curry, 1999; Luk and Layton, 2002).

In addition, this study extends the model of service quality which was developed by El Saghier (2015) which measured the relationships between the five dimensions of SERVQUAL and customer satisfaction (See Figure 1). By identifying the nature of the relationship among these dimensions, hotels' managers will be in a position to develop better marketing strategies for their target customers.

Several academics (Zeithaml *et al.* ,1990; Saleh and Ryan, 1992; Parasuraman *et al.*,1998) have explained that applying the SERVQUAL instrument always help service

providers in understanding customer expectations, perceptions of specific services, and areas of needed quality improvements.

The main research questions of this study are: Is there any meaningful difference between customers' expectations and their perception about service quality dimensions in the Egyptian Hotel Industry?; Which quality attributes are perceived to have more/less importance to customers and which ones have high/low levels of performance?; What is the nature of the relationship between the three concepts; service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions?

2. The Study Background

The main purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality in service sectors with respect to the service quality dimensions.

Moreover, it focuses on the relationship between such dimensions and the behavioral intentions when the customer satisfaction mediates such relationship. Many studies focused on these variables aiming to provide customers with the maximum satisfaction from the provided products or services that they got.

Customer satisfaction may take place through minimizing the gap between their perceptions and expectations of product/service quality which may affect their behavioral intentions. Actually, many studies address the importance of the relationship among these issues in hospitality industry worldwide as shown in table (1):

Table 1: Main studies on Customer Satisfaction and behavioural intention in hospitality industry			
Study	Alkhabz (2006)	Kingj et al. (2009)	Ladhari et al. (2008)
Focus of the study	Measuring Service quality in the hotel industry	Antecedents and consequences of consumer satisfaction	Determinants of dining satisfaction and post-dining behaviour intentions
Survey mode	Survey	Customers who visited a restaurant or hotel in last six weeks	In student class
Country	Turkey	UK	Canada
Sample	234 participants	185 questionnaires	338 undergraduate business student
Independent variables	Tangibles, adequacy in service, assurance, convenience, understanding and caring	actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, desires congruence, service quality	Perceived service quality, positive emotions, negative emotions
Dependent variables	-----	intention to return	recommendation, customer loyalty and willingness to pay
Mediator	Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction
Analysis	Factor analysis, paired sample-test	Correlations and multiple regression analysis	Structure equation modelling
Main results	The research findings indicated that the SERVQUAL scale was a useful tool as a concept.	Consumer satisfaction is found to be a better indicator of the consumers' overall attitude to the service firm than service quality.	Satisfaction has a significant impact on recommendation, customer loyalty and willingness to pay
Study	Kim, Ng and Kim (2009)	Ryu and Zhang (2012)	Ali (2015)
Focus of the study	Influence of institutional DINESERV on customer satisfaction, return intention and WOM	Antecedents and Consequences of Customers' Menu Choice	Service quality as a determinant of customer satisfaction and resulting behavioural intentions: A SEM approach towards Malaysian resort hotels.
Questionnaire mode	public university during the spring semester	After customer finishing their main entree and waiting for dessert.	Various locations at the sampled resort hotels
Country	USA	USA	Malaysia
Sample	4659 students	295 respondents	425 guests
Independent variables	food quality, atmosphere, service quality, convenience and price and value	risk-taking behaviour, physical environment, menu choice for unfamiliar food	intention to return and intention to recommend
Dependent variables	Customer satisfaction; Return intention; Word-of-mouth endorsement	Revisit intentions and word of mouth	Hotel ambience and staff courtesy; F&B products, staff presentation and knowledge; reservation services overall value for money
Mediator	Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction
Analysis	Factor analysis, ANOVA, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analyses	confirmatory factor analysis and Structural Equation Modelling	confirmatory factor analysis and Structural Equation Modelling
Main results	Improving customer satisfaction, which results in increased return intention in university food service.	Customer satisfaction significantly affected both revisit intention and WOM.	There were a positive relationship between dependent variables and customer satisfaction.

3. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

In addition to what the researchers have found out from service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions, some other authors went into details to bring in customer value in the study of the relationship between them:

3.1. The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction

The literature review shows many studies conducted to explore the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. It has been concluded that service quality could be evaluated with the use of SERVQUAL model with its five dimensions; reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness and tangibles as illustrated below:

3.1.1. The relationship between reliability and customer satisfaction

Reliability refers to the ability of delivering the promised service *consistently* and *dependably* (Abu Alroub *et al.*, 2012). Consistency means uniformity of the quality, doing things in the same way and depending on the same standards (Iberahim *et al.*, 2016). Frei *et al.*, (1999) suggested that service quality should include compatibility of the promised service output around a typical target value determined by the customer, while dependability refers to the assurance of providing services as customers expected (Iberahim *et al.*, 2016). Actually, reliability has a significant impact on customer satisfaction through

performing the service orders right from the first time and within the promised time and also maintaining error free records. (Iberahim *et al.*, 2016; Omar *et al.*, 2015; Gagnon and Roh, 2008). Based on the above review of literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

H1: Perception of reliability positively influences customer satisfaction.

3.1.2. The relationship between assurance and customer satisfaction

Assurance can be defined as *the employees' knowledge and courtesy and the service provider's ability to inspire trust and confidence* (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2012). If trust and confidence are not conveyed properly to the customers, their assessment of that provider's service quality will be lower and their satisfaction may be affected negatively (Zeithaml, *et al.*, 1990; 2012). By communicating competencies through their personnel, service providers can help in managing customers' expectations and in turn, quality with respect to this customer service element will be high. It occurs through matching customer expectations with what service providers promised to deliver, if there are gaps, improvements should be tracked through regular surveys to determine such expectations (Zeithaml, *et al.*, 1990). Based on the above review of literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

H2: Perceptions of assurance positively influences customer satisfaction.

3.1.3. The relationship between empathy and customer satisfaction

Empathy is defined as an individualized attention the firm provides its customer (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2012) through which the customer is treated as if he is unique and special. This dimension is more applicable in industries where building relationships with customers ensures the firm's survival as in hospitality industry, opposing to "transaction marketing" (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006). Empathy may be important to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty as the service provider knows how the customer likes his /her services (Harr, 2008). Based on the above review of literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

H3: Perception of empathy positively influences customer satisfaction.

3.1.4. The relationship between responsiveness and customer satisfaction

Responsiveness refers to the speed of the service providers to respond to the customers' needs. The response requires presence of willingness and flexibility to help customers and provide prompt service (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2012; Abu Alroub, *et al.*, 2012). To be responsive, a firm has to determine how long it would take to get answers or have the

customers' problems dealt with from the customers' point of view rather than its perspective (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2012). Mariappan (2006) stated that information technology has brought serious changes in business environment, especially in the responsiveness of service delivery and creation of value added services that will bring up the level of customer satisfaction (Zhu, *et al.*, 2002). Based on the above review of literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

H4: Perception of responsiveness positively influences customer satisfaction.

3.1.5. The relationship between tangibles and customer satisfaction

Tangibility refers to the environment in which the service is delivered. It also includes any tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2012). Santos (2002) refers to tangibility as the visible facilities of a service such as the appearance of physical aspects, tools and equipment, personnel, and communication material. The importance of tangibility or creating an attractive physical environment has gained growing attention among scholars in hospitality industry; as it is a key factor for attracting and satisfying more customers (Han and Ryu, 2009). The physical environment has a significant impact on the customer perception of the overall quality of the service which in turn affects customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry (Ryu and Jang, 2008; Panda and Das, 2014). Based on the above review of literature, the following hypothesis is derived:

H5: Perception of tangibles positively influences customer satisfaction.

In conclusion, service quality is playing a critical role in the success of the Hotel Industry which cannot be denied. Identifying the specific expectations of customers, the dimensions of the service quality, and their relative importance in achieving customer satisfaction for each specific segment of hotel industry would certainly help in the challenge of improving the service quality.

3.2. The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions

Behavioral intention is a person's perceived likelihood or "subjective probability that he or she will engage in a given behavior" (Committee on Communication for Behavior Change in the 21st Century, 2002: p. 31). In business context, behavioral intention represents the repurchase/reuse intentions, word of mouth and loyalty behavior, (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996).

Several studies have used intention to return, intention to recommend to friends and relatives and intention to switch from the current service provider to measure behavioral intentions (Homburg and Giering 2001 , Oppermann, 2000; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen and Gursoy, 2001; Cai, *et al.*, 2003; Niininen *et al.*, 2004; Petrick, 2004; Burnham *et al.*, 2003; Carter *et al.*, 2014; Ting, 2014). Consequently, the relationship between customer satisfaction and each of these indicators are discussed in turn.

3.2.1. The relationship between customer satisfaction and intention to return

Chi and Qu, (2008); Chen and Chen, (2010) emphasized that perceived quality and customer satisfaction are the most frequent factors used to explain the customer's intention to revisit. Weiss (2003) and Weiss *et al.*, (2004) concluded that high customer satisfaction along with better service quality are simultaneously the most significant attributes in predicting repeat purchase behavior (intent to return). Lately, Um *et al.*, (2006) concluded that satisfaction is considered as both; a predictor of revisiting intention and a moderator between such intention and perceived attractiveness, perceived quality of service and perceived value for money. Based on the above review of literature, the following hypotheses are derived:

H6: Customer satisfaction positively influences customers' intention to return.

H7: Customer Satisfaction mediates the influence of the five dimensions of service quality on intention to return.

3.2.2. Customer satisfaction and intention to recommend

Customers who share their positive or negative feedback of their experiences, they are more likely to influence the others' purchase behavior (Susskind, 2002). Customer satisfaction is considered as a significant reason of positive word of mouth (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Swan and Oliver 1989; Zeithaml *et al.*, 1996). Satisfied customers can create a

positive impact if they recommend a certain service provider to their friends, families, and colleagues (Reichheld, 2003; Morgan and Rego, 2006; Keiningham, *et al.*, 2007). Based on the above review of literature, the following hypotheses are derived:

H8: Customer satisfaction positively influences intention to recommend.

H9: Customer satisfaction mediates the influence of the five dimensions of service quality on intention to recommend.

3.2.3. Customer satisfaction and intention to switch

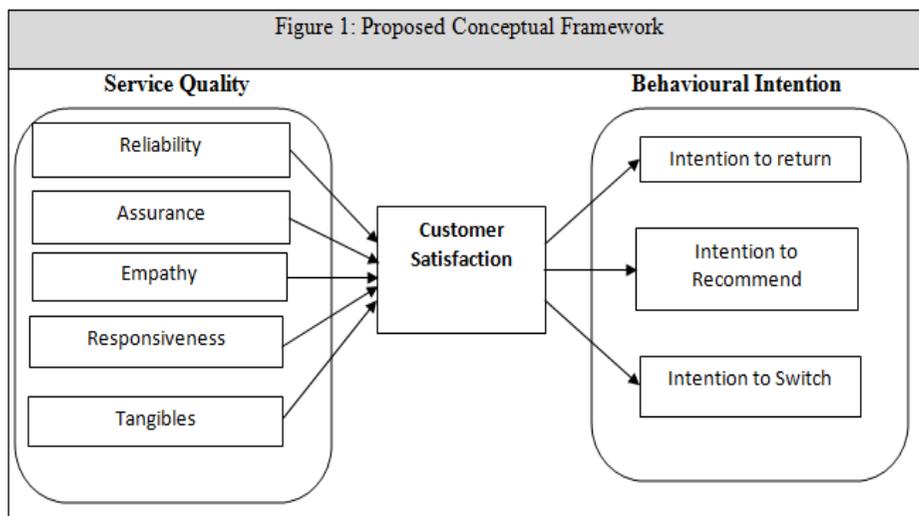
Sahi *et al.*, (2016) revealed that the core problem behind customer's switching intention is its harmful consequences represented in *switching cost*. Ting (2014) divided the Switching costs into three categories: procedural, financial and relational. Procedural switching cost involves the cost of time and efforts. Financial switching cost involves the loss of financial resources. Relational switching cost involves psychological or emotional harm caused by loss of customers (Burnham *et al.*, 2003). In addition, Wen-hua *et al.*, (2011) pointed out that service providers may reduce switching intentions through providing high quality and variety of services to increase customers' satisfaction. Based on the above review of literature, the following hypotheses are derived:

H10: Customer satisfaction positively influences intention to switch.

H11: Customer Satisfaction mediates the influence of the five dimensions of service quality on intention to switch.

4. Proposed Conceptual Framework

In accordance with the literature review, the proposed conceptual framework is developed as at figure (1) below:



Source: Adapted from Akbaba (2006)

The evidences from the literature review were the bases on which the conceptual framework is grounded. Firstly; It proposes that service quality dimensions; reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness and tangibles have a significant impact on customer satisfaction -as depicted in figure (1) - emphasizing on the hotels' capabilities in developing and deploying the available resources in a way that providing

customers with superior value. Secondly, depending on the literature, we argue that customer satisfaction is supposed to have a significant impact on each aspect of behavioral intention; intention to return, intention to recommend and intention to switch. Thirdly; the conceptual framework suggests that customer satisfaction mediates the influence of the five dimensions of service quality on the three dimensions of behavioral intention.

5. Methodology

5.1. Questionnaire design

Self-administrated questionnaire was used to collect the primary data of this study. The questionnaire was adopted from Akbaba (2006) and divided into three parts. The first part includes 29 factors which measured customer expectations and perceptions of services offered by hotels. Customers were asked to rate their responses on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). The reason for using this layout with a five-point Likert scale is to overcome confusion, length of the questionnaire, boredom stemmed from two administrations in SERVQUAL. The second part measured the overall customer satisfaction and behavior intentions of overall service quality. The third part of the questionnaire measured the customers' characteristics.

5.2. Sampling design

The sample size should be large enough in order to achieve significant statistical results in quantitative research

(Creswell and Clark, 2011). More specifically, Davies (2007) indicated that it might be between 50 and 120 or more. The sample frame for this study was the Egyptian Hotel Guide 2012 (EHA, 2013). A convenience sampling was used to target customers who stayed in the 6 out of 33 five star hotels in Greater Cairo: the Intercontinental Cairo Semiramis; Kempinski Nile Hotel; Grand Nile Tower Hotel; Cairo Marriott Hotel and Omar Khayyam Casino; Four seasons Hotel Cairo at Nile Plaza and Sofitel Cairo El Gezira. The reason for choosing these hotels is the convenience way of sampling to collect data. Also, the characteristics of these downtown hotels were similar which allowed the authors to investigate them in greater depth. Customers were approached during their dinner at the main dining restaurant of each sampled hotel. A total of 300 survey forms were filled out. Of these 300 forms, 40 were taken out before the analysis because they were not completed.

5.3. Data Analysis tools

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze demographic characteristics. Paired sample *t*-test was performed to examine the significant differences between two means of expectations and perceptions. Reliability analysis was carried out to ensure the internal consistency of the scale items. Construct validity was used through factor analysis to make sure that all of the indicators in the scale measure the same construct (Flynn *et al.*, 1995). Factor analysis was performed to explore the small dimension of the 29-attribute

scale. In addition, multiple regression analysis was carried out to identify the relative importance of the service quality factors in predicting the overall customer satisfaction.

Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was conducted to test the internal consistency of these five dimensions of service quality (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The total Cronbach's α score of these five dimensions was 0.941, with the individual alpha coefficients ranging from 0.885 to 0.935, which indicates a good internal consistency between the items within each factor and across all the factors. Hence, the self-administrated questionnaire can be considered "reliable" for analysis (Pallant, 2007).

6. Results

6.1. Demographics

As noticed from Table 2, the majority of customers (35.8%) fell into the 35-44 year age group, followed by the 25-34 year age group (26.2%). The highest proportion of the respondents was for males who accounted for (66.2%) of the sample as opposed to females (33.8%). In terms of employment status, (58.1%) of customers were self-employed, followed by (32.7%) professional people; then, (5.4%) were students and (3.8%) of customers were in "other jobs", such as "business representative, government official and retirees". Regarding education levels, the largest respondent segments had a bachelor's degree (64.2%), whereas the smallest respondent segments had a college degree (12.7). With regards to the

respondents' frequency of stay at hotels, most customers stayed at hotels once a year (80.4%).

Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-24	12	4.6
	25-34	68	26.2
	35-44	93	35.8
	45-54	60	23.1
	55-64	24	9.2
	65 or above	3	1.2
Gender	Male	172	66.2
	Female	88	33.8
Marital Status	Single	68	26.2
	Married	128	49.2
	Other	64	24.6
Occupation	Professional	85	32.7
	Student	14	5.4
	Self-employed	151	58.1
	Other	10	3.8
Education	High School	13	5.0
	College degree	33	12.7
	Bachelor's degree	167	64.2
	Other	47	18.1
Frequency of	Once a year	209	80.4

stay at Hotels	Twice a year	45	17.3
	Five times or more	6	2.3

6.2. Factor analysis

Factor analysis was performed to reduce the service quality attributes from 29 to 21 interpretable set of factors. The principal component analysis and Varimax rotation were used to identify the underlying structure of the correlated dimensions that would be suitable for further examination (Hair *et al.*, 2010). In this study, a variable with factor loading greater than 0.4 and with eigenvalue equal to or greater than one was selected for interpretation and considered significant (see Table 3).

Five major dimensions of service quality were extracted and named as follows: “tangibles”, “reliability”, “empathy”, “assurance” and “responsiveness”. Generally, the overall significance of the correlation matrix was 0.000 with Bartlett’s test of sphericity value of 4595.7, which indicated that the data matrix had sufficient correlation to the factor analysis.

Based on the results of factor analysis, factor one (assurance) was the most important factor for customers. It had 4 significant factor loadings which explained 40.82% of the total variance in the data, with an eigenvalue of 12.62. However, responsiveness was the least important factor from customers’ viewpoints, which explained 4.69% of the total variance and had 3 significant factor loadings.

Table 3: Results of factor analysis (n=260)						
Statement	Factor loading	Communalities	Reli. coeff.	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance %	Factor
The hotel keeps accurate guest records	0.812	0.760	0.887	12.62	40.823	Assurance
The hotel operating hours are convenient to all their guests.	0.690	0.507	0.892			
The hotel provides its guests a safe place.	0.601	0.519	0.890			
Employees have in-depth occupational knowledge.	0.450	0.475	0.886			
Employees are always willing to serve customers	0.892	0.757	0.895	3.01	14.952	Reliability
The hotel provides the services as they were promised	0.789	0.701	0.892			
Hotel performs services right the first time	0.721	0.592	0.887			
Employees give guests individualized attention that makes them feel special	0.704	0.615	0.895			
Employees are always available when needed	0.652	0.483	0.888	1.697	5.743	Empathy
The hotel provides consistent services.	0.735	0.618	0.894			
The hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands	0.598	0.455	0.896			
Employees always treat guests in a friendly manner	0.530	0.490	0.890			
Employees of the hotel understand the specific needs of guests	0.496	0.454	0.885	1.550	5.276	Tangibles
The service units of the hotel have adequate capacity.	0.809	0.453	0.891			
The atmosphere and equipment are comfortable.	0.718	0.596	0.885			
The hotel has modern looking equipment	0.620	0.467	0.889			
The equipment of the hotel works properly	0.562	0.453	0.886			
Food and beverages served are hygienic	0.509	0.691	0.884	1.814	4.691	Responsiveness
It is easy to access to the hotel	0.856	0.790	0.895			
Getting information about the facilities and services of the hotel is easy.	0.771	0.781	0.897			
The hotel resolves guest complaints and compensate for the inconveniences guests go through	0.463	0.523	0.856			

6.3. Paired- sample t test

A paired-sample t-test was used to compare the mean score of customer expectations versus customer perceptions. As illustrated in table (4), paired sample *t*-test showed a significant difference of 20 out of 21 service quality attributes between expectations and perceptions means ($t < 0.01$). The biggest gaps between customer expectations and their perceptions were for three factors: ‘it is easy to access to the hotel’ (-3.85); ‘the hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands’ (-2.31); and ‘the hotel performs the services right at the first time’ (-2.15).

However, the smallest gaps were for: ‘The equipment of the hotel works properly without causing breakdowns’ (-0.70); ‘Employees give guests individualized attention that makes them feel special’ (-0.55) and ‘the hotel provides its guests a safe place’ (-0.21).

Table 4: Results of paired-sample t test					
Dimensions	Expectations Mean	Perceptions Mean	Mean Difference	t-value	P-value
Tangibles					
The equipment of the hotel works properly without causing breakdowns	2.52	1.82	-0.70	2.695	.059
The atmosphere and equipment are comfortable.	3.82	2.45	-1.37	15.881	.442
The hotel has modern looking equipment	3.57	2.68	-0.89	-11.563	.008
Food and beverages served are hygienic	4.34	2.51	-1.83	-14.421	.000
The service units of the hotel have adequate capacity.	4.26	3.03	-1.23	-13.059	.000
Reliability					
The hotel provides the services as they were promised	4.06	2.37	-1.69	1.895	.000
Employees are always willing to serve customers	2.65	2.09	-0.56	-10.445	.000
Employees are always available when needed	4.43	3.35	-1.08	-11.22	.000
The hotel performs the services right at the first time	4.57	2.42	-2.15	-5.694	.000
The hotel provides consistent services.	4.23	3.20	-1.03	-18.162	.000
Empathy					
Employees give guests individualized attention that makes them feel special	3.42	2.87	-0.55	-13.930	.000
The hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands	4.74	2.34	-2.31	-15.316	.000
Employees always treat guests in a friendly manner	4.37	3.06	-1.31	-3.804	.017
Employees of the hotel understand the specific needs of guests	3.75	2.26	-1.49	-18.673	.000
Assurance					
The hotel keeps accurate records	4.63	3.34	-1.29	-11.392	.000
The hotel and its facilities have operating hours convenient to all their guests.	3.42	1.70	-1.63	-13.752	.000
The hotel provides its guests a safe place.	2.22	2.01	-0.21	-13.116	.000
Employees have in-depth occupational knowledge.	4.63	3.52	-1.11	-7.723	.000
Responsiveness					
It is easy to access to the hotel	4.28	0.43	-3.85	-2.422	.000
Getting information about the facilities and services of the hotel is easy.	4.08	2.28	-1.26	-7.1770	.000
The hotel resolves guest complaints and compensate for the inconveniences guests go through	3.08	1.95	-1.13	-13.080	.000

6.4. Multiple regression analysis

The multiple regression analysis was performed to test the relationship between service quality factors (independent variables) and behavioral intentions (dependent variables). The results of multiple regression analysis indicated that the coefficient of determination (R^2) is 0.56, estimated that 56% of the variation of overall customers satisfaction is explained by the service quality factors (see Table 5). The F ratio measures whether the findings of the regression model have been occurred by chance. The F ratio has a value of 34.298 while significance is 0.000, showing that the findings of equation would hardly occurred by chance and the regression model was meaningful explaining the data. In addition, the multiple regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis of the current study.

Table 5: The relationship between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction			
Variables	Dependent		P-value
	Customer Satisfaction		
Independents	β	t	
Assurance	.33	4.33	.000*
Reliability	.40	5.91	.005*
Empathy	.21	3.49	.001*
Tangibles	.15	2.85	.080*
Responsiveness	.12	1.76	.120*
F Change	38.19		
R ²	0.56		
P value	.000		

Note: * $p < 0.05$

As shown in table (5), there is a statistical significant relationship between three dependent variables and customer satisfaction ($P=0.000$). Specifically, perceptions of reliability was the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction ($\beta=.40$; $t=5.91$), compared to perception of empathy ($\beta=.21$; $t=3.49$).

This finding indicates that customer perceptions of assurance will lead to increase their satisfaction. In addition, customer perceptions of tangibles ($\beta=.15$; $t=2.85$) and responsiveness ($\beta=.12$; $t=1.76$) were not significant factors in predicting customer satisfaction. Based on these findings, *H1*, *H2* and *H3* were accepted, whereas *H4* and *H5* were rejected.

Table 6: The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions

Variables	Dependents					
	Intention to return		Intention to recommend		Intention to switch	
Independent	β	t	β	t	β	t
Customer Satisfaction	.51	15.13*	.83	19.05*	.32	7.15*
P value	.000		.040		.000	
R ²	.42		.72		.25	
F Ratio	256.9		480.5		66.2	

Note: * $p < 0.05$

As shown in table (6), customer satisfaction is significantly predicting the three dependent variables of this study. Customer satisfaction had the strongest influence on

intention to recommend ($\beta=.83$; $t=19.05$), while it had the weakest influence on intention to switch ($\beta=.32$; $t=7.15$). The findings also showed a statically significant relationship between independent variables and customer satisfaction as a mediator was created ($R^2=.56$, $P=0.000$) (see table 7). A significant relationship was also built between independent and dependent variables – intention to return ($R^2=.36$, $P=0.050$); intention to recommend ($R^2=.39$, $P=0.000$) and intention to switch ($R^2=.22$, $P=0.000$). Based on these findings, *H6*, *H7* and *H8* were accepted.

Furthermore, customer satisfaction (the mediating variable) was added into the three relationship models between independent and dependent variables. A significant relationship will disappear if the customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between independent variables and each dependent variable, whereas when the significance is reduced, customer satisfaction will partially mediate the aforementioned relationship.

Variables	Mediating		Dependents					
	Customer Satisfaction		Intention to return		Intention to recommend		Intention to switch	
Independents	β	t	β	t	β	t	β	t
Assurance	.40	5.91*	.28	3.84	.29	3.27*	.24	3.75*
Reliability	.38	4.33*	.32	5.20*	.33	4.05*	.41	6.39*
Empathy	.23	3.49	.24	3.37*	.20	2.84	.10	1.85
Tangibles	.17	2.85	.12	2.58*	.25	3.22	.16	2.36*
Responsiveness	.12	1.76	-.15	-2.13	.09	1.90*	.21	3.78
P value	.000		.050		.000		.000	
R ²	0.56		.36		.39		.22	
F ratio	38.19		20.64		31.55		14.71	

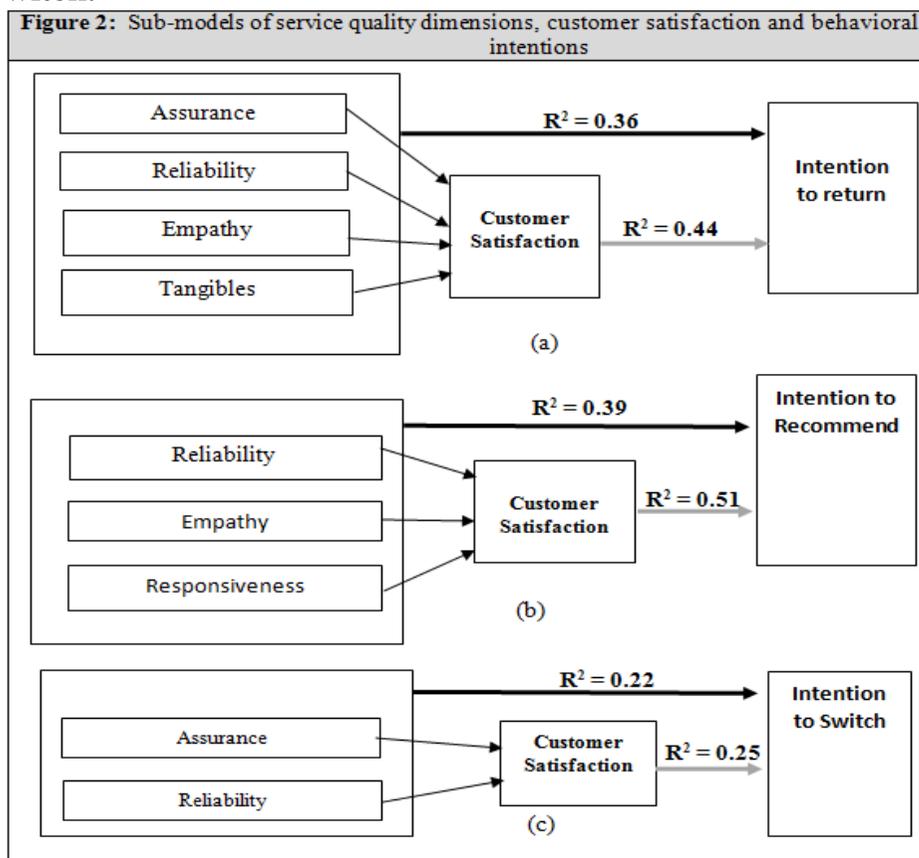
Note: * $p < 0.05$

Regarding the significance of each independent variable, table (7) indicates that reliability and empathy are the only two dimensions of service quality remained significant in predicting all dependent variables. It is also noticed that the β and t values of these dimensions were decreased compared to those values in table (6). This finding indicates customer satisfaction partially mediated the relationship between these two dimensions and dependent variables. In addition, the relationship between empathy and the three dependent variables become significant after including the customer satisfaction in the regression model. In contrast, a decrease β and t values showed that customer satisfaction partially mediated these relationships. In addition, the findings indicated that assurance did not predict intention to recommend before and after adding the customer satisfaction in the model as there is no significant relationship. The results also showed tangibles predicts only intention to return after adding customer satisfaction in the model, whereas, β and t values were decreased showing customer satisfaction partially mediated this relationship. However, table (6) shows that tangibles dimension without customer satisfaction in the model significantly predicted intention to recommend and intention to switch, indicating that customer satisfaction is fully mediated these relationships. In addition, responsiveness predicts customers' intention to recommend before and after involving customer satisfaction in the model. However, the relationships between responsiveness and intention to return as well as intention to recommend were remained insignificant; showing that responsiveness with or

without customer satisfaction did not predict intention to return and intention to switch.

These findings result in drawing the three sub-models of service quality dimensions, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions (see figure 2 and table 8). The findings indicated that after customer satisfaction had included in the model, the R^2 value was enhanced for the three models: intention to return, recommend and switch. R^2 value for model 1 increased from .36 to .44, .39 to .51 for model 2 and .22 to .25 for model 3. Also, as illustrated, the findings showed that when customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between service quality dimensions and the behavioral intention, the independent variables explained more variances in the dependent variables. Accordingly, H9, H10 and H11 are accepted. Moreover, as illustrated in figure (2) and according to the R^2 value, the model labelled (b) is the best-fit model explains customer satisfaction in the current study followed by (a) and (c). The R^2 values for these models improved after including customer satisfaction in the model of relationships between independent and dependent variables. For example, independent variables through customer satisfaction explained a total of (51%) variance in customer intention to recommend followed by intention to return (44%) and intention to switch (25%). This finding means that independent variables are better predicted dependent variables through customer satisfaction. In addition, Figure (2) indicates that the weakest model was involved the relationship between the independent variables and intention to switch. There are other factors which may mediate

the relationship between independent variables, customer satisfaction and intention to switch, such as switching costs (Bansal and Taylor, 1999). Thus, further research is needed to examine such relationships to see whether customer satisfaction model will be improved with the existence of intention to switch.



Note: For R^2 values, *black path* (direct path) checks the relationship between independent and dependent variables. *Grey path* (indirect path) checks the relationship between independent and dependent variables through mediator.

Table 8: The effect of Customer satisfaction as a mediator						
Variables	Dependents					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Intention to return		Intention to recommend		Intention to switch	
Independents	β	t	β	t	β	t
Assurance	.13	1.71*	.25	2.59	.15	2.17*
Reliability	.16	3.08*	.31	3.97*	.23	3.62*
Empathy	.09	1.69*	.05	.63*	.02	.77
Tangibles	.17	2.34*	.21	2.58	.10	1.45
Responsiveness	-.20	-1.10	.06	1.09*	.14	2.11
Customer Satisfaction	.38	6.21*	.54	7.81*	.20	4.88*
P value	.000		.000		.000	
R ²	0.44		.51		.25	
F Ratio	24.39		37.61		14.72	

Note: * p < 0.05

7. Discussion

The findings of factor analysis suggested five main dimensions of service quality in business hotels which are: assurance, reliability, empathy, tangibles and responsiveness. This study used the five service quality dimensions of Akbaba (2006). However, Akbaba's study was conducted in one business hotel in Turkey. The primary date of this study was collected from six business hotels in the Greater Cairo in Egypt. Although the findings of factors analysis showed that 21 factors were valid for further analysis compared to 23 factors in the Akbaba's study. Eight factors were eliminated from the scale because they had a cross-loading and these factors are: 'materials associated with the services are adequate'; 'employees provide prompt service'; 'employees have knowledge to provide information to guests in areas they would

require'; 'the hotel provides the services at the time it promises to do so'; 'the hotel has visually appealing buildings and facilities'; 'employees of the hotel appear neat and tidy'; 'employees instill confidence in guests' and 'the hotel is also convenient for disabled guests'.

In addition, the findings indicated that the business guests had the highest importance for the dimension of 'assurance', 'reliability', 'empathy', 'tangibles' and 'responsiveness'. However, the findings of Akbaba's study (2006) found the business travelers had the highest expectations towards: 'responsiveness', 'assurance', 'tangibles', 'reliability', and 'empathy'. This finding may be because the culture difference between Turkey and Egypt and the guests who visit Egypt may have different expectations than those who visit Turkey.

In the current study, the reliability score of service quality dimensions has also increased compared to Akbaba's study (2006). In the present study, the total α value of the five major service quality dimensions is 0.941, while total $\alpha = 0.931$ in Akbaba's study (2006). In addition, the findings of paired sample t test showed that customer perceptions of quality of service provided were lower than their expectations, indicating that quality of service provided by business hotels did not meet customer expectations. The biggest gap between customer expectations and their perceptions was: 'it is easy to access to the hotel' (-3.85). However, the smallest gap was for: 'the hotel provides its guests a safe place' (-0.21). The reason behind this gap may be because the majority of business hotels

in Cairo do not have common facilities and services for handicapped people. Also, for security reasons, some business hotels have more than one point of customer inspections to allow him/her to enter the hotel especially if s/he arrives to the hotel in a private transportation.

This study is the first attempt to use the model of customer satisfaction as mediator between service quality dimensions and behavioral intentions. Also, the study failed to prove that tangibles and responsiveness were antecedents of customer satisfaction. The reason behind such finding may be the information technology which had brought serious changes in business environment, especially in the creation of value-added services that brought up the level of customers' satisfaction (Zhu *et al.*, 2002; Mariappan, 2006). Although Panda and Das (2014) found the physical environment significantly affected customer perceptions of service quality, they did not prove if the tangibles affect customer satisfaction or not. However Ekinci *et al.*, (2008) indicated that physical environment was positively related to customer satisfaction.

The findings of this study also showed that reliability, assurance, empathy were antecedents of customer satisfaction. Ekinci *et al.*, (2008) found that customers used to evaluate service by using elements of staff behavior and such elements have been recognized as a predictor of customer satisfaction. For example, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) pointed out that responsiveness influenced customer satisfaction, whereas Lee *et al.*, (2005) found that customer satisfaction is significantly

influenced by empathy. Moreover, this study includes the consequences of customer satisfaction in terms of; intention to return, intention to recommend and intention to switch as many studies indicated that customer satisfaction positively influences intention to return (Shanka and Taylor, 2003; O'Neill *et al.*, 2006; Chen and Chen, 2010); intention to recommend (De Matos and Rossi 2008; Keiningham *et al.*, 2007); and intention to switch (Carter *et al.* , 2014; Sahi *et al.*, 2016).

The findings also indicated that customer satisfaction mediated the relationships between service quality dimensions and behavioral intentions. As shown in Table 6, tangibles and responsiveness did not impact customer satisfaction. Hence, the outcomes of this study support 9 out of 11 hypotheses. Figure 1 suggests that customer satisfaction route starts with achieving customers' assurance, perceptions towards reliability, empathy and perceptions of tangibles which in turn lead positive customer behavioral intentions. In this study, it can be also noticed that reliability is involved in the three models of customer satisfaction, showing the effective role of reliability in predicting customer satisfaction, intention to return, intention to switch. Although customer perceptions of assurance were involved in the models of intention to return and intention to switch, it was not involved in the model predicting intention to recommend. Perception of responsiveness was only involved in the model of intention to recommend.

Moreover, the findings are compared with other studies of customer satisfaction and found that customer satisfaction

models may result in customer intention to return, intention to recommend and intention to switch. No single study has examined the relationship between each dimension of service quality and behavioral intentions in hotels as in this study. The models of this study merge all the variables that were used separately in previous studies of service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

The findings of this study concluded that when customers were satisfied with a hotel, they had a higher intention to recommend or revisit this hotel and they were not likely to switch to other hotels.

8. Conclusion

The current study investigated the customer satisfaction as a mediator between service quality dimensions and behavioral intentions in the Egyptian Hotel Industry. This study proved that assurance, reliability, empathy were predictors for customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction also had the strongest influence on intention to return, intention to recommend and prevent customer to switch from a hotel to another.

These findings can encourage marketers' attempts to raise customer satisfaction with confidence for improving behavioral intentions. In comparison to previous studies that developed customers' satisfaction model, it seems that the current study is the first study which develops customers' satisfaction model (see figure 1) in the Egyptian Hotel Industry despite the growing number of researches which examined the customer

satisfaction from different aspects. In addition, this study provides insights for hotel managers into that dimensions of service quality that are important in impacting customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

Firstly, reliability is important factor in influencing customers to return to a hotel or recommend it to a friend or relative and prevent them to switch. Secondly, the findings of this study indicated that assurance was critical factor for preventing customers' switching. Thus, hotel management should provide a reliable service and keep more accurate information in order to create loyal customers' base instead of spending a lot of money on advertising campaigns to attract new customers.

Thirdly, empathy contributed significantly in better customer satisfaction and customers' intention to return and recommend. Therefore, hotel management should provide their staff with more effective training techniques in determining how they can deliver more personalized services to their guests that make them feel special. In addition, the hotel managers should provide them with evermore relevant and responsive services according to their demands.

Fourthly, tangibles impact significantly on customers' intention to return. Therefore, hotel managers should customize several aspects in hotels to fulfill the desire of target markets of the physical environment (e.g. the hotel restaurant color, its design, music) which can be designed to match customers' nationality, age, education level and income. Better physical

environment for the dining experience may results in building a strong relationship between customers and hotels.

Finally, responsiveness contributes directly to customers' intention to recommend a hotel to a friend or relatives. Consequently, hotel managers have to resolve the guests' complaints and compensate for the in responsiveness guests go through. Also, hotel manager should provide customers with more clear and simple maps of the hotel accessibility as well providing them with an integrated database for facilities and services available in the hotel.

Also, the findings of this study indicated that the performance of quality (i.e. reliability, assurance, empathy) in the sampled hotels was rationally good because of many factors. These factors involved, but not limited to the following: 'the hotel performs the services right at the first time'; 'the hotel provides flexibility in services according to guest demands' and 'it is easy to access to the hotel'.

However, not all hospitality industry operations benefit customers because of many weaknesses such as the quality of the staff behavior which is considered as the strongest negative influence on customer satisfaction. In addition, it is important to utilize the resources in more effective manner to recreate services' attributes that significantly affect customer satisfaction and in turn leads to positive behavioral intentions.

Based on the previous discussion, this study proposes the most important dimensions of service quality in the hotels which are: 'assurance'; 'reliability' and 'empathy '. These

dimensions have different weights of importance in relation to customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

9. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

In this study, the authors only sampled from six hotels in Greater Cairo in Egypt. Hence, to generalize the findings of this study, other studies may include several five star hotels across Egypt. Since the Middle East countries have similar culture, future research may apply the findings of the study in one of these countries and changes may be traced.

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