

Effects of service quality on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty: A case of 4- and 5-star hotels in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to define and measure the effects of service quality on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty of four and five star hotels in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Methodology: This study has used qualitative and quantitative researches: (i) qualitative research carried out through focus group discussions with 10 customers, and (ii) quantitative research conducted through direct interviews with 322 customers in Ho Chi Minh city (Viet Nam).

Result and conclusion: The results show that: (i) customers' loyalty is affected by four dimensions of service quality (reliability, responsiveness, website utility, and tangibles) and customer satisfaction; and (ii) customer satisfaction is affected by five dimensions of service quality (reliability, responsiveness, website utility, tangibles, and sympathy). However, the research subject has certain limitations: (i) due to limited resources in conducting research, the sample size consisted of 322 customers, (ii) This study conducted the sampling technique of using direct interview methods from respondents using service at 4- and 5-star hotels in HCM city, Viet Nam.

JEL Classifications: M10, M31

Keywords: Service quality, loyalty, 4- and 5-star hotels, HCMC, SEM

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1. Introduction

After the economic reform, the Vietnamese economy witnessed changes in its structure, especially the shift of its emphasis from agricultural to industrial and service sectors. Share of the service sector increased remarkably and part of tourism in particular represented a noticeable weight and showed an upward tendency when the economy integrated more fully into the world economy. After Vietnam's accession to the WTO, the tourism industry was treated as a key one that deserves better investment. Realities show that Vietnam has potentials for tourism (beautiful landscapes, a long coastline with many nice beaches, and well-preserved national parks and tourist attractions, etc.) and enjoys a politico-economic life considered as stable by many countries. The fact that Vietnam has become a popular destination for tourists from home and abroad as well is predictable.

In recent years, the number of international visitors was on the increase, domestic tourists tended to prefer local tours to foreign ones, and general living standard of the Vietnamese population of some 90 million was improved, which helped increase flows of tourists and develop this industry.

HCMC, as usual, enjoys the role as the most popular destination (it attracts 58% of foreign visitors and 34% of local tourists). In 2016, some 5.2 million foreign tourists and 21.8 million local ones arrived at this city (HCMC Tourism Service, 2017). The market for foreign and local tourists, however, in both long and medium terms did not show a clear tendency and structure of visitors to hotels and resorts changed unpredictably. Generally, tourists displayed changes in comparison with visitors in previous years: They are more demanding and pay more attention to values and service quality; they are also better informed, especially on the threshold of the fourth industrial revolution. What could hotel managers do to cope with those changes? There are many answers to this question but most of hotel managers haven't examined seriously what tourists need and want to persuade them to come back to their hotels. In the new situation at present, hotel personnel should not only make visitors feel satisfied but also kindle their loyalty to the hotel. This means that hotel managers should identify factors affecting tourists' loyalty. To help with this effort, this paper will concentrate on: (i) theoretical bases about customers' loyalty; (ii) a quantitative model of loyalty; and (iii) policy implications.

2. Literature review

According to Oliver (1993); Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001), customers' loyalty reflects their tendency to buy and use goods/services of certain brands in a set of competing brand names available in the market and repeat this behavior; show attitudes or behavior attaching to suppliers of such goods and services.

Kabiraj & Shanmugan (2011), identify customers' loyalty under two aspects. The first approach is based on customers' behavior and examines the loyalty by repetitive purchase and frequent use of a good or service. In this approach, customers' loyalty is their commitment to buy or use a good or service of certain brand name in the future although situational influences and impacts of market may cause changes in their behavior. The second approach is based on customers' attitude and tends to emphasize intentions of customers to consume certain goods or services.

Rossiter & Percy (1987) stress that customers' loyalty shows itself in sympathetic attitude toward the goods/services and tendency to use such goods/service over time.

According to Gronroos (1984); and Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry (1985), service quality is considered as an evaluation performed by customers when they compare expected service quality and experienced one as a gap between their expectation and perception when they use the service.

Gronroos (1984) says that service quality is measured with three components: technical quality, functional quality and image, while Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) maintain that the service quality is measured through five dimensions presented in their SERVQUAL model: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, and empathy.

With the industrial revolution 4.0 as a background, Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue (2002) argue that website usefulness (estimated through information quality, functional fit-to-task, interactivity, trust, and response time) is also part of the service quality. Dabholkar, Shepherd, & Thorpe (2000) consider the service quality as being affected by four factors: reliability, personal attention, comfort, and features of goods/services; and this service quality will affect customers' satisfaction and loyalty to offered goods/services as well.

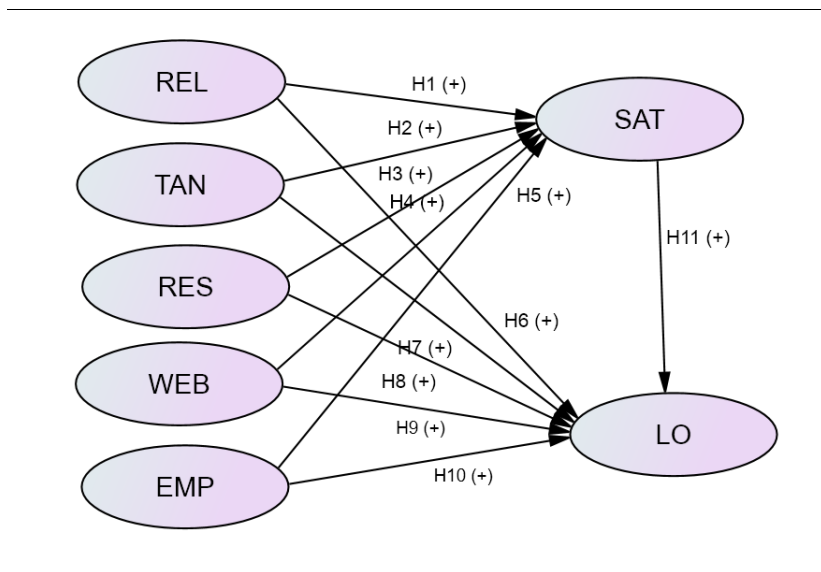
According to Oliver (1990), Cronin & Taylor (1992), Tribe & Snaith (1998), and Baker & Crompton (2000), the service quality is the factor that affect directly and finally the customers' satisfaction. When the service quality is considered as good customers will experience satisfaction (Kim et al., 2005; Ho et al., 2006; Nadiri et al., 2008; Chen & Yeung, 2008; Pham & Kullada, 2009). In addition, researches by Cronin & Taylor (1992); Zeithaml et al. (1996), Pham & Kullada (2009); Baker & Crompton (2000); Xiangyu & Jarinto (2012), Mai Ngoc Khuong et al. (2015), and Tefera & Govender (2016) show that customers, when they feel satisfied with services offered by hotels they stayed, will develop some loyalty to those service providers.

The service quality is also considered by many researchers as a determinant of customers' loyalty (Monal & Girish, 2012). Researches by Rousan et al. (2010), Xiangyu & Jarinto (2012), Galib (2013), Kofi et al. (2013), Mai Ngoc Khuong et al. (2015), Tefera & Govender (2016) show that service quality does affect customers' loyalty when they use services offered by hotels.

3. Proposed research model

Having examined previous researches and realities in HCMC, authors identified following dimensions of service quality that affect the customers' loyalty:

FIGURE 1. MODEL AND HYPOTHESES



H₁: Reliability affects customers' satisfaction (expected sign +)

H₂: Tangibles affect customers' satisfaction (expected sign +)

H₃: Responsiveness affects customers' satisfaction (expected sign +)

H₄: Website usefulness affects customers' satisfaction (expected sign +)

H₅: Empathy affects customers' satisfaction (expected sign +)

H₆: Reliability affects loyalty (expected sign +)

H₇: Tangibles affect loyalty (expected sign +)

H₈: Responsiveness affects loyalty (expected sign +)

H₉: Website usefulness affects loyalty (expected sign +)

H₁₀: Empathy affects loyalty (expected sign +)

H₁₁: Satisfaction affects loyalty (expected sign +)

The model has seven scales with 32 observed variables (measured with a 5-level Likert scale varying from 1 (Extremely poor) to 5 (extremely good)). The service quality includes five scales and 24 observed variables while satisfaction and loyalty have four ones each.

TABLE 1. DIMENSIONS OF AND SCALES

No	SCALES AND DIMENSIONS	SYMBOL
<i>I. TANGIBLE</i>		<i>TAN</i>
1	Hotel with modern facilities	TAN1
2	Neat offices and front desks suggesting reliability to customers	TAN2
3	Hotel personnel equipped with neat and good-looking uniforms	TAN3
4	Hotel services always meet requirements	TAN4
<i>II. RELIABILITY</i>		<i>REL</i>
1	All promises offered by the hotel (a customer service, after-sales services, etc.) are delivered at a preset time	REL1
2	All customers' complaints about hotel services are dealt with properly and timely.	REL2
3	Quality of services provided by the hotel is always stable and reliable	REL3
4	Services are delivered exactly at time when customers need them.	REL4
5	Customers are informed of time when services are provided.	REL5
<i>III. RESPONSIVENESS</i>		<i>RES</i>
1	Hotel personnel deal quickly with demands from customers, such as changes in information on invoices or Internet services, etc.	RES1
2	Hotel personnel are always present when customers need.	RES2
3	Hotel personnel are never too busy to meet customers' requirements	RES3
<i>4. CUSTOMERS CAN ALWAYS GET HELP FROM HOTEL PERSONNEL</i>		RES4
<i>IV. WEBSITE USEFULNESS</i>		<i>WEB</i>
1	The website provides all information relating to hotel services.	WEB1
2	The website meets all customers' demands for hotel services.	WEB2
3	Time for dealing with information and meeting customers' requirements is short	WEB3
4	All transactions and personal information of customers through the website are properly protected.	WEB4
<i>V. EMPATHY</i>		<i>EMP</i>
1	Hotel personnel show a full care for every customer.	EMP1
2	Hotel personnel show care for all customers.	EMP2
3	Hotel personnel understand customers' particular needs.	EMP3
4	Hotel personnel pay full attention to what you or companies care most.	EMP4
5	Hotel personnel always find convenient time for meeting	EMP5

TABLE 1. DIMENSIONS OF AND SCALES

No	SCALES AND DIMENSIONS	SYMBOL
	customers' demands.	
	<i>VI. SATISFACTION</i>	<i>SAT</i>
1	I feel satisfied when using services at Hotel X.	SAT1
2	I feel satisfied with management skills and service quality of Hotel X.	SAT2
3	I feel satisfied with attitude and job done by personnel of Hotel X.	SAT3
4	I feel satisfied with management process and check in/check out procedure of Hotel X.	SAT4
	<i>VII. LOYALTY</i>	<i>LO</i>
1	I always think of Hotel X when necessary.	LO1
2	I will not use services from other hotels if Hotel X can provide them.	LO2
3	I will use again services offered by Hotel X.	LO3
4	I will recommend these services to other users.	LO4

Data used for this study are collected by direct interviews with 322 users of services from 4- and 5- star hotels in HCMC in the period from May to September 2017 by employing the random sampling and detailed questionnaire to test the model and hypotheses.

Due to the fact that the theoretical model includes a set of intertwined relations, the Structural Equation Model (SEM) is used to test the aforementioned hypotheses (Lorence & Mortimer, 1985; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Analysis of the model includes the following stages: (i) Cronbach test for reliability of the scale; (ii) Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA); (iii) Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA); and (iv) SEM.

4. Results of analysis of reliability

The results presented in Table 2 show that all observed variables satisfy requirements of the analysis of scale reliability through Cronbach's coefficient (Cronbach > 0.6 and item-total correlation > 0.3, Nunnally & Burnstein, 1994).

TABLE 2. RESULTS OF RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

CONCEPT	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
<i>TANGIBLES TAN</i>	
TAN1: The hotel has modern facilities	0.793
TAN2: Neat offices and front desks suggesting reliability to customers	
TAN3: Hotel personnel equipped with neat and good-looking uniforms	
TAN4: Hotel services always meet requirements	
<i>RELIABILITY REL</i>	
REL1: All promises offered by the hotel (a customer service, after-sales services, etc.) are delivered at a preset time	0.866
REL2: All customers' complaints about hotel services are dealt with properly and timely.	
REL3: Quality of services provided by the hotel is always stable and reliable	

TABLE 2. RESULTS OF RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

CONCEPT	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
REL4: Services are delivered exactly at time when customers need them.	
REL5: Customers are informed of time when services are provided.	
<i>RESPONSIVENESS RES</i>	
RES1: Hotel personnel deal quickly with demands from customers, such as changes in information on invoices or Internet services, etc.	0.840
RES2: Hotel personnel are always present when customers need.	
RES3: Hotel personnel are never too busy to meet customers' requirements	
RES4: Customers can always get help from hotel personnel	
<i>WEBSITE USEFULNESS WEB</i>	
WEB1: The website provides all information relating to hotel services.	0.838
WEB2: The website meets all customers' demands for hotel services.	
WEB3: Time for dealing with information and meeting customers' requirements is short.	
WEB4: All transactions and personal information of customers through the website are properly protected.	
<i>EMPATHY EMP</i>	
EMP1: Hotel personnel show a full care for every customer.	0.831
EMP2: Hotel personnel show care for all customers.	
EMP3: Hotel personnel understand customers' particular needs.	
EMP4: Hotel personnel pay full attention to what you or companies care most.	
EMP5: Hotel personnel always find convenient time for meeting customers' demands.	
<i>SATISFACTION SAT</i>	
SAT1: I feel satisfied when using services at Hotel X.	0.846
SAT2: I feel satisfied with management skills and service quality of Hotel X.	
SAT3: I feel satisfied with attitude and job done by personnel of Hotel X.	
SAT4: I feel satisfied with management process and check in/check out procedure of Hotel X.	
<i>LOYALTY LO</i>	
LO1: I always think of Hotel X when necessary.	0.871
LO2: I will not use services from other hotels if Hotel X can provide them.	
LO3: I will use again services offered by Hotel X.	
LO4: I will recommend these services to other users.	

Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

5. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Results presented in Tables 3 and 4 show that all variables meet requirement for values. Namely, factors affecting the customers' loyalty are extracted to six factors corresponding to measured variables of six concepts with a cumulative of variance of 65.828% at an Eigenvalue of 2.422; EFA of loyalty is turned into one factor with an average variance extracted of 72.139 at an Eigenvalue of 2.866. EFA results are clarified using the Varimax rotation.

TABLE 3. RESULTS OF EFA OF FACTORS AFFECTING CUSTOMERS' LOYALTY

Observed variables	Factors					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
REL3	.815					
REL2	.806					
REL5	.795					
REL1	.759					
REL4	.730					
EMP5		.810				
EMP4		.776				
EMP1		.740				
EMP2		.725				
EMP3		.708				
RES3			.835			
RES4			.802			
RES1			.794			
RES2			.765			
WEB2				.808		
WEB3				.800		
WEB4				.787		
WEB1				.748		
TAN1					.816	
TAN2					.799	
TAN4					.785	
TAN3					.749	
SAT2						.726
SAT3						.707
SAT1						.704
SAT4						.666
Eigenvalue	3.409	3.123	2.809	2.760	2.725	2.427
% of variance	13.112	12.013	10.804	10.615	10.481	9.334
Cumulative %	13.112	25.124	35.929	46.543	57.024	65.358
KMO			0.837			
Bartlett's Test	Chi square				3893.428	
	df				352	
	Sig.				0.000	

TABLE 4. RESULTS OF EFA OF LOYALTY

OBSERVED VARIABLES	FACTOR	
	1	
LO2		0.874
LO4		0.850
LO3		0.840
LO1		0.833
Eigenvalue		2.886
% of variance		72.139
KMO		0.830
Bartlett's Test	Chi square	616.375
	Df	6
	Sig.	0.000

Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

6. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

6.1. Results of tests for composite reliability and variance extracted of research concepts

Results presented in Table 5 show that satisfy requirements for composite reliability and variance extracted.

TABLE 5. RESULTS OF TESTS FOR COMPOSITE RELIABILITY AND VARIANCE EXTRACTED OF RESEARCH CONCEPTS

Concept	Symbol	Number of obs. variables	Composite reliability	Variance extracted
Reliability	REL	5	0.867	0.566
Empathy	EMP	5	0.855	0.501
Website usefulness	WEB	4	0.840	0.568
Responsiveness	RES	4	0.840	0.569
Tangibles	TAN	4	0.826	0.545
Loyalty	LO	4	0.872	0.630
Satisfaction	SAT	4	0.849	0.588

Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

6.2. Results of test for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and unidimensionality of research concepts

Results presented in Figure 2 and Table 6 show that some values of the model are not appropriate, such as $\chi^2 = 552.274$, $df = 384$, $C_{min}/df = 1.438$, and $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ (< 0.05), because of the size of research sample but other fit indices, such as $TLI = 0.959$, $CFI = 0.963$ and $RMSEA = 0.037$ are acceptable. This means that the saturated model is consistent with data from the market. Additionally, correlation coefficients along with standard deviation show that they are all different from 1 (in other words, all research concepts have discriminant validity), errors of measured variables do not correlate with one another, and all weights (λ_i) are greater than 0.5 and statistically significant. Thus, all observed variables have convergent validity, discriminant validity, and unidimensionality.

TABLE 6. RESULTS OF TEST FOR DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY OF RESEARCH CONCEPTS

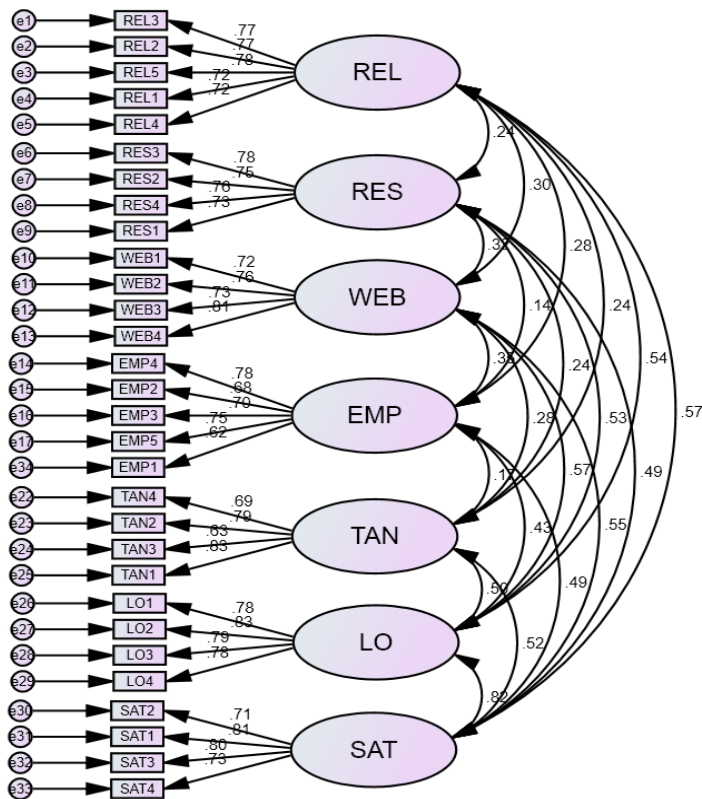
Variables		ESTIMATE	S.E.	C.R.	P	LABEL
REL	<--> RES	.072	.020	3.565	***	
REL	<--> WEB	.091	.021	4.294	***	
REL	<--> EMP	.090	.023	3.992	***	
REL	<--> TAN	.068	.019	3.497	***	
REL	<--> LO	.171	.025	6.904	***	
REL	<--> SAT	.173	.025	6.897	***	
RES	<--> WEB	.098	.022	4.419	***	
RES	<--> EMP	.046	.022	2.064	.039	
RES	<--> TAN	.068	.020	3.380	***	
RES	<--> LO	.170	.025	6.728	***	
RES	<--> SAT	.149	.024	6.159	***	
WEB	<--> EMP	.118	.025	4.759	***	

TABLE 6. RESULTS OF TEST FOR DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY OF RESEARCH CONCEPTS

Variables		ESTIMATE	S.E.	C.R.	P	LABEL
WEB <-->	TAN	.081	.021	3.884	***	
WEB <-->	LO	.185	.027	6.857	***	
WEB <-->	SAT	.174	.026	6.563	***	
EMP <-->	TAN	.055	.022	2.548	.011	
EMP <-->	LO	.152	.026	5.789	***	
EMP <-->	SAT	.165	.027	6.165	***	
TAN <-->	LO	.153	.024	6.238	***	
TAN <-->	SAT	.152	.024	6.223	***	
LO <-->	SAT	.271	.032	8.433	***	

Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

FIGURE 2. RESULTS OF TEST FOR CONVERGENT VALIDITY, DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY, AND UNIDIMENSIONALITY



Chi-square=552.274;df=384;CMIN/df=1.438;p=.000; TLI=.959;CFI=.963; RMSEA=.037

Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

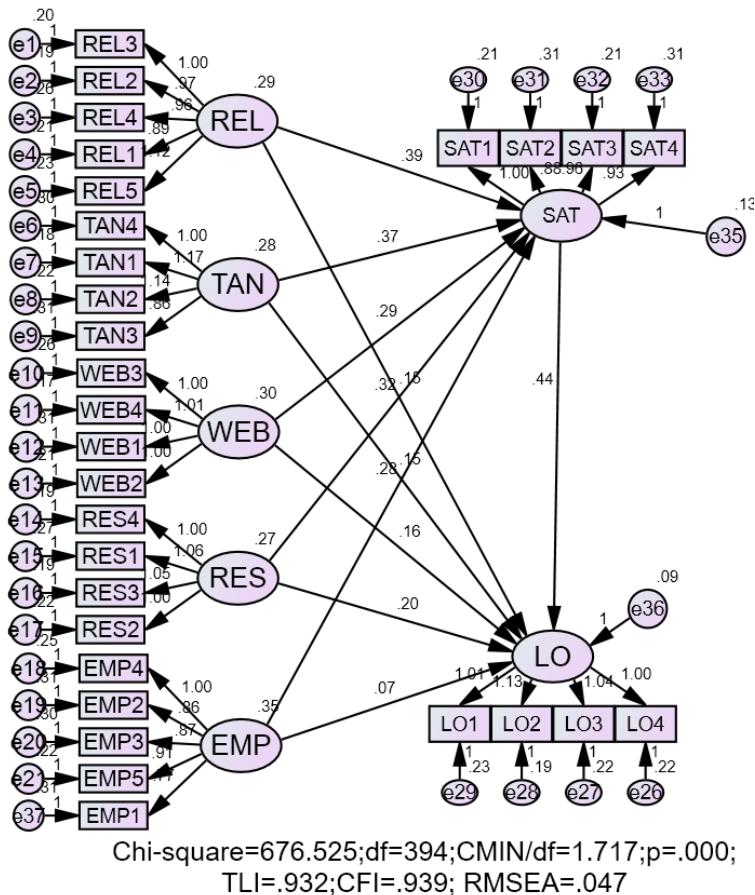
Notes: χ^2 / d.f. ratio < 5 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004), TLI > 0.90 (Hair et al., 2006), CFI > 0.95 (Hu & Bentler, 1999), RMSEA < 0.07 (Hair & et al., 2006), p - value > 0.05 (Hair & et al., 2006).

7. Results of tests of model and hypotheses

7.1. Research model

Results in Figure 3 show that although the model has some inappropriate values, such as chi-square one (661.525), df (394), Cmin/df (1.717) with p value of 0.000 (< 0.05) because of the size of samples (only 322 patrons of 4- and 5-star hotels were surveyed), other fit indices, such as TLI (0.932), CFI (0.939) and RMSEA (0.047) are acceptable. Thus we can conclude that the model is consistent with market data.

FIGURE 3. RESULTS OF THE MODEL TESTING



Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

7.2. Results of the test of hypotheses

Results presented in Table 7 show that all hypotheses are acceptable with a significance of 5% and reliability of 95%.

TABLE 7. RESULTS OF HYPOTHESES TESTING

VARIABLES			ESTIMATE	S.E.	C.R.	P	LABEL
SAT	<---	EMP	.280	.052	5.383	***	H ₅ accepted
SAT	<---	REL	.395	.059	6.731	***	H ₁ accepted
SAT	<---	TAN	.367	.062	5.962	***	H ₄ accepted
SAT	<---	WEB	.290	.056	5.176	***	H ₃ accepted
SAT	<---	RES	.316	.059	5.358	***	H ₂ accepted
LO	<---	SAT	.442	.088	5.042	***	H ₁₁ accepted
LO	<---	REL	.154	.057	2.709	.007	H ₆ accepted
LO	<---	TAN	.145	.057	2.526	.012	H ₉ accepted
LO	<---	WEB	.163	.052	3.138	.002	H ₈ accepted
LO	<---	RES	.204	.056	3.658	***	H ₇ accepted
LO	<---	EMP	.070	.048	1.470	.141	H ₁₀ rejected

Source: Authors' survey, 2017.

8. Discussion

Firstly, satisfaction of customers with services from 4- and 5-star hotels is directly affected by five components of the service quality (reliability, responsiveness, website usefulness, tangibles, and empathy), and therefore hypotheses H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄, and H₅ are accepted. This means that when finding quality of services supplied good customers will feel satisfied. In other words, when users of hotel services feel sure about the quality of service supplied, when all of their expectations are met by hotels, when they consider hotel's tangibles and facilities as good, when they appreciate the hotel's website usefulness, and they feel that the hotel show empathy for them, they will feel satisfied with hotel services.

Secondly, the customers' loyalty to hotel services is directly affected by components of quality of services supplied by the hotel (reliability, responsiveness, website usefulness, and tangibles) and their satisfaction. Thus, hypotheses H₆, H₇, H₉, H₁₀, and H₁₁ are accepted. This means that customers tend to repurchase hotel services when they feel satisfied with them, appreciate service quality through their trust in it, consider hotel facilities and tangibles as good, and appreciate hotel's website usefulness; and when all of their expectations of the hotel are met.

9. Conclusions and implications

The research finds that the customers' loyalty to services supplied by 4- and 5-star hotels in HCMC is affected by four dimensions of service quality (reliability, responsiveness, website utility, and tangibles) and customer satisfaction; especially the website usefulness that is associated with demand from customers on the threshold of the fourth industrial revolution.

Hotel business is a special service industry where hospitality, devotion, and understanding of customers' needs (from basic ones for rest and enjoyment to personal preferences) will affect directly their satisfaction and loyalty to the hotel. The research results show that hotels can take various measures to improve the quality of their services.

To improve empathy with customers, the hotel can (i) form a First Impression Team that is responsible for welcoming and helping customers when they first enter the hotel; (ii) offer a wide range of services for customers' choice, such as Express Check-In or VIP Check-In service that allow customers to get their rooms quickly; and (iii) give training courses in customer services to staff members.

To improve reliability, the hotel can (i) update regularly description of jobs for all staff members and establish standard of procedure applied to 4- and 5-star hotels including all tasks from the first contact with customers to their check-ins and check-outs based on information from receptionists and first impression teams; (ii) develop standard procedures to develop cooperation between departments with direct contacts with customers; (iii) monitor and gather customers' assessments on a weekly basis through Guest Services

Satisfaction or Review Pro to act on guest feedback quickly to ensure improvements; and (iv) form a task force responsible for operating tours and provide additional services to potential customers, such as taking customers to and from airports, providing them with means of transport and timetable for their excursions.

Most guests think that 4- and 5-star hotel always have modern comforts and facilities along with well-trained personnel. This is a tangible measure of customers' feelings. To create better impressions on customers of this aspect, the hotel can (i) make investment in a fleet of luxury cars used for taking customers to and from the hotel; (ii) have staff uniforms designed according to their jobs and working environment; (iii) improve the quality and usefulness of hotel website aiming at providing detailed and necessary information and images about the hotel, integrating share buttons to find number of visitors to the website and their reactions, thereby helping them get a clearer image of services offered by the hotel.

To improve the website usefulness, the hotel can (i) update information about hotel services displayed on the website; (ii) contract web security agents to protect all transactions and information relating to the hotel and its customers; and (iii) get better servers to allow quick transactions and communications.

Regarding responsiveness, we see that although prices of services do not affect directly the service quality, they may have some impact on customers' satisfaction and loyalty because those two factors are closely related. To establish selling prices of its products and services, the hotel should keep them flexible to appropriate to customers' needs and seasonal variations. Some suitable measures the hotel can take are (i) to offer additional services, package prices, discount prices, or free services (free massage tickets, free shuttle service between airport and hotel, etc.) to meet diverse needs of customers; and (ii) enter into agreements with other hotels and service suppliers in the same or neighboring provinces to meet quickly unexpected demands by customers.

Customers' feelings may affect directly their loyalty to the hotel. That is why timely reactions may have great impacts on their feelings and mood.

However, the research subject has certain limitations: (i) due to limited resources in conducting research, the sample size consisted of 322 customers, (ii) This study conducted the sampling technique of using direct interview methods from respondents using service at 4 - 5 star hotel in HCM city, Viet Nam.

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