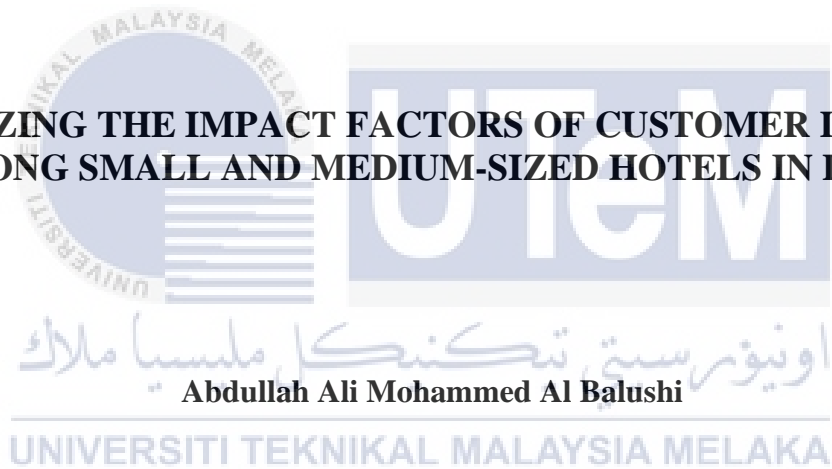




**Faculty of Technology Management and Technopreneurship**

**ANALYZING THE IMPACT FACTORS OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY  
AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED HOTELS IN DUBAI**



**Master of Science in Technology Management**

**2023**

**ANALYZING THE IMPACT FACTORS OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY AMONG  
SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED HOTELS IN DUBAI**

**ABDULLAH ALI MOHAMMED AL BALUSHI**

**A thesis submitted  
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science  
in Technology Management**



**UNIVERSITI TEKNIKAL MALAYSIA MELAKA**

**2023**

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “Analyzing The Impact Factors of Customer Loyalty Among Small And Medium-Sized Hotels in Dubai” is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree

Signature :



Name :

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Date :

.....7/10/2023.....



## APPROVAL

I hereby declare that I have read this thesis and in my opinion this thesis is sufficient in terms of scope and quality for the award of Master of Science in Technology Management.

Signature



Supervisor Name : Associate Professor Dr. Haslinda Binti Musa

Date : .....9/10/2022.....



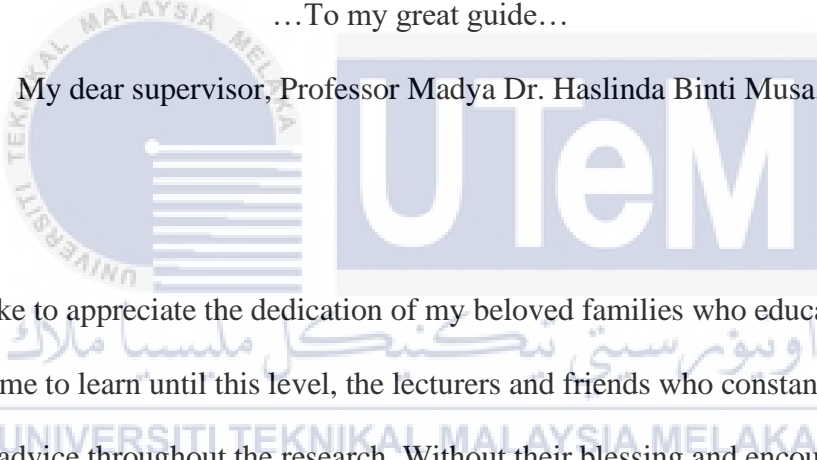
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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the inspiring person towards my life... my dear father and my dear mother whose always want me to have the best, for her love, the prayers that she made for me.

...To my great guide...

My dear supervisor, Professor Madya Dr. Haslinda Binti Musa.



I would like to appreciate the dedication of my beloved families who educated me and motivate me to learn until this level, the lecturers and friends who constantly give me support and advice throughout the research. Without their blessing and encouragement, this research is impossible to complete on time.

## ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the most important factors that contribute to customer loyalty in the hotel sector, specifically in Dubai's hotels. Small and medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) were examined from the standpoint of their customers using customer loyalty as a performance metric. This research shed additional light on how customer satisfaction and trust in SMSHs contribute to customer loyalty, particularly within Dubai's hotel sector SMSHs. A quantitative research involves the data was analysed using Smart-PLS based on a sample random of 384 respondents from SMSHs in Dubai. The findings showed a positive and significant relationship between customer trust, service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the SMSHs in Dubai. Also, customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between customer trust and customer loyalty, and customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between customer trust and customer loyalty in the SMSHs in Dubai. To boost client satisfaction, hotels should undertake a more detailed service assessment of online hotel performance and improve the hotel's application system, which is prone to faults, by speeding up digital technology. An original research on small and medium-sized hotels in Dubai would provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by this segment of the hospitality industry in a highly competitive and dynamic market.

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# **MENGANALISIS FAKTOR IMPAK KESETIAAN PELANGGAN DI KALANGAN HOTEL KECIL DAN SEDERHANA DI DUBAI**

## **ABSTRAK**

*Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti faktor terpenting yang menyumbang kepada kesetiaan pelanggan dalam sektor hotel, khususnya di hotel Dubai. Hotel kecil dan sederhana (SMSH) telah diperiksa dari sudut pandangan pelanggan mereka menggunakan kesetiaan pelanggan sebagai metrik prestasi. Penyelidikan ini memberi penerangan tambahan tentang bagaimana kepuasan dan kepercayaan pelanggan terhadap SMSH menyumbang kepada kesetiaan pelanggan, khususnya dalam SMSH sektor hotel Dubai. Kajian kuantitatif melibatkan data dianalisis menggunakan Smart-PLS berdasarkan sampel rawak 384 responden daripada SMSH di Dubai. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan hubungan yang positif dan signifikan antara kepercayaan pelanggan, kualiti perkhidmatan, kepuasan pelanggan dan kesetiaan pelanggan dalam SMSH di Dubai. Selain itu, kepuasan pelanggan menjadi pengantara hubungan antara kepercayaan pelanggan dan kesetiaan pelanggan, dan kepuasan pelanggan menjadi pengantara hubungan antara kepercayaan pelanggan dan kesetiaan pelanggan dalam SMSH di Dubai. Untuk meningkatkan kepuasan pelanggan, hotel harus melakukan penilaian perkhidmatan yang lebih terperinci tentang prestasi hotel dalam talian dan menambah baik sistem aplikasi hotel, yang terdedah kepada kerosakan, dengan mempercepatkan teknologi digital. Kajian asal mengenai hotel kecil dan sederhana di Dubai akan memberikan pandangan berharga tentang cabaran dan peluang unik yang dihadapi oleh segmen industri hospitaliti ini dalam pasaran yang sangat kompetitif dan dinamik.*

اونيورسيتي تيكنيكل مليسيا ملاك

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AVE	-	Average variance extracted
BR	-	Bank reputation
CF	-	Customer focus
CFA	-	Confirmatory factor analysis
CR	-	Composite reliability
EFA	-	Exploratory factor analysis
EM	-	Expectation-maximization
GDP	-	Gross domestic product
GoF	-	Goodness of fit
PLS	-	Partial least squares
SDG	-	sustainable development goals
SEM	-	Structural equation modelling
SPSS	-	Statistical package for the social science
SQC	-	Statistical quality control
VIF	-	Variance inflation factor
VRIN	-	Valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable

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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Al-Balushi, A.A.M. and Musa, H., 2023. Analysing the Impact Factors of Customer Loyalty Among Small and Medium-Sized Hotels in Dubai. *International Journal of Professional Business Review*, 8(5), p.74.





# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This section starts with an introduction of the research's context, providing a brief description of tourism and hotel development in the UAE. Following that, the problem statement for the discussed subject, Following that are research problems and research priorities that are directly related to the problem statement. Additionally, the research's significance, scope, and limitations have been discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research's organisation.

### 1.2 Background of the research

The UAE hotel market is valued at \$14.6 billion (Gulf News, 2015), which rises by 16 % each year. This year, the total contribution by the UAE's GDP to the gross domestic product is expected to hit 8.5%, with an annual growth of 4.5% to AED 122.6 billion. As rationale for globalisation, economies are being increasingly dynamic, diversified, and consumer-oriented; customers are seeking increasingly choice, better product, more productivity and more reliable distribution (Valk and Yousif, 2023). Paying a commodity to the correct location needs improved productivity, both inside the business and across the whole supply network, in good timing and at the lowest rate. The rivalry is not local anymore, but worldwide, since businesses search for ways to lower their prices while working hard to boost the standard of their goods while meeting long-term consumer demands. Nearly all big hotels and resorts worldwide have established a branch in the region

in recent years. As the city increases tourism potential, the Government of the UAE is issuing visas for visitor arrivals from more and more countries (Bocanet et al., 2022).

Additionally, the UAE has a longstanding experience of being a premier tourism and leisure destination. These sectors contribute significantly to the UAE's successful economic diversification policy, which has resulted in rapid and sustained growth. And because Dubai, in particular, is regarded as one of the world's most favourable tourist destinations, hotels play a critical role in demonstrating exceptional hospitality that reflects the country's best image. As a result, major global hotel chains, including Hilton, Hyatt, and Marriott, have invested significantly in the UAE hospitality industry. Additionally, this country gave rise to brands like Emaar and Jumeirah. Each year, the country sees the construction of several hotel resorts, both foreign and domestic, that provide a greater level of hospitality services. Additionally, the hotel industry has a significant role in deciding the location of a large number of international and regional events, such as conferences, seminars, training programmes, annual meetings, and festivals (Valk and Yousif, 2023). According to Gissing and Wallace (2014), hotels have become a popular site for panels and discussions in the United Arab Emirates. Customers like hotels that offer superior service at a reasonable price and a variety of features (Haque et al., 2019). For many years, customer satisfaction has been crucial in the service industry ((Bocanet et al., 2022)). In 2017, the hospitality sector contributed around 4.6 percent to the UAE's gross domestic product (GDP) and generated the most job opportunities in the country (UAE Business Council report, 2019). Numerous prior studies, like those by Al-dweeri et al. (2017) and Alzoubi et al. (2020), have established that service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, delight, trust, and commitment. Although it is still limited to the UAE's hospitality business, it has an impact on consumer loyalty.

SMSHs in the UAE are distinct from those in other hotel sectors (Ahmad, 2019). The majority of SMSHs in the UAE are family or privately owned and have been in operation for less than ten years. According to Ahmad (2019), the vast majority of SMSHs are run by volunteers. The owners are referred to as "amateurs" because of their lack of official training in the hospitality and tourism industries. For these entrepreneurs, reality is more important than theory when it comes to hotel management. While most SMSHs have an average staff size of 30 employees, more than a third of them have less than 10 employees. Expats from countries including the Philippines and Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal make up most of the workforce. Due to long hours, low pay, and a lack of expertise, local workers are often reluctant to join the field (The National, 2014). SMSHs were first funded mostly by personal investments, family/relatives and private loans, government grants and bank loans (Ahmad, 2019). Even more problematic is the fact that there is a lack of educational background and a lack of expanding resources and low profitability and low skill levels among workers, as well as significant staff turnover. SMSHs offer low entry barriers and a highly fragmented market, which draws entrepreneurial spirit. As a result, the market is quite competitive, with a lot of inconsistencies in service.

The majority of SMSHs in the UAE believe that word-of-mouth marketing, together with the usage of the internet, brochures, and travel agents, is essential for attracting both local and international tourists (Ahmad, 2019). It is because the SMSHs are reasonably priced that they appeal to a wide range of consumers ranging from students to the middle-class traveller (Chan et al., 2019). This group of SMSHs is usually praised for their warm demeanour, personalised service, and concentration on the unique needs of each and every client. The SMSH architecture is likely to be tailored to the specific needs of the location. As an example, the hotelier's own style in interior design was often be evident while using standard room units with little amenities and following impersonal professional trends

(Melhem et al., 2021). As a result of their large housing stock, inexpensive rents, convenient location, and lack of amenities and services, SMSHs can be a good investment (Melhem et al., 2021).

Academic studies have focused on how service quality affects outcomes such as customer loyalty, satisfaction, and even trust. Due to their potential to boost operational efficiency and profitability, service quality concepts have experienced an increase in popularity in recent years (Priporas et al., 2017). It is, nevertheless, a constant challenge to keep customers satisfied through better service quality. Satisfaction is the foundation for an enterprise or an agency to accomplish the objectives. Any happy client has an initiative or tends to build an individual or company pleasant and fruitful partnership (Jenneboer et al., 2022). Customer loyalty has emerged as one of today's most important strategies for retaining a strategic edge for market victory and longevity by superior customer delivery. Jenneboer et al. (2022) claimed that excellent service represents a benefit policy because it was result in more potential clients, more business with current customers, less consumer loses, more price isolation and fewer failures that was need a re-service.

The pre and post-consumption assessment of service features such as comfort, protection, security and response are of significant concern to the growth of consumer loyalty in the hotel sector (Mmutle, 2017). Trust, therefore, represents a permanent reaction that evolves following an examination of the post-commerce and strengthens consumer convictions that service providers should not take an opportunity to conduct themselves (Kotler and Keller, 2012). In other terms, if the consumers believe that the service providers are trustful, they feel secure and assured about maintaining their ties with service providers. The analysts, on the other side, have taken great care of the history of consumer loyalty, which is very significant for an organisation (Tarofder et al., 2017) as service

efficiency. While there is a range of service quality models, consumer satisfaction backgrounds are by far the most common and checked.

Obviously, one of the most significant problems for travellers around the world is the cost of lodging; SMSHs deliver a lower price as compared to other industries. Although it is anticipated that this sector was do well, it is also believed that visitors was downgrade to cheaper and lower star-rated hotels (Nazari et al., 2020). As a result, the SMSH sector could be a viable option for customers seeking cost savings. SMSHs (three-star and lower) saw a 15% to 20% decline in revenue due to competition, and some hoteliers were forced to sell their properties due to a lack of business in UAE (Melhem et al., 2021). Additionally, the SMSH sector in the UAE has not grown properly (Tahir, 2021). In the hotel/tourism industry, high service quality and enhanced customer loyalty are usually viewed as vital components for increasing and anticipating organisational and company efficiency (Liu et al., 2020). Customer satisfaction is crucial for SMSHs as well, as hotel operations are customer-driven (Nazari et al., 2020).

Many studies have analysed and discussed the relationship between consumer satisfaction and loyalty to consumers (Maisya et al., 2019). While examining the role of customer experience and quality of service in satisfying customers (Jhandir, 2012). The credibility of firms and the confidence of consumers in these service businesses (Kandampully and Hu 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2012) is also apparent (Tjiptono, 2014). The uniqueness of this research contributed to a strong link between the dimensions of the standard of service, happiness and confidence as the essential cornerstone of consumer loyalty.

### 1.3 Problem statement

The UAE boasts itself as the Middle Eastern region's most popular travel destination with about 14.1 million international tourists in 2015, and a predicted 18.8 million tourists in 2022 (Ahmad, Ahmad and Papastathopoulos, 2018). According to The World Travel and Tourism Council Report (WTTC) (2016), in 2015, travel and tourism was responsible for AED64.9bn of the UAEs Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which was 4.2 per cent of the country's total GDP. The amount is expected to rise by an estimated 5.7 per cent per annum from 2016-2026 to AED 118.1bn, a total of 5.5 per cent of the country's GDP, by 2024. Dubai's successful bid to host the Expo 2020 will be a major factor for the predicted influx of tourists from European and ASEAN countries within the years 2014-2026. In addition to that, the efforts of the UAE Government in promoting tourism alongside the country's reputation as a premier shopping destination, business hub, avenue for events and luxurious leisurely activities, will also contribute to its tourism industry (Ahmad, Ahmad and Papastathopoulos, 2018).

Approximately 83% of hotels are SMSHs in UAE which is considered as a huge segment in the hospitality and accommodation industry (Department of Statistics 2022 in UAE). It is obvious that accommodation expenses are one of the main issues for travelling in the world; SMSHs offer a lower price in comparison with other sectors. While it is expected that this sector will have a better business, it is assumed that the tourists downgrade themselves to cheaper and lower star rated hotels (Al Balushi, and Musa, 2023). So, the SMSH sector can be a choice for the customer to go for cost reduction. Further, SMSH sector has not grown perfectly in UAE (Al Balushi, and Musa, 2023). High service quality and enhancing customer satisfaction are often seen as necessary elements to enhance and customer loyalty and business performance in the hotel/tourism industry (Huang and

Trusov, 2020; Al Balushi, and Musa, 2023). As hotel organisations are customer-driven, customer loyalty is essential for SMSHs as well (Al Balushi, and Musa, 2023).

Essentially, the survival of hotels in this competitive environment lies within the delivery of superior quality to produce customer delight. In general, most small- and mediumsized hotels (SMSHs) have, more or less, similar services, appearances, facilities and rooms (Ahmad, Ahmad and Papastathopoulos, 2018). To stand out, SMSHs need to understand, meet or exceed visitor expectations through the offering of high quality services (Al Balushi, and Musa, 2023).

According to Mohamad et al. (2017), the hotel industry in the UAE suffers from low customer loyalty, which is attributed to the lack of customer expectations, specifically in terms of customer satisfaction and the service quality provided. The hotel industry in the UAE relies more on foreign customers. More of them visit the UAE for short periods, but with a high frequency. Local customers were reported to have lower customer loyalty (Mohamad et al., 2017a). This issue has resulted in shifting customers' preferences to multinational hotels operating in the UAE. This shift has affected the sustainable growth of the industry. In addition, the decline of local hotels contributed to the economy.

This research examines the expectations and feedback of hotel guests towards service quality, trust and satisfaction within SMSH in the UAE in order to fill the literature gap. Sann and Lai (2020) claimed that the hotelier might enhance service efficiency by understanding the characteristics of the service likely to affect preference. If the possible characteristics are not discussed, a negative appraisal of the customer who would possibly not return to the hotel was result. Thus, for successful and suitable market and service designs to be created to improve hotel guest loyalty, the research would be necessary. The research is distinguished not just by its unique setting - the UAE, a dynamic, evolving, and



modern nation at the heart of the Arab world. While the UAE are classified as a high-income region, they remain a developing country on a global scale (Eshtrefi, 2021). As SMSHs are too complex and not uniform, generic research in consumer loyalty and quality of service is challenging to apply from other research. As a consequence, this research has produced realistic advances in the hotel industry, particularly in developed countries such as the UAE, through an investigation of client expectations of the standard of service offered through the SMSH lens (Basari and Shamsudin, 2020).

On the other hand, maintaining customer satisfaction is no easy effort. It involves extensive investigation to ascertain what customers desire. Additionally, it involves innovative thinking to uncover significant aspects of their lives that may delight them, as well as a long-term strategy for implementing new customer-satisfying techniques (Huang and Trusov, 2020). Satisfaction has a strong correlation with consumer loyalty and other interpersonal interactions (Tech, 2020). Client satisfaction is critical since it can influence whether an organisation succeeds or fails, hence it is critical to collect customer feedback on a regular basis, particularly on customer demands and useful sources of information regarding customer decision making (Hussain, 2021).

On the other hand, trust leads favourably to consumer loyalty. In Victor's, Rotinsulu's and Jacky's (2015) research, confidence has a positive but not substantial impact. Upamannyu etc., (2015); Safitri (2015) also researched the trust in customers as having a beneficial influence on customer loyalty. Trust in establishing and preservation partnerships is seen as of considerable significance, but it is often acknowledged that it is challenging to handle. Despite the continuous establishment of trust in corporate ties with consumers, trust raising has been seen in every manner other than this (Gustafsson et al., 2020). Furthermore, the role of hotel quality in the loyalty of the consumer was not clearly