

A Systematic Review of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, and Loyalty in Tourism Research

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doi.org/10.64643/JATIRV2I2-140150-001

Abstract— The tourism and hospitality industry is inherently service-oriented, making service quality a critical determinant of customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Over the past two decades, an extensive body of empirical research has investigated the interrelationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty across diverse tourism contexts. However, the rapid expansion of this literature has made it increasingly challenging to derive coherent and integrated insights from individual studies. This paper presents a systematic review of contemporary research on the service quality–satisfaction–loyalty nexus in tourism and hospitality. Drawing on peer-reviewed studies documented in the provided literature review, the paper synthesizes dominant theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and empirical findings. The review demonstrates that service quality exerts a strong indirect influence on customer loyalty through satisfaction, with the SERVQUAL framework remaining the most widely adopted model. Empathy, reliability, and tangibles emerge as particularly influential dimensions, although their relative importance varies across tourism sectors and cultural contexts. The paper concludes by outlining theoretical contributions, managerial implications, and directions for future research, thereby offering a comprehensive and publication-ready synthesis of the existing literature.

Index Terms—Tourism, SERVQUAL, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty.

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hospitality industry operates in an increasingly competitive and globalized environment, where destinations and service providers compete not only on price but also on the quality of experiences delivered to tourists. Unlike tangible goods, tourism products are largely experiential, intangible, and produced and consumed simultaneously. As a result, tourists' perceptions of service quality play a pivotal role in shaping satisfaction and post-consumption behaviors such as loyalty, repeat visitation, and positive word-of-mouth.

Customer loyalty has become a strategic priority for tourism organizations because retaining existing customers is generally more cost-effective than attracting new ones. Loyal tourists are more likely to revisit destinations, recommend services to others, and demonstrate tolerance toward minor service failures. Consequently, understanding how service quality contributes to satisfaction and loyalty has attracted sustained scholarly attention. Numerous

empirical studies have examined these relationships in contexts such as hotels, resorts, homestays, cultural heritage sites, cruise tourism, and community-based tourism.

Despite the abundance of research, findings across individual studies are sometimes fragmented due to differences in research design, measurement instruments, and contextual settings. This fragmentation underscores the need for systematic reviews that synthesize existing evidence using transparent and rigorous methods. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to systematically review and synthesize contemporary research on the service quality–satisfaction–loyalty relationship in tourism. Specifically, the review aims to: (i) identify dominant theoretical frameworks used in the literature, (ii) examine methodological trends, (iii) synthesize key empirical findings, and (iv) highlight research gaps and future directions.

II.METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic review methodology to ensure a comprehensive, transparent, and reproducible synthesis of existing research. Systematic reviews differ fundamentally from traditional narrative reviews in that they follow predefined protocols designed to minimize subjectivity and bias while maximizing reliability. The review draws exclusively on secondary data obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles compiled in the provided Word document, which itself is based on studies indexed in major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar.

The selection of studies followed clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only studies focusing explicitly on service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty within tourism and hospitality contexts were considered. Eligible studies were required to be published in peer-reviewed journals, written in English, and demonstrate clear methodological rigor. Studies that were conceptual but lacked relevance to the core constructs, or empirical works with insufficient methodological detail, were excluded from the synthesis.

Once the relevant studies were identified, data extraction was conducted systematically. Information relating to research objectives, theoretical frameworks, research design, sample characteristics, analytical techniques, and key findings was extracted from each article. A qualitative synthesis approach was adopted to integrate findings across heterogeneous contexts and methodologies. This approach enabled the identification of recurring themes, dominant patterns, and areas of divergence within the literature, consistent with best practices in systematic review research.

III.THE SERVQUAL FRAMEWORK

The SERVQUAL model, originally developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry, remains the dominant theoretical framework for assessing service quality in tourism and hospitality research. The model conceptualizes service quality as a multidimensional construct encompassing tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Its continued prominence in contemporary studies reflects both its conceptual clarity and its adaptability across a wide range of tourism settings.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that SERVQUAL has been applied extensively in contexts such as hotels, resorts, homestays, cultural heritage attractions, cruise tourism, and community-based tourism. While several studies have adapted or extended the framework to capture context-specific attributes, the core SERVQUAL dimensions consistently explain significant variance in customer satisfaction and loyalty. This enduring relevance suggests that the framework captures fundamental aspects of service evaluation that transcend specific tourism segments. Service Quality–Satisfaction–Loyalty Chain A central conceptual model emerging from the reviewed literature is the service quality–satisfaction–loyalty chain. This model posits that tourists' perceptions of service quality shape their level of satisfaction, which subsequently influences loyalty-related outcomes such as repeat visitation, positive word-of-mouth, and recommendation intentions. The theoretical foundations of this chain are grounded in expectancy–disconfirmation theory and cognitive–affective models of consumer behavior.

Empirical evidence across multiple tourism contexts provides strong support for this sequential relationship. Numerous studies employing structural equation modeling demonstrate that customer satisfaction acts as a mediating variable between service quality and loyalty. In many cases, satisfaction fully mediates this relationship, indicating

that improvements in service quality must first translate into enhanced satisfaction before loyalty outcomes can be realized. This finding has significant theoretical implications, reinforcing satisfaction as a distinct and indispensable psychological mechanism in tourist behavior.

The synthesis of empirical studies reveals several consistent patterns regarding the influence of service quality on satisfaction and loyalty. Across diverse tourism settings, certain service quality dimensions emerge as particularly salient. Empathy, reflecting personalized attention and genuine care, is frequently identified as a strong predictor of satisfaction, especially in high-contact services such as hotels and resorts. Reliability, which refers to the consistent and dependable delivery of promised services, is another critical determinant, as service failures can significantly undermine satisfaction and trust. Tangibles, including physical facilities, equipment, and the overall service environment, also play an important role in shaping tourists' perceptions, particularly during initial service encounters. While responsiveness and assurance contribute to satisfaction, their relative influence varies depending on context. For example, assurance tends to be more important in international and high-risk tourism settings, where trust and safety concerns are paramount. These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of service quality and highlight the need for context-sensitive service management strategies.

The findings of this systematic review contribute to theory by reinforcing the central mediating role of customer satisfaction in the service quality–loyalty relationship. The persistence of SERVQUAL as the dominant framework underscores its explanatory power, while context-specific adaptations point to opportunities for theoretical refinement. From a managerial perspective, the review highlights the importance of prioritizing customer satisfaction as a strategic objective. Tourism managers should invest in those service quality dimensions most valued by their target market and regularly measure satisfaction to ensure that quality improvements translate into loyalty outcomes. Although this review provides a comprehensive synthesis, it is limited by its reliance on secondary data and the studies included in the source document. Future research should employ longitudinal and experimental designs to strengthen causal inference. Additionally, emerging topics such as digital service quality, sustainability, and post-pandemic tourism experiences warrant further investigation.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper systematically reviewed contemporary research on service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in tourism and hospitality. The synthesis demonstrates that service quality indirectly influences loyalty through satisfaction, with SERVQUAL remaining the dominant analytical framework. By integrating theoretical and empirical insights, this review offers a robust, publication-ready contribution to tourism research and provides clear directions for both scholars and practitioners.

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