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MEDIATING EFFECT OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AND LOYALTY: KANO HOTELS EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic nature of hotel businesses requires holistic approach of managing customer satisfaction and retention to gain competitive advantage and avoid market glut. Over a decade to date, Nigerian economy is under recession forcing firms including hotels to engage in fierce competition for their survival. This paper examines and validates a customer loyalty model in the context of Nigerian hotel with a view to ascertain the mediating influence of customer satisfaction on the connection between customer engagement and loyalty. Data from 384 guests in 82 hotels operating in Kano were analyzed with the aid of PLS-SEM 4 statistical software. Findings show significant and direct relationship between customer engagement, satisfaction and loyalty. As postulated, the mediating role of customer satisfaction on customer engagement relationships has been confirmed. The use of customer engagement and its re-validation is a novel contribution of this study to the body of knowledge and to the hotel managers as it facilitates towards developing effective strategies to meet guests' requirements and, by extension, enhance their retention.

Keywords: customer engagement, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, hotels.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, the hospitality industry is impacting positively to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the tune of 4.7trillion USD (5.5%) in the year 2020 and 9.2 trillion USD in 2019 (10.4%), the drop may not be unconnected with COVID-19 pandemic experienced globally and the general economic turbulences experienced by many countries (WTO 2022). The contributions of travel and tourism to the GDP of Nigeria has reached 11 billion USD in the year 2020 representing 2.8% to the GDP, unlike in the year 2019 where the contribution was 4.4%. In fact, the country's GDP is experiencing a massive blow as the sum of 45 trillion Naira has being dropped in the second quarter of 2022 due to decline in many businesses in the country according to the (NBS) (2022) report. Specifically, the hotel occupancy rate fell from (48.4%) in 2020 to (47.5%) in 2021. This may be as a result of the inflationary trend in the economy as the rate of inflation has increased by 20.77% in the month of September 2022 (NBS 2022).

Apart from the global economic downturn, the Covid-19 virus endemic has equally affected the tourism sector, and the hotel business in particular negatively. In fact, Demira, et al (2021) affirmed that Covid 19 had a negative influence on hotel businesses not only economically, but also psychologically and socially. Added to the above, hotels have highly proliferated in Africa with specific reference to Nigeria. For instance

the 'Hospitality Group Hotel Chain Development Pipeline' reported in their annual survey manual that a surge of 30% hotels rooms in Africa in 2016 than in the preceding year (Tendai, 2016), with Nigeria having the leading in the number of rooms. As hotels businesses are being done in an intense competitive environment, scholars refer the services offered as a commodity. The services provided by most hotels are to a large extent similar, this commoditization even makes the competition to be more fierce as differentiating hotels offerings on the part of the guests becomes even more difficult (Berezina, et al 2016). That is why Peter (2014) affirmed that regardless of their star ranking variance most hotels in Nigeria offer less distinct core services. Chinedum, et al (2017) reiterated that the retaining guests becomes an issue to hotels industry managers in view of the proliferation of hotels in Nigeria.

On the other hand, other scholars believed that considering the severity of today's competition, meeting customers' requirements remains the main source of firms' corporate survival (Nguyen et al., 2024; Pizam et al., 2016; Sa'id et el. 2025). Thus, hotels can only be successful when their services meet or excced the requirement of their guests. This will help towards building a reciprocal symbiotic link with their numerous guests thereby yielding to customer loyalty. Also, in view of the stiffness of the competition baffling in the hospitality context, hotel industry managers need to device various strategies geared toward achieving competitiveness, which according to Kim and Kim (2016), involves customer loyalty.

Equally, some scholars believed that the severity of today's competition mandated companies to appreciate the fact that meeting their customers' requirements boost their likelihood for survival (Hu et al., 2009 ; Nguyen et al. 2024 Sa'id et al. 2025), as customer satisfaction becomes key for their corporate survivals (Pizam2016; Nguyen et al. 2024). Oyner, et al (2016) further argued that hotels can only be successful when their services meet or excced the requirement of their guests. This will help towards building a reciprocal symbiotic link with their numerous guests thereby yielding to customer loyalty.

Problem statement

Organizations are saddled with the task of uncovering other emerging concepts capable of eliciting loyalty in the present competitive market (Nguyen et al. 2024). Scholars have done a lot of work with respect to the antecedents and determinants of loyalty (Hapsari et al., 2017; Nguyen et al. 2024). Recently, Yu and Rojniruttikul (2025) and Alghizzawi et al., (2024) emphasized the need to include other variables such as engagement beyond quality as a predictor of loyalty. In agreement with this, the meta-analytic study of Kandampully et al (2015) suggested future studies to include customer engagement (CE) as one of determinant of loyalty in hospitality context.

Although CE has been adequately investigated in other fields of studies such as information technology and education, suprisigly, there is paucity of empirical works in marketing domain, specially as it relates to loyalty (Kandampully, Zhang & Tingting, 2015). Similarly, most studies on CE were originally targeting the online contexts (Vivek, et al (2014), however, So et al., (2016) affirmed that studies can equally be done in offline settings, as consumers' advice along with their opinions can significantly influence their buying decision.

Furthermore, being an emerging concept in the marketing and management domain, especially within the hospitality context Kandampully, et al (2015) and Yu and Rojniruttikul (2025) recommended that the concept of CE should be studied in the hospitality industry on the ground that, customers' behaviors are being influenced by current advancement in information and communication knowledge which turn consumers to be more sophisticated and informed about organizational offerings. This mandated the organizations to re-adjust their tactics in order to acquire and by extension retain their existing clients.

Additionally, Yu and Rojniruttikul (2025) and Nyadzayo and Khajehzadeh, (2016) called scholars to unearth other factors that predict loyalty other than the well-known conventional ones like switching cost, word of mouth advocacy , trust, brand image, commitment and perceived value in today's wired world characterized with stiff competition and customer sophistication. Similarly, the need to further include a moderating and/or mediating variable in the connection among the determinants of loyalty specifically in the hospital domain has also been solicited by Oh and Kim, (2017) in their meta-analytic study. In furtherance of these, Makanyeza and Chikazhe, (2017) along with Kumar, et al (2013) recommended the use of intervening variables like a mediator in different domain and diverse cultures,

hence, the need for the intervention of this work. Similarly, Hapsari et al., (2017) argued that paucity of empirical studies regarding CE prevails, as most scholars focused their attention on conceptual work. Thus, this study aims at examining the role of customer satisfaction in mediating CE- CL relationship in the Nigerian hotels context addresses the above stated gaps.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, the achievement and sustenance of competitive advantage continues to be a major hurdle confronting many service organizations. Organisations are presently operating in an environment characterised with severe competition and enlightened customers that access wide variety of information. Their sustenance is not always assured by just reduction of their prices or service quality improvement, rather, powerful bond that will ensure long lasting loyalty amongst firms and their clients should be established. Thus, scholars believed that CL is the strategic weapon for survival and sustainability in today's marketing environment surrounded with severe competition, dynamism and uncertainty (Kandampully et al; Kim & Kim, 2016).

Presently, marketing scholars and experts have begun to pay attention to CE considering the dynamism and intense interaction prevailing in today's marketing setting. Perhaps this might be due to the pivotal role it plays in boosting customer experience (Brodie, et al., 2011). Even with this there is paucity of empirical works with respect to CE despite of its expected worthiness as an emerging determinant of loyalty specifically in the developing world (Hapsari et al., 2017; Kam, et al., 2014).

The contribution of CE towards realizing organizational performances have been documented in numerous studies. For instance, Brodie, et al., (2011) assert that CE boosts sales volume and effectiveness of organizations through positive word of mouth advocacy and recommendation of a given product/service against its competing brand thereby enhancing their corporate survival. Also, (Vivek, et al., 2014) added that CE goes beyond the immediate patronage of an offerings, as it entails continuous interactions and connectedness with a brand.

On the other hand, CS plays a vital role towards promoting business retention especially in today's competitive, dynamic and complex market. As hotels are saddled with the responsibilities of meeting the requirements of their guests in today's dynamic and competitive markets to ensure their corporate survival and profitability (Oyner, et al 2016), they need to give adequate emphasis on the concept of customer satisfaction and creating a mutually symbiotic tie which will eventually lead to customer loyalty (Martínez, 2015).

Relationship between CE, CS and CL

Although there is a dearth of studies on CE and its relation with loyalty (Sisodia, & Nordfält, 2017). However, the work of Hapsari et al.,(2017) validated a model that confirms a direct effect of the construct on loyalty among in the Indonesian airline domain. Similarly, the work of So et al., (2016) revealed that CE had a positive link with loyalty. Furthermore, in the mobile devise setting, the study of Thakur (2016) affirmed that CE significantly determined loyalty. Similarly, the empirical study of Harrigan, et al., (2017) used a 25-item scale originally invented by So, et al., (2014) and swapped it with an 11-items of 3-dimensional measures and validated them in the social media domain. The result confirmed a positive and direct connection between CE and CL. However, Skippari, et al., (2017), found an indirect link between perceived value and CE on consumers' patronage among retail grocery firms in Finland

Based on the above, we hypothesize that;

H_1: CE has a significant and positive link with CL in the Nigerian Hotel industry

H_2: CE has a significant and positive link with CS in the Nigerian Hotel industry

Relationship between CS and CL

Quite a number of empirical studies have established a positive relationships between CS and CL in different contexts and settings. For instance, Han et al., (2018) in their work intended at examining the determinants of loyalty among South Korean coffee consumers found that CS a positively and significantly impacted on CL. Equally, Ahadmotilaghi and Moghaddam (2017)'s work revealed a significant positive effect between CS and guests' willingness to buy more in the Iranian hotels domain. Furthermore, a positive and significant connection was established in the study of Saleem and

Raja (2014) conducted among 5-star hotels' guests in Pakistan. Also, satisfaction was found to a positive connection on cognitive, affective along with conative loyalty in the work of Kim, et al., (2015). Similar results was achieved in the study of Yeh, et al., (2016) among the community based tourism participants in Korea.

CS was also established to be a predictor of CL in the South African mobile phone context (Morgan & Govender 2017). Satisfaction was also confirmed to determine CL in the hospitality context by Pena et al., (2013). Consistent with these, Martínez et al., (2013) established that satisfaction was a major determinant of loyalty among the Spanish guests. Moreover, Liat et al., (2017) found that loyalty was determined by satisfaction in the hotel context. Consistent with the above, the works of Martínez et al., (2013), Jackie (2004), Morgan and Govender (2017) and Liat et al., (2017) found that satisfaction greatly determines CL.

The study proposes that significant link between CS and guest loyalty exist.

H_3: CS has a significant and positive association with CL in the context of Nigerian hotel industry

Mediating influence of CS on the connection between CE-CL relationships

In addition to the role CS is playing towards determining loyalty, it also mediate the connections among some predictors of loyalty. For example, in the work of Achmad and Fernandes (2018) it was established that it CS served as a mediating variable on the links among service quality, market orientation and marketing mix strategy in the Indonesian telecom industry. Also, the study of Ashraf, et al., (2018) conducted in various service settings of educational sector, hotels, banks, and hospitals established that CS mediates the association among value, image and service quality with CL. Similarly, Priporas et al., (2017)'s work affirmed that CS partly intervenes the connection between quality and loyalty in the context of Thailand hotels. Similarly, the work of Muhammad et al., (2017) revealed that CS functioned as a mediator between quality and CL in the Pakistan airline domain. Moreover, Ganiyu (2016) validates a model that confirmed a mediating effect among service quality-CL relationship in the airline domain of Nigeria. At the same time, same result was established in the Zimbabwe banking sector by (Makanyeza & Chikazhe, 2017). In addition, Namin (2017)'s study conducted in restaurant domain found that CS was a mediating variable between quality and behavioral intention of the customers. Moreover, Ali et al., (2016) established that consumers' delight along with CS mediate the link among some determinants of loyalty in Malaysian park context. From above, the study postulates that customer satisfaction to be a mediating variable in the relationships between CE on hotel guest loyalty.

H_4: CS mediates the association between CE and CL in the context of Nigerian hotel industry

Conceptual Framework

The framework examined the mediating influence of CS on the association between CE and CL in the context of Nigerian hotel with specific references to Kano state experience. It consist of one independent variable with five dimensions consisting of absorption, identification, interaction, enthusiasm and attention, on mediating variable (CS) and CL as a dependent variable.

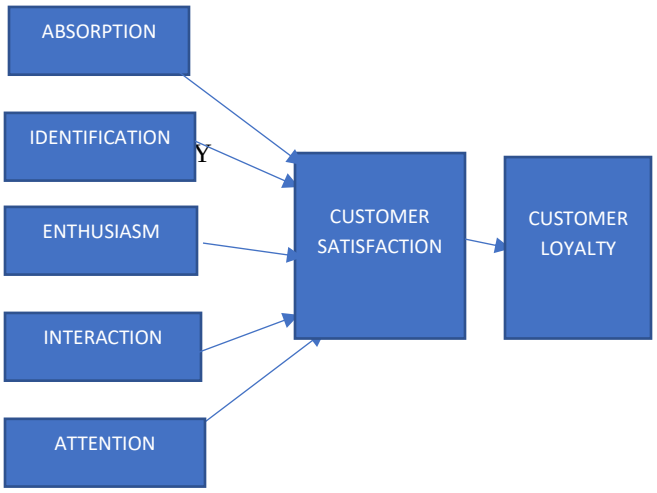


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

3. METHODOLOGY

The entire guests patronizing the hotels operating in Kano along with the 82 hotels that registered with the Kano ministry of commerce and tourism as at 2018 are the population of the study. The study employed a cross sectional survey technique to retrieve data from the guests who eventually are the unit of analysis. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determinant was employed in selecting 384 guests for the study. This is

due to complexity of the population who are the guests, and the inability to have the exact sampling frame. Multi-stage cluster sampling technique were the hotels were classified on their star-ranking. They were classified based on their star-ranking (from 4 to 1 star) as provided by the state tourism board. There are ten 4* hotels, nineteen 3*, twenty one 2*, and thirty two had 1* classification. The summary of how the sample is determined with respect to the number of guests that participated in the study is depicted in the table below;

Table 1 Distribution of the sample

Star Rating	The hotels count	Workings Respondents per hotel
1-Star Hotels	32	32÷82 (384) =150. 5 150÷32= 5
2-Star Hotels	21	21÷82 (384) =98. 5 98÷21=5
3-Star Hotels	19	19÷82 (384) =89. 5 89÷19=5
4-Star Hotels	10	10÷82 (384) =49. 5 49÷10=5
	82	**383.99**

Source: Field Survey

As 82 hotels participated in the study with 384 guests as the study sample (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970), number of hotels in every group was divided by 82 (overall number hotels in their entire groups), the result is then multiplied is multiplied by 384 (sample size) so as to have the number of hotels in every class. The outcome was then expressed on a per-hotel format for each category divided by the number of hotels for each category. The outcome was then divided by the number of hotels in each group in order to have the exact guests from each hotel. In essence five guests from all the hotels were considered in the study.

The sample was then increased to 410 as buttressed by Saunders et al. (2007). Simple random sampling, and specifically mall intercept method (Nusairat et al., 2017; Abraham & Poria, 2019) was used in selecting the five respondents in each hotel. It is a systematic method using random interval in getting our prospective respondents who are the guests. They were approached prior to their departures from the hotels as every third respondent was solicited to partake, and when uninterested, the next guest was contacted.

The study's variables were adapted from previous studies. CE (So, et al., (2014), CS (Han, et al., 2008), and CL (de Leaniz & Bosque Rodríguez, 2016). Structured questionnaire was administered to the guests for the data collection on a 7 likert- scaling method, that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A total of 410 questionnaires were administered as the sample size was increased as buttressed by Saunders et al. (2007). In analysing the retrieved data, SPSS 24 along with Smart PLS were employed.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Assessment of Measurement Model

The construct reliability and validity were measured through Cronbach alpha coefficient and convergent validity (AVE). As presented and depicted in Table 2 and the figure 1, the Cronbach alpha coefficient (β) along with composite reliability (CR) are in excess of 0.9 which is far more than the average value of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2020). Equally, the value of the factor loading in all the items indicated they are above the accepted threshold figure of 0.6 (Hair, et al., 2017). The figure of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than the minimum threshold value of 0.50, hence it satisfied the required rule of thumb (Hair et al., 2020). In addition, Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to determine the discriminant validity as shown in Table 3. It indicated that, the square root of average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent constructs are greater than the value of related column and row portraying fulfilment of the required condition of discriminant validity (Hair, et al., 2017). Furthermore, Henseler et al. (2014) recommended the assessment of interrelation heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) to determine the discriminant validity. This approach shows the measure of actual correlation between the latent constructs under examination. The threshold value of 0.90 for HTMT and interval confidence level of the HTMT below have been suggested as the threshold value for confirming the discriminant validity through HTMT. Thus, table 4 reveals that HTMT criteria have been fulfilled for further analysis.

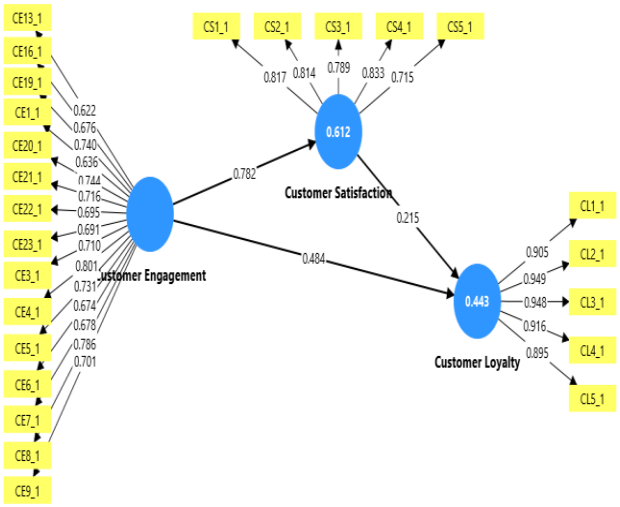


Figure 1 *Measurement Mode*

Table 2: Measurement Model

Constructs	Item	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Customer Engagement	CE13	0.622	0.929	0.933	0.502
	CE16	0.676			
	CE19	0.740			
	CE1	0.636			
	CE20	0.744			
	CE21	0.716			
	CE22	0.695			
	CE23	0.691			
	CE3	0.710			
	CE4	0.801			
	CE5	0.731			
	CE6	0.674			
	CE7	0.678			
	CE8	0.786			
	CE9	0.701			
Customer Loyalty	CL1	0.905	0.956	0.958	0.852
	CL2	0.949			
	CL3	0.948			
	CL4	0.916			
	CL5	0.895			
Customer Satisfaction	CS1	0.817	0.854	0.858	0.631
	CS2	0.814			
	CS3	0.789			

Table 3 Discriminant Validity
Fornell-Larcker criteria

	1	2	1
Customer Engagement (CE)	**0.708**		
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.652	**0.923**	
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.782	0.594	**0.795**

Table 4 Discriminant Validity
Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	1	2	3
Customer Engagement (CE)	-		
Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.683		
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.859	0.648	--

Structural Measurement

One more crucial benchmarks for assessing structural model is value of R^2 which is popularly known as the coefficient of determination (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al.,

2020; Ringle, et al., 2012). As suggested by Falk and Miller (1992), the R^2 for latent variable should be in excess of. Thus, the R^2 for this model customer loyalty (CL) and customer satisfaction (CS) are 0.541 and 0.588 and is considered appropriate. Therefore, the model is regarded as substantial. Equally predictive relevance of the model is tested and found satisfactory because table 4 indicated that value of predictive relevance (Q^2) of customer loyalty and customer satisfaction are greater than zero as recommended by (Hair et al., 2020). After confirming the coefficient determinant and predictive relevance of latent construct of the model. The researcher also tested effect size of the model. This is done to examine the influence of predictive variables on the criterion one (Hair et al., 2014). The result in this study for the latent construct revealed to be statistically significant. The result of coefficient determination, predictive relevance along with the effect size is presented in Table 5 below;

Table 5 Assessment of Coefficient Determination (R^2), Predictive Relevance (Q^2) and Effect Size (f^2)

Constructs	**R^2**	**Q^2**	**F^2**
CL	0.541	0.257	
CS	0.588	0.330	
CE -> CL			0.076
CE ->C			1.427
CS -> CL			0.214

Table 6 and figure 2 present the relationship between the predictor variable, mediating variable and the endogenous variable through the analysis with PLS SEM. The structural model discovered that there is significant direct relationship between customer engagement and customer loyalty (β =0.474; t = 15.728; p = 0.001). Hence, H1 is supported. Similarly customer engagement has a significant relationship with customer satisfaction (β = 0.792; t = 19.771; p = 0.001). In the same vein, customer satisfaction has a significant positive association with CL (β = 0.597; t = 6.691; p = 0.001), hence, H2 and H3 are supported. Lastly, the customer satisfaction mediates the link between CE and CL (β = 0.474; t = 5.0728; p = 0.001).

Table 6 Result of Hypothesis Testing

Paths	Mean	STDEV	T statist	P values	Decision
CE -> CL	0.474	0.081	5.728	0.001	Supported
CE -> CS	0.792	0.040	19.771	0.001	Supported
CS-> CL	0.597	0.089	6.691	0.001	Supported
CE-> CS -> CL	0.474	0.081	5.728	0.001	Supported

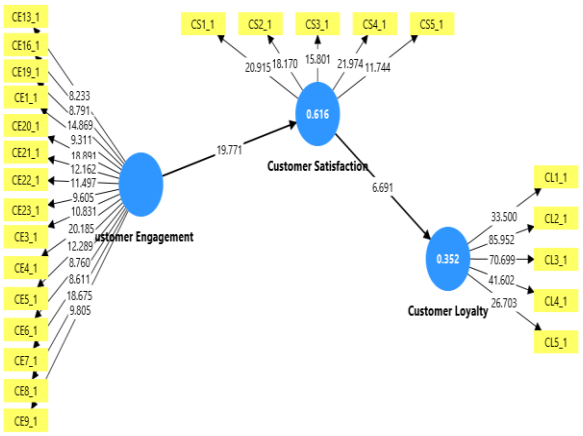


Figure 2
PLS Bootstrapping mediation relationship

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this work is to investigate the mediating influence CS on the connection between CE and CL in the Nigerian hotels context. Expectedly all the formulated hypotheses were supported. These also were in agreement with prior studies. For example, Khan et al, (2016) established that CE is a predictor of CS. That is, CE is an end result of persistent attention. Similarly, this study empirically confirms that CS significantly influences CL. CS reflects the gap between consumers' expectations and perceived service performance; when hotels meet or exceed guests' expectations, it results to repeat patronage, word-of-mouth referrals and by extension, CL. Thus, guests could be engrossed with the hotels they really love and passionate about, which in turn make them happy. Equally, empirical justifications of the influence of CS on CL were reaffirmed. Their pleasurable stay in their chosen hotels determined their loyalty. The hotels managers should make sure that they provide services that meet or exceed the requirements of their guests. This will ensure recurrence patronage, positive WOM advocacy and loyalty. With respect to the mediating role of CS in the relationship between CE and

loyalty, the statistical evidence confirms that CS significantly mediates this relationship.

Past empirical studies paid limited attention to the conceptualization along with validation of this construct (CE), perhaps because of its emerging nature and conceptual ambiguity; therefore, incorporating CE in this study contributes significantly to theory by explaining factors that drive loyalty. The study has made a methodologocal contribution by testing both the reliability as well as the validity of the variables in Nigeria. This work responded to Harrigan et al (2017)'s suggestion for further revalidating the CE scale model using random sampling in various non-western countries and cultures.

Today, governments, stakeholders, and the academic community are increasingly emphasizing the importance of the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly the hotel segment in the emerging countries. Thus, in the contemporary highly competitive and dynamic hotel setting, identifying emerging factors that promote and sustain guest loyalty is crucial. The findings indicate that enhancing, CE and satisfaction can effectively strengthen loyalty and provide practical guidance for hotel managers to improve their service delivery. Achieving customer satisfaction, which is a fundamental requirement for achieving CL, requires hotel management to adopt strategies that enhance guest satisfaction. This entails ensuring a pleasant guest experience and delivering services that meet or exceed guests' expectations for them to remain competitive. Hotels should also develop effective strategies to enhance CE, as it plays a vital role towards improving CS and CL. In this regard, hotel managers should strengthen their presence on various social media platforms to facilitate interaction, improve information accessibility, and promote guest satisfaction.

Despite its contributions, this work has some limitations that should be addressed in future studies. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design rather than a longitudinal approach, although variables such as satisfaction and loyalty may change over time due to factors like economic conditions or changes in management policies. Thus, incoming studies are to consider longitudinal method by employing qualitative interview in evaluating causality and lessen common method variance.

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