

Validation of CRM Variables on Customer Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Commitment in the Mid-Market Hotel Sector

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Abstract *The paper aims at developing a conceptual framework of customer loyalty and commitment on customer relationship management (CRM) in the mid-market segment of hotel sector. The investigation was conducted with sample size of 410 usable respondents in the four major states of eastern India, which represents mid markets for the hotel industry. SPSS-20; AMOS-20 were used to conduct the statistical analysis. The result indicated that variables of CRM i.e., service quality, employee behavior, relationship management, information technology, effective interaction management influence customer satisfaction positively but only three variables hospitality management, service quality and employee behavior have direct positive impact on customer loyalty or retention. It is also significant to learn from the empirical evidence that in the mid-market segment environment loyalty/retention leads to commitment. Further, the findings of the study revealed that variables of CRM play a significant role in customer retention and loyalty through satisfaction. Since commitment and loyalty are synonymous and positively associated with each other also evidenced by the results. The research further suggested managerial and practical implications in the mid-market segment of hotel sector.*

Keywords: *Customer Satisfaction, Customer Retention, Relationship Management, Commitment*

INTRODUCTION

Customer relationship management (CRM) has become an imperative and core integral tool for attracting, managing, and retaining customer of the hotel industry. As customers are becoming more price sensitive, less brand loyal, and more sophisticated with their ever-increasing expectations it has become strategically important for the hotel business to attract and increase guest patronage for longer period of time.

CRM is basically implemented in the form of technology solution and is expressed as 'information supported relationship marketing' (Ryals & Payne, 2001). It originates its root from relationship marketing with an objective of maintaining long term profitability by effective management of customer relationship (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 1991). According to Payne and Frow (2005), the philosophy of CRM has its base in relationship marketing that enables to

design, develop, and improve customer value, organisation profitability and shareholder value.

Studies indicated that application of CRM takes benefit of technology, innovations that enables to gather and process data regarding customer patterns and interpreting customer's behaviours, which would help firm to deliver value added service and products to individual customers (Chen & Popovich, 2003). Chen and Ching (2004) analyzed that customer service, customer orientation and information technology are the essential blocks for CRM success.

Long et al. (2012) studies indicated CRM objectives is to enhance profitability, customer satisfaction (CS) and customer loyalty. Its basic idea is on developing a firm relationship with customers to make them more loyal. Magasi (2016) argued relationship marketing leads to decrease of marketing costs and enhancement of CS and customer loyalty which increases customer retention levels.

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Similarly, Nwankwo (2013) indicated CRM positively influences customer retention. It is one of the important business approaches with its main objective to return back to the core and initial stage of the marketing. Richards & Jones (2008) reported that customer management process, customer-oriented strategies and technologies are all linked to the performance measures of CRM in customer centric firm. Author mentioned CRM as group of business activities pertaining to four dimensions - strategy, organisation, technology, and customer management, with its end goal as improved CS (Pozza et al., 2018).

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To develop a customer loyalty and commitment framework through CRM practices in hotel industry.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

CRM is one of the important strategies to manage customer and understanding customers as individuals rather than a unit of a group (Lambert, 2010). The CRM has its roots in the foundation of marketing strategy to satisfy customers in the best possible alternative option by a relational exchange process. The importance of CRM practices on CS was studied by Mithas et al. (2005) with 300 managers and the findings was concluded that there was strong association of CRM with CS. Sim et al. (2008) examined that hospitality as one of the antecedents of CS and retention and its consequences in the hotel industries. Results revealed that the customer retention immensely depends on the latent construct of CS.

Service quality (SQ) is one of the deciding factors on the basis of which, re-purchase decision is made by customer in order to maintain relationship with an organisation in long run. (Barksey & Labagh, 1992; Bitner et al., 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1992). Scanlon and McPhail (2000) stated service relationship among customers and service providers is of critical importance to the organisation. Research indicated significant impact of SQ on dining satisfaction specially in the service seeker segment (Yu'ksel, 2002; Namkung & Jang's, 2008). Similar results was shown by Ladhari et al. (2008) indicating SQ as antecedent of dining satisfaction. Gee et al. (2008) reported that SQ has positive impact on customer satisfaction. Authors also indicated SQ has positive significant impact with customer loyalty, CS, which influences profitability of firms. Hanley (2008) emphasized SQ can be met by meeting customer expectation of good service with wide range of products, providing good quality with affordable price and in handling customer grievances. Similar results was found by Ming (2013) where SQ efficiency is determined by proficient skill, attitude, and service time management. Empirical studies suggested that service delivery process, emphasize central and relational

service quality are related to general service quality and CS (Dimitriades, 2006).

Brown and Gulycz (2002) stated interaction management as organisational willingness to make firm interaction and relations with its customers with distribution channels and touch points. Literature review revealed interaction management is implemented by getting customers feedback and attractively interacting with the customers through social media (Lindgreen et al., 2006; Peppers et al., 1999). The growth in information technology has supported in generating customer data base leading to effective CRM strategies (Anshari et al., 2018). Relationship management (RM) must be combined with information technology to facilitate various functions and develop one to one individual relationship with the customers (Shoemaker, 2001).

RM is a mode of interaction that leads into relations among two parties. Brown and Gulycz (2002) revealed achievement of RM is done through monitoring of relationship process such as mechanisms, procedures, strategies, and sequence of activities through which services are delivered to end customers. Also, major performance indicators are retention rate, customers value and to provide satisfaction to the customers by the organisation. Lindgreen et al. (2006) mentioned RM can be established through commitment in convincing customers that their grievances and feedbacks are taken care seriously. The most essential activity of RM is monitoring the process of service delivery and grievance handling procedure (Brown & Gulyez, 2002). The importance of RM lies in the fact that it costs five times more to attract new customer as compared to retention of the existing customer (Christopher et al., 1991; Filiatrault & Lapierre, 1997). Studies reflected CS as consequence of RM (Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). The studies also suggest success of CRM depends more on RM. The recent research by Izogo (2016) confirmed that commitment is one of the important dimensions of RM. Furthermore, commitment helps in building long term relationship between parties. Extensive work by (Beaton & Beaton, 1995; Carbarino & Johnson, 1995) reported commitment is effective in influencing customer's decisions and in establishing mutual benefits and long-run relationships. Hyun (2010) identified the factors that influence RM and customer loyalty in service industry. Arbatt and Russell (1999) stated that high levels of customer loyalty are supported by successful implementation of CRM.

Hanley (2008) reported if effective interaction management aligns with organisational behaviour and value, which would strengthen the connection of the customers with the firm. Author also stated positive effect of effective interaction is conveyed by enhancing quick response to customer and ensuring friendly behaviour of employees and its respect towards customers.

CS has no doubts became as a crucial marketing priority and determine repeat purchase (Sirgy & Tyagi, 1986;

Joaquin & Magdalena, 2009). Homburg et al. (2006) reported that satisfied customers help in generating customer loyalty. Literature review revealed positive and significant association between CS and customer retention (Bolton, 1998; Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Different authors indicated that in high standard and luxury hotel segment, CS was much higher among repeated guests (Barsky & Lin, 2004). CS had received a significant attention in literature review, because CS helps in attainment of increased levels of customer retention. Intensive review by various authors revealed CRM practices has wide impact on CS and customer retention (Rahimi & Gunlu, 2016; Rahimi et al., 2017). Santouridis and Veraki (2017) investigated close associations between practices of CRM and CS. Authors mainly focussed on mediation effect of RM on CRM practices and CS and found positive and significant effect of CRM on CS. Similar study was also undertaken by Hassan et al. (2015) showing positive and significant effect of CRM on CS. Authors also indicated CRM enhances productivity, market share and higher CS leads to improved customer loyalty. The application of CRM practices leads to customer loyalty and retention (Nikolis, 2009).

In the earlier research works by various authors on commitment and loyalty relationship, still confusion persists, whether both are synonymous, or one is the antecedent of the other. Oliver (1999) describes loyalty as “A deeply held psychological commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing”. Few authors (Assael, 1987; Buchanan, 1985) stated that both loyalty and commitment are synonymous and can be used as substitution. In addition to them, authors such as (Kyle et al., 2004; Backman, 1991; Backman & Crompton, 1991) identified that commitment is synonymous with loyalty but at the same time few authors have different views that commitment is antecedent of loyalty (Dick & Basu, 1994; Oliva et al., 1992). Rather (2018) explored an empirical study in Indian context and revealed customer experience has positive impact on customer loyalty.

In the present paper, based on the literature review it is attempted to investigate the relationship between loyalty and commitment in the purview of CRM. The purpose of this study is therefore to develop a customer loyalty and retention framework through CRM practices by identifying and analysing the causal attributions leading to effective CRM in the hotel industry of Jharkhand in India.

DATA ANALYSIS

The investigation was directed on the mid segment market of hotel in the eastern part of India comprising of four major states namely Orissa, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar. Multi-organize simple random sampling technique was utilized

to choose the samples. Every hotel was randomly selected, and 15 arbitrary numbers were generated electronically. The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section A deals with demographic profile and section B consists of 45 questions corresponding to the hypotheses and related with the development of customer loyalty and commitment framework. Section-B has nine parts. First part was designed to measure hospitality management, second part for service quality, third part for relationship management, fourth part was to assess employee behaviour, fifth part for information technology, sixth part was to assess effective interaction management, seventh part was to assess customer satisfaction, eighth part to assess commitment and ninth part to assess customer loyalty or retention. All the questions were prepared on Likert-Rating scale. It required the respondents to express their opinion on degree of agreement or disagreement on the sequential series of statements about the various stimulus objects.

Primarily sampling frame was developed from the database procured online. In each state, hotel administrators from the top five hotels were selected as the sample for the study. A total of 800 questionnaires were distributed among various hotel guests through the reception desk. 560 responses were retrieved. Out of which, 410 usable questionnaires were retrieved which was approximately 41%.

Sample size was calculated by the formula and the calculated sample size was 384.

$$n = \left(\frac{ZS}{E} \right)^2 \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

where,

Z = standardized value corresponding to a confidence level;

S = sample standard deviation or an estimate of population standard deviation; and

E = acceptance level of error he has taken the following values

Taking,

Z = 1.96 (at 95% Confidence level);

S = 0.6 (assumption based on past studies of consumer behaviour); and

E = 0.06 (assumption based on past studies of consumer behaviour).

The reliability test using Cornbach’s alpha was determined indicating the reliability of data (<0.7) (Table 1). To access the validity of the data confirmatory factor analysis was performed. Validity decides if the scale genuinely measures what it was expected to quantify. Two factors are evaluated for the confirmation of validity viz. convergent validity and discriminant validity. These were measured

by assessing the standardized factor loading, Maximum shared variance (MSV), Average shared variance (ASV) and Average variance extracted (AVE). The standardized factor loading has surpassed the identified cutoff of 0.50 and was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Composite reliability is greater than AVE and its value is greater than 0.5 value in all the cases (Table 2), indicating establishment of convergent validity. CS has (AVE) 0.445 but since CR is 0.861 it is acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Malhotra & Dash, 2011). For discriminant validity, there are three criteria. First, MSV must be less than AVE, secondly, ASV must be less than AVE and finally square root of AVE must be greater than inter-construct correlation. Table 2 indicates that all the values of MSV and ASV are less than their respective AVE values. Further, the square root value of AVE of all the variables are greater than inter-construct correlation values (Table 2). Hence, discriminant validity is also established.

Convergent validity is the degree of association between the observed variables of a factor and discriminant validity is the extent to which a measure does not correlate with other constructs from which it is supposed to differ. For the confirmation of convergent validity there are two criteria, first the composite reliability should be greater than AVE and simultaneously, AVE must also be greater than 0.5. It can be seen from the results that composite reliability is greater than AVE and AVE is greater than 0.5 value in all the cases (Table 1 & 2). Hence, in this study, the convergent validity is established.

Table 1: Reliability Tests Summary

	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability
Hospitality Management (HM)	0.937	0.943
Service Quality (SQ)	0.939	0.938
Relationship Management (RM)	0.944	0.940
Employee Behavior (EB)	0.934	0.943
Information Technology (IT)	0.938	0.932
Effective Interaction Management (EIM)	0.94	0.932
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.918	0.861
Commitment (CO)	0.860	0.953
Customer Retention/Customer Loyalty (CR)	0.862	0.952

Table 2: Test for Validity

Latent Variables	AVE	ASV	MSV	RAVE
Hospitality Management (HM)	0.765	0.010	0.023	0.874
Service Quality (SQ)	0.752	0.010	0.023	0.867
Relationship Management (RM)	0.756	0.100	0.672	0.869
Latent Variables	AVE	ASV	MSV	RAVE

Employee Behavior (EB)	0.766	0.010	0.031	0.875
Information Technology (IT)	0.732	0.115	0.490	0.856
Effective Interaction Management (EIM)	0.732	0.026	0.066	0.855
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.445	0.174	0.379	0.667
Commitment (CO)	0.807	0.157	0.579	0.898
Customer Retention (CR)/ Customer Loyalty (CL)	0.797	0.151	0.546	0.893

AVE: Average variance extracted; ASV: Average shared variance; MSV: Maximum shared variance; RAVE: Square root of average variance extracted.

STRUCTURAL MODEL EVALUATION: GOODNESS OF FIT ASSESSMENT

In the present study the Relative/Normed Chi-Square (χ^2/df) is 1.170, Normed Fit Index (NFI) 0.982, Tucker-Lewis's coefficient (TLI) 0.996, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) 0.997, Root Mean Residual (RMR) is 0.064, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) 0.984, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0.020. Goodness of Fit Assessment have been used in assessing the overall model fit. All the values are above the accepted range.

Table 3: Summary of Model Fit Statistics of the Re-Specified Customer Loyalty Model

Goodness of Fit Indices	Recommended Range of Good Model Fit
P	0.254
χ^2/df	1.170
NFI	0.982
CFI	0.997
TLI	0.996
GFI	0.984
RMSEA	0.020
RMR	0.064

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

In hypotheses testing, 95% confidence level was adopted as the cut-off of significance. SPSS-20; AMOS-20 were used to conduct the statistical analysis for examining the developed hypotheses. Table 4 exhibits unstandardized (B), standardized coefficients (β), standard error (S.E.), critical ratios (C.R.) and significance levels (P-Value) of the relationship between constructs in the model. The summary of hypothesis testing is indicated in Table 5. Fig. 1 reveals the conceptual Model of Customer Relationship Framework for mid-market hotel sector.

Table 4: Results of Maximum Likelihood Estimates of the Proposed Model

			B	β	S.E.	C.R.	P
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	<--	Information Technology (IT)	0.254	0.301	0.044	5.77	***
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	<--	Effective Interaction Management (EIM)	0.312	0.362	0.044	7.02	***
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	<--	Relationship Management (RM)	0.299	0.351	0.041	7.20	***
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	<--	Service Quality (SQ)	0.251	0.307	0.039	6.43	***
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	<--	Employee Behavior (EB)	0.205	0.247	0.04	5.08	***
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	<--	Hospitality Management (HM)	0.204	0.252	0.038	5.36	***
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Customer Satisfaction (CS)	1.16	1.195	0.167	6.94	***
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Service Quality (SQ)	0.149	0.189	0.031	4.89	***
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Relationship Management (RM)	0.109	0.132	0.033	3.34	***
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Hospitality Management (HM)	0.096	0.122	0.031	3.14	0.002
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Employee Behavior (EB)	0.08	0.1	0.033	2.42	0.015
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Information Technology (IT)	0.024	0.03	0.037	0.66	0.509
Customer Retention (CR)/Loyalty (CL)	<--	Effective Interaction Management (EIM)	0.056	0.067	0.034	1.62	0.106
Commitment (CO)	<--	Customer Satisfaction (CS)	0.013	0.013	0.108	0.12	0.907
Commitment (CO)	<--	Service Quality (SQ)	0.015	0.019	0.02	0.76	0.445
Commitment (CO)	<--	Relationship Management (RM)	-0.01	-0.014	0.02	-0.59	0.553
Commitment (CO)	<--	Hospitality Management (HM)	0.01	0.012	0.017	0.55	0.585
Commitment (CO)	<--	Employee Behavior (EB)	-0.01	-0.008	0.017	-0.37	0.711
Commitment (CO)	<--	Information Technology (IT)	-0.01	-0.008	0.017	-0.38	0.707
Commitment (CO)	<--	Effective Interaction Management (EIM)	0.01	0.012	0.019	0.54	0.586
Commitment (CO)	<--	Customer Retention (CR)/ Loyalty (CL)	0.974	0.962	0.073	13.38	***

B: Unstandardized Path Coefficient; β: Standardized Path Coefficient; S.E.: Standard Error; C.R.: Critical Ratio; P: Level of Significance.

*** Significance at 0.001 level.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Hospitality management was observed to have positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta_{HM} \rightarrow CS = 0.252; p < 0.001$) and customer retention or customer loyalty ($\beta_{HM} \rightarrow CR/CL = 0.122; p < 0.001$). $B=0.204$ for hospitality management in the prediction of customer satisfaction is significantly different from zero at the 0.001 level (two-tailed) and the probability of getting a CR as large as 5.364 and 3.138 in absolute value is less than 0.001 in customer satisfaction and customer retention/customer loyalty respectively.
- Service quality was observed to have positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta_{SQ} \rightarrow CS = 0.307; p < 0.001, B=0.251, CR=6.428$) and customer retention or customer loyalty ($\beta_{SQ} \rightarrow CR/CL = 0.189; p < 0.001, B=0.149, CR=4.886$).
- Similarly, employee behavior was observed to have positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction $CS = 0.247; p < 0.001, B=0.205, CR=5.08$) and customer retention or customer loyalty ($\beta_{EB} \rightarrow CR/CL = 0.1; p < 0.05, B=0.08, CR=2.424$).
- Relationship management was observed to have positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta_{RM} \rightarrow CS = 0.351; p < 0.001, B=0.299, CR=7.198$).
- Information technology was observed to have positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta_{IT} \rightarrow CS = 0.301; p < 0.001, B=0.254, CR=5.773$).
- Again, it has been observed that effective interaction management have positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction ($\beta_{EIM} \rightarrow CS = 0.362; p < 0.001, B=0.312, CR=7.023$).
- Customer satisfaction was observed to be the significant predictors having positive impact on customer retention or customer loyalty ($\beta_{HM} \rightarrow CR/CL = 0.122; p < 0.001, B=0.204, CR=3.138$) and customer commitment ($\beta_{CS} \rightarrow CR/CL = 1.195; p < 0.001, B=1.157, CR=6.944$).
- Customer retention and loyalty had a significant impact on customer commitment ($\beta_{CR/CL} \rightarrow CO = 0.962; p < 0.001, B=0.974, CR=13.383$).

Fig. 1 reveals that that all the variables of CRM service quality, employee behavior, relationship management, information technology, effective interaction management influence customer satisfaction positively but only three variables hospitality management, service quality

and employee behavior have direct positive impact on customer loyalty and retention. One of the major findings and novelty of the present research reveals that loyal customers are more committed towards the hotel sectors

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Particulars	Result	P
H1	Hospitality Management has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H2	Hospitality Management has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.585
H3	Hospitality Management has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	0.002
H4	Service Quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H5	Service Quality has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.445
H6	Service Quality has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H7	Relationship management has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H8	Relationship management has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.553
H9	Relationship management has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand	Accepted	***
H10	Employee behavior has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H11	Employee behavior has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.711
H12	Employee behavior has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	0.015
H13	Information technology has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H14	Information technology has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.707
H15	Information technology has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.509
H16	Effective interaction management has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H17	Effective interaction management has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.586
H18	Effective interaction management has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.106
H19	Customer satisfaction has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Rejected	0.907
H20	Customer satisfaction has a significant impact on customer retention/customer loyalty in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***
H21	Customer retention/customer loyalty has a significant impact on customer commitment in hotel sector of Jharkhand.	Accepted	***

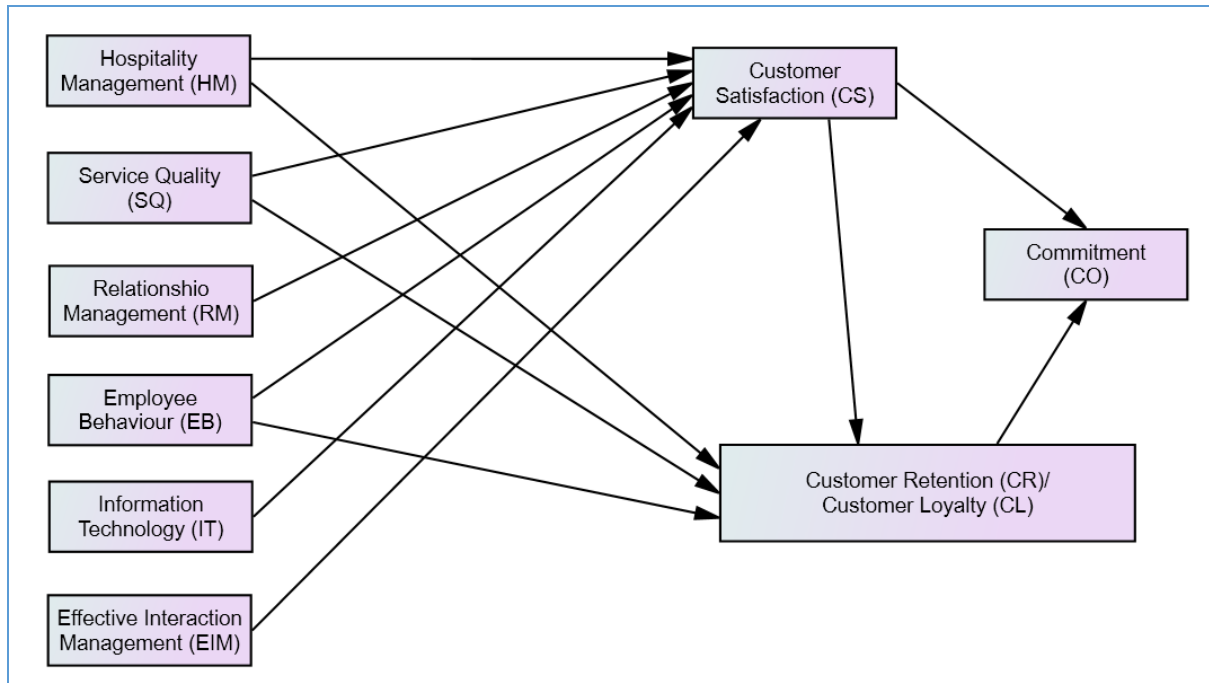


Fig. 1: Conceptual Model of Customer Relationship Management Framework for Mid-Market Hotel Sector

CONCLUSION

The present study develops a final conceptual framework that determines the drivers of four phases of customer retention/loyalty and commitment in the hotel sector. The model includes seven predictor variables (hospitality management, service quality, employee behavior, relationship management, information technology, effective interaction management and customer satisfaction) and two criteria variables (commitment and customer retention and loyalty).

The present research has provided empirical evidence for the development of customers' repurchasing behavior involving hospitality management, service quality, employee behavior, relationship management, information technology, effective interaction management and customer satisfaction. The study has attempted to explore the dimensions of CRM. This paper seeks to gain an insight into the formation of customer loyalty/retention and commitment in the hospitality sector. The paper attempted to integrate extant findings related to the structure and antecedents of the CRM construct. It is revealed that loyalty and commitment could be predicted by hospitality management, service quality, employee behavior, relationship management, information technology, effective interaction management and customer satisfaction. It is also evident that all the variables of CRM service quality, employee behavior, relationship management, information technology, effective interaction management influence customer satisfaction positively but only three variables hospitality management, service quality and employee

behavior have direct positive impact on customer loyalty and retention.

Since, commitment and loyalty are synonymous and positively associated with each other, so both variables can be used interchangeably which is evident in the present empirical study.

Therefore, the study suggests that customers can be segmented according to the dimensions of CRM. Different marketing strategies are required for the customers who are at different at CRM dimensions. Different marketing programs such as customized service; value-added service; loyalty bonus; loyalty rewards and so forth can be created and implemented for the specific groups of customers according to their levels.

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