The Mediating Role of Brand Image in The Relationship Between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty in The Hotel Industry of Aqaba /Jordan

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*Abstract**:** The purpose of this study is to study the quality of service on customer loyalty and the role of the brand as an intermediary variable in hotels in Aqaba/Jordan and to understand the reasons behind customers' loyalty to hotel brands. Data was collected from five-star hotels in Aqaba and 81% of participants responded. Data analysis revealed that high quality services increase customer loyalty, which in turn increases brand loyalty. Moreover, strong customer loyalty is directly related to a strong brand.*

*Keywords:** Service quality, Brand Image, Customer loyalty, Hotel Industry of Aqaba*

1. Introduction

In today's global market, competition among companies is fierce, and they are continually seeking ways to anticipate service quality, understand the value perceived by customers, and enhance their company's image in order to achieve customer loyalty (Srivastava & Sharma, 2013). Nowadays, many companies focus on increasing customer loyalty by creating a strong brand image among consumers, as it can greatly influence corporate decisions and consumer behavior. (Crosby & Stephens, 1987). Shi et al. (2014) Research has found that a positive relationship exists between better profitability and higher service quality. Also Blery et al. (2009) find a positive relationship between service quality and repurchase intention.

Customer loyalty and satisfaction are essential for gaining new customers and retaining old ones in any business, particularly in the service sector. (Priyo et al., 2019). Managers in the hospitality industry believe that pleasing customers can lead to increased revenue. However, most research has shown that simply having satisfied customers does not guarantee their loyalty or future use of a company's services. Customer loyalty is considered more vital for a business's success than customer satisfaction. Additionally, a company's reputation can significantly impact marketing efforts and can have both positive and negative effects. Zeithaml et al., (1996) defined brand image as the ability to shape the customer's perception of the products or services offered. The hotel industry's brand image is considered to be independent of the travel market, and it is considered as a crucial variable in determining customer loyalty (Jiang & Zhang, 2016).

As a result, it can be said that a positive image leads to customer satisfaction, while a negative image leads to dissatisfaction. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between the quality of services provided by Aqaba /Jordan hotel industry and the factors that affect consumer loyalty and role of Brand Image perception. The hotel industry in Jordan is rapidly growing, yet until recently, it has received little attention in terms of research. The study will examine the level of customer service provided by businesses in the hotel industry in Aqaba /Jordan. As there are limited studies on this topic and service quality is critical to the hotel industry, this research is significant. The findings of this study will be beneficial for both academics and practitioners. Academics can use the results to support existing findings and guide future research, while practitioners can use the findings to enhance their profitability by implementing new strategies in areas that need improvement.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 . Service Quality and Customer loyalty

Service quality, as defined in management and marketing literature, refers to the degree to which customers' perceptions of a service align with or surpass their expectations (Selnes, 1993; Zeithaml, Berry, et al., 1996). In recent decades, researchers in the field of service marketing and management have placed significant focus on the topic of service quality (Jiang & Zhang, 2016; Oh & Kim, 2017; Tamwatin et al., 2015). Additionally, significant attention has been devoted to understanding the concept of service quality and developing measurement scales for it (Kitapci et al., 2014; Orel & Kara, 2014; Shi et al., 2014). Specifically, the various elements of service quality have been thoroughly examined across different industries, including mobile banking, health management, telecommunications, education, hospitality, and tourism.

Service quality is a multifaceted concept and it encompasses several dimensions, each of which plays a different role in terms of overall service quality and its impact on patients' satisfaction. (Paul et al., 2016). Service quality has become a critical factor in determining customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth communication. Instead of focusing on cognitive outcomes, customer satisfaction is widely accepted as an effective measure of the value of a product or service to customers. (Khan & Fasih, 2014; Yang et al., 2018).

Furthermore, consumer satisfaction can serve as a tool for evaluating the current and potential performance of businesses, as it leads to customer loyalty, recommendations, and repeat purchases (Boadi et al., 2019; Meesala & Paul, 2018). Likewise, another recent study by Anabila (2019) Research has also shown a positive correlation between customer satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat purchase intentions. Therefore, in the hospital industry, customer satisfaction is a crucial aspect for maintaining a sustainable business and building long-term relationships with customers. (Aftab & Razzaq, 2016; Anabila, 2019; Chotivanich, 2014).

Kandampully and Suhartanto, (2000) Researchers have defined customer loyalty as the tendency of customers to repurchase from the same service provider whenever possible and to recommend or maintain a positive attitude towards the service provider. Customer loyalty can be demonstrated through a customer's likelihood of repeat business with a particular retailer, preference for a specific brand, and word-of-mouth recommendations. (Molinillo et al., 2022). As customer loyalty is one of the most crucial factors for companies to increase their market share, it is an important area for further research. (Jenneboer et al., 2022). While, attitudinal loyalty refers to the customer's intention to not only repurchase but also recommend the brand or service to others, which is a strong indication of customer loyalty (Bowen & McCain, 2015). Several empirical studies have found a strong correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Additionally, Brodie et al. (2009) Research on service quality suggests that an increase in service quality leads to a higher likelihood of positive customer repurchasing behavior.

2.2. Brand Image and Customer loyalty

One of the company's most valuable assets is its brand. According to ,Keller (1993) "brand is reflected by the brand links kept by consumers in consumer memory." Simply said, a brand's image is essentially what a consumer thinks about when the brand is presented to him. As a result, these connections are developing in the minds of customers as a result of the direct experiences they have with service. Following these experiences, customers draw conclusions by comparing those findings to their prior interactions with the company and the predetermined associations. and brand image are positively correlated, according to a large body of empirical research (Selnes, 1993; Zins, 2001). However, some studies have shown that service quality and customer happiness have a favorable impact on brand image.

2.3. The Relationship between Services Quality and Customers Loyalty:

According to Rahim (2012) definition, every aspect of service quality (reliability, Student happiness has a strong association with the four A's (Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, and Responsiveness) and overall service quality. According to Malik et al. (2012)customer happiness, which in turn encourages consumer repurchase, increases the relationship between the quality of the service offered and the customers. According to Chinomona et al.(2013) brand service qualification has served as the model's starting point and has a direct impact on customer satisfaction. According to Tabaku and Kushi (2013), brand preference is ultimately anticipated to be influenced by brand trust and brand satisfaction. According to Kumowal et al. (2016) and Vasumathi and

Subashini 92015), consumer loyalty requires customer happiness. According to Shala and Balaj (2016) the overall quality of the customer experience on e-commerce platform is highly important.

The quality of services offered is adequate when the customer's expectations and perceptions of the level of service match, and unacceptable when they don't. Product and service quality, according to Naeimavi & Gaskari (2016), influence perceived value, customer happiness, and loyalty. Customers will be more satisfied with better service, which encourages innovative customer commitment. According to Dimyati & Subagio (2016)the company exploits product distinction to create value and establish an icon. According to Alnaser et al. (2017)returning customers show their devotion by making further purchases from a business. Customer loyalty to the bank can be effectively maintained by providing high-quality service.

In conclusion, it appears that there is a connection between service quality and brand loyalty based on the previous review mentioned above. Some researchers claimed there is an indirect association between service quality and brand loyalty, while others claimed there is a direct relationship.
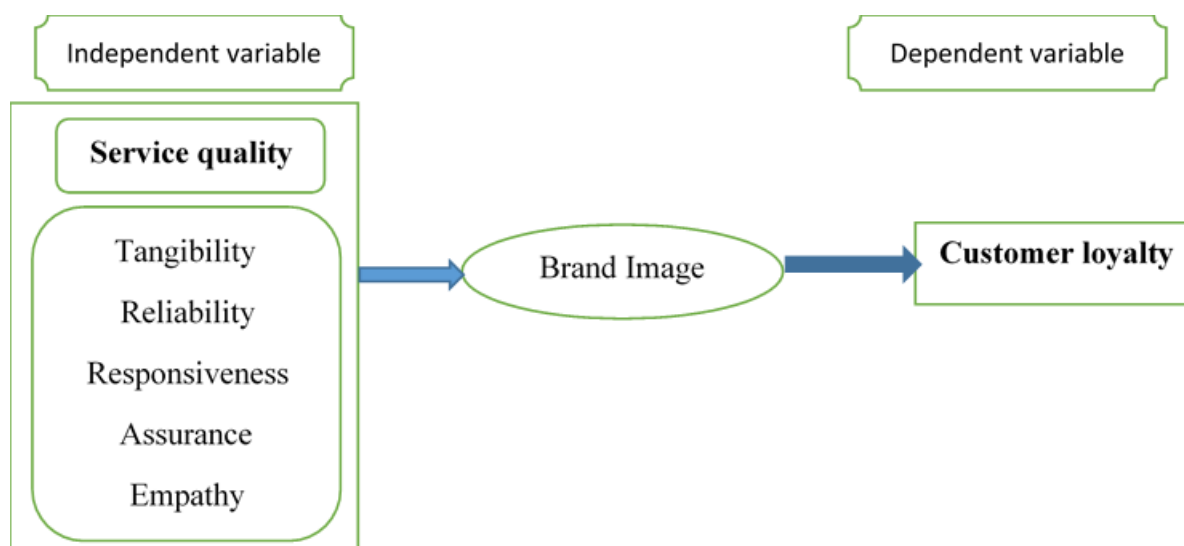
3. Model study:

Fig. 1 Sources: The model is developed based on the following previous studies: independent variables (Aaker, 1991; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman, et. al., 1988; Akbaba, 2006). Mediating Variables: (Oliver, 1997; Bansal and Taylor, 2002). Dependent variable:

4. Hypothesis:

H1: Service quality sub-variables (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) do affect Customer loyalty in Hotel Industry of Amman, Jordan, at ($\propto \leq 0.05$).
H2 :Brand Image do affect Customer loyalty in Hotel Industry of Amman, Jordan, at ($\propto \leq 0.05$).
H3 :Brand Image Mediate the relationship between Services Quality and Customers Loyalty at a morale level (a ≤ 0.05).

5. Research Methodology

5.1. Procedure and sample
Respondents to questionnaires in Jordan's Five Star Hotels provided the data for this study. information on all fourteen of Jordan's five-star hotels. 500 questionnaires in all were circulated; 346 were collected, and 314 were judged to be useful for further study with a response rate of 63%. Table reports the demographic information from the respondents (Table 1)

TABLE I:. Demographic Data for respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	male	18	60 %
	female	12	40 %
Age	20-less 30	9	30 %
	30- less 40	12	40 %
	40-less 50	6	20 %
	50 or more	3	10 %
Qualification	inter diploma	7	23.3 %
	higher diploma	4	13.3 %
	bachelor	7	23.3 %
	master	7	23.3 %
	phd	5	16.7 %
Experience	1-2	9	30 %
	3-4	12	40 %
	5-6	5	16.7 %
	7 - up	4	13.3 %

As shown in Table 1, the demographic profile of the respondents for this study revealed that the sample consisted of more males, most of them experienced, 90% of them are more than 35 years old, and 88% of them are graduates.

5.2. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, and the mean, standard deviation, percentage, Pearson correlation coefficient, T-test, and regression were computed using SPSS. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the instrument's internal consistency. Table 2, has demonstrated remarkable consistency, with values between 0.718 and 0.842 > 0.50 (Wu, 2005). The instrument's reliability throughout the board is above 70%, and the overall reliability is above 90% > 0.60. As a result, it can be said that the instrument employed in this investigation was trustworthy and consistent.

TABLE II: The values of reliability coefficient by Cronbach's alpha

	Factors					
	tangibility	reliability	responsiveness	assurance	empathy	The Service quality as a whole
Cronbach's alpha	.836	.716	.747	.765	.824	.868
Mean	3.850	3.589	3.717	3.700	3.967	3.754
Std. Deviation	0.114	0.118	0.077	0.118	0.095	0.152
N of Items	4	3	4	3	2	16

H1: **Service quality** sub-variables (tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy) do affect **Brand Image** in Hotel Industry of Amman, Jordan, at ($\propto \leq 0.\,05$).

TABLE III : Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.800ᵃ	.641	.628	.663

Table (3) shows that the value of the correlation coefficient between the independent variable (Service quality) and the mediate variable (Brand Image) was (0.8), the value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) (0.641), and that the value of the adjusted determination coefficient (Adjusted R^2) (0.628) which indicates that the independent variable (Service quality) was able to explain (62.8%) of the changes in the mediate variable (Brand Image).

TABLE IV: ANOVAa

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.974	1	21.974	49.915	.000
	Residual	12.326	28	.440		
	Total	34.300	29			

It is noted from table (4) that the value (F = 49.915) and statistically significant (0.00) is less than the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), Thus, a simple linear regression model is suitable for measuring the causal relationship between the independent variable (Service quality) and the mediate variable (Brand Image).

TABLE V: The coefficients for simple linear regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.424	.735		-1.936	.063
	Service quality	1.365	.193	.800	7.065	.000

* Statistically significant at the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$)

The preceding table (5) shows the following: There is a statistical significance for the constant of the simple linear regression equation, where the value of (T = -1.936) and statistical not significance (0.063), which is greater than the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \geq 0.05$), which indicates that there is significance for the constant of the simple linear regression equation that reached (-1.424) .

There is a statistical significance for the coefficient of simple linear regression equation of Standardized Coefficients and Unstandardized Coefficients related to the independent variable (Service quality), where the value (T = 7.065) and statistical significance (0.00), which is lower than the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), which shows the impact of the effect of Service quality on Brand Image. Thus, there is significant significance for the coefficient of simple linear regression equation, which was (0.800) and Unstandardized 1.365).

H2 :**Service quality** do affect **Customer loyalty** in Hotel Industry of Amman, Jordan, at ($\propto \leq 0.05$).

TABLE VI: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.559	.312	.288	1.030

Table (6) shows that the value of the correlation coefficient between the independent variable (Service quality) and the dependent variable (Customer loyalty) was (0.559), the value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) (0.312), and that the value of the adjusted determination coefficient (Adjusted R^2) (0.288) which indicates that the independent variable (Service quality) was able to explain (28.8%) of the changes in the dependent variable (Customer loyalty).

TABLE VII: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	13.485	1	13.485	12.707	.001
1	Residual	29.715	28	1.061		
	Total	43.200	29			

It is noted from table (7) that the value (F = 12.707) and statistically significant (0.001) is less than the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), Thus, a simple linear regression model is suitable for measuring the causal relationship between the independent variable (Service quality) and the dependent variable (Customer loyalty) .

TABLE VIII: The coefficients for simple linear regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.414	1.142		-.363	.720
	Service quality	1.069	.300	.559	3.565	.001

The preceding table (8) shows the following: There is a statistical significance for the constant of the simple linear regression equation, where the value of (T = -0.363) and statistical not significance (0.72), which is greater than the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \geq 0.05$), which indicates that there is significance for the constant of the simple linear regression equation that reached (-0.414) .

There is a statistical significance for the coefficient of simple linear regression equation of Standardized Coefficients and Unstandardized Coefficients related to the independent variable (Service quality), where the value (T = 3.565) and statistical significance (0.001), which is lower than the level of statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), which shows the impact of the effect of Service quality on Customer loyalty. Thus, there is significant significance for the coefficient of simple linear regression equation, which was (0.559) and Unstandardized (1.069).

H3 :Brand Image effects on the Customer loyalty in the presence of the Services Quality at a morale level (a ≤ 0.05).

TABLE IX Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.632	.399	.355	.980

Table (9) shows that the value of the correlation coefficient between the mediate variable (Brand Image) and the dependent variable (Customer loyalty) in the presence of the Services Quality was (0.632), the value of the coefficient of determination (R^2) (0.399), and that the value of the adjusted determination coefficient (Adjusted R^2) (0.355) which indicates that the mediate variable was able to explain (35.5%) of the changes in the dependent variable in the presence of the Services Quality.

TABLE X: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	17.252	2	8.626	8.976	.001
1	Residual	25.948	27	.961		
	Total	43.200	29			

It is noted from table (10) that the value (F = 8.976) and statistically significant (0.001) is less than the level of statistical significance (α ≤ 0.05), Thus, a simple linear regression model is suitable for measuring the causal relationship between the mediate variable (**Brand Image**) and the dependent variable (**Customer loyalty**) in the presence of the Services Quality.

TABLE XI: The coefficients for simple linear regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.201	1.157		-1.038	.308
	Brand image	-.553	.279	-.493	-1.980	.058
	Service quality	1.024	.476	.953	3.830	.001

The preceding table (11) shows the following: There is a statistical significance for the constant of the simple linear regression equation, where the value of (T = -1.038) and statistical not significance (0.308), which is greater than the level of statistical significance (α ≥ 0.05), which indicates that there is not significance for the constant of the simple linear regression equation that reached (-1.201).
There is a statistical significance for the coefficient of simple linear regression equation of Standardized Coefficients and Unstandardized Coefficients related to the mediate variable (brand image) in the presence of the Services Quality, where the value (T = -1.98) and statistical not significance (0.058), which is greater than the level of statistical significance (α ≥ 0.05).

Figure No. (2) shows the type of effect and the type of mediation between variables
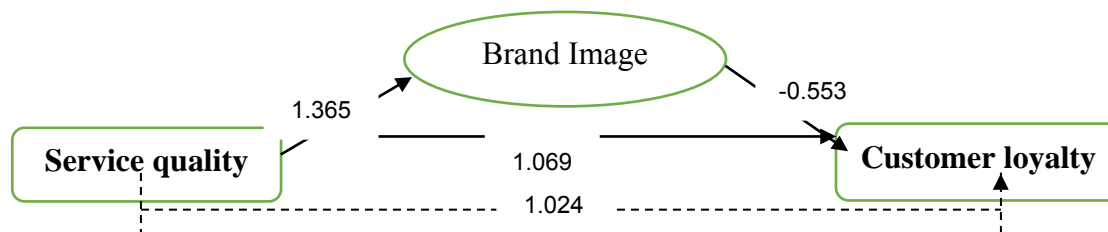
We note that the decline factor of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable of the presence of the intermediate variable is less than the direct relationship between the independent variable and the dependent and represents a statistical function at 0.001. This means that the medium mediates the relationship in a holistic manner.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that elements, variables and dimensions were strongly implemented in five-star hotels in Aqaba, Jordan. This indicates that the management in these hotels is interested in providing the best services and quality. Results also indicate that all brand loyalty dimensions are substantially related to one another and that all service quality sub-variables are strongly related to one another. Finally, there is a substantial correlation between all quality service sub-variables and brand loyalty dimensions. As a result of their close relationships, all sub-variables should be taken into account by management at five-star hotels in Aqaba, Jordan.
Finally, the findings demonstrate that brand loyalty of five-star hotels in Aqaba, Jordan, is influenced by service quality. Brand loyalty is influenced by all of the sub-variables of service quality, with tangibility having the greatest impact. Responsiveness, responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and assurance follow, in that order. In order to increase customer loyalty, hotels focus on all of the sub-variables that affect service quality.

7. Recommendations

This investigation was conducted on five-star accommodations in Aqaba, Jordan. The impact of their findings was favorable. The researcher advises that the experiment's findings be shared with other hotel classes in Jordan and abroad. The study advises include all of the service quality sub-variables in their plan and putting them into practice on a regular basis. The study suggests enhancing each sub-variable of service quality together because they are intricately connected.

The study recommends ongoing studies on all service quality variables for all staff working in these hotels. The study recommends that quality of service affect brand loyalty in five-star hotels. Data analysis of other hotel classes is needed to test the impact of quality of service on brand loyalty apparently.

This study will open a new horizon for academic researchers interested in developing the hotel industry. This study implements variables of service quality on brand loyalty in hotels operating in Jordan. The study therefore recommends further studies in different sectors within the same concept.

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