

Front office service quality as a driver of customer emotional experience and revisit intention

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INTRODUCTION

In luxury hospitality, service quality drives satisfaction, emotional experience, and loyalty (Anabela et al., 2022; Vikas et al., 2023). The front office is the hotel's main guest interface, shaping first and last impressions through frequent, high-contact interactions (Roy et al., 2024). Such encounters evoke emotions (e.g., comfort, trust, frustration, delight) that strongly influence revisit decisions in luxury settings (Salem et al., 2023). Yet research often treats service quality as an aggregated hotel construct, overlooking front office performance as a distinct, emotion-intensive service domain. Industry evidence highlights recurring front-office failures, i.e. check-in delays, impersonal communication, and weak request/complaint handling that trigger negative emotions and reduce revisit intention (Wang, 2019; Busser et al., 2022; Althubiti et al., 2025). This study contributes by examining how front office service quality, as a distinct high-contact touchpoint, influences revisit intention directly and through customer emotions. Building on related loyalty research (Guo et al., 2022; Chongkun, 2023; Nadesan et al., 2023) and addressing limited evidence on emotional pathways (Li, 2021; Fan et al., 2023), this study tests how front office service quality (reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles) affects customer emotions and revisit intention in luxury hotels (Parasuraman et al., 1988) using survey data and structural equation modeling. There are three (3) research objectives (RO)

RO1: To identify the key dimensions of front office service quality that significantly influence customer revisit intention in luxury hotels.

RO2: To examine the relationship between front office service quality and customer emotions.

RO3: To evaluate the impact of customer emotions on revisit intention among luxury hotel guests.

To achieve the stated objectives, the study is guided by the following three (3) research questions (RQ):

RQ1: To what extent does front office service quality influence customer revisit intention?

RQ2: How do specific front office service quality dimensions affect customer emotions?

RQ3: To what extent do customer emotions influence revisit intention in luxury hotels?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hospitality is co-created and experience-led; guest emotions shape evaluations and loyalty, particularly in high-contact front office interactions that form first/last impressions (Cavagnaro et al., 2018; Singgalen, 2024; Kandampully et al., 2024; Bharwani et al., 2021; Jawabreh et al., 2022). The front office is also a coordination hub; interaction quality can outweigh facilities, and emotional labor and emotional contagion make employee displays a key stimulus shaping guest affect and loyalty (Agripina et al., 2024; Wijaya et al., 2024; Atikah et al., 2023; Zientara et al., 2025; Herrando et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Service quality is the expectation-performance gap and is operationalized with SERVQUAL (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy) to capture physical cues and interpersonal competence; digital tools can improve speed but do not replace empathy/personalization (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Ali et al., 2018; Yousuf et al., 2022; Anwar et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023; Kumawat et al., 2024). Emotions are appraisal-based states guiding memory and decisions; affect can predict loyalty beyond satisfaction in luxury settings (Ding et al., 2015; Ribeiro et al., 2019; Völker et al., 2023; Groth et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2013; Rychalski et al., 2017). Revisit intention is the likelihood of return; loyalty forms via cognitive value and affective attachment, shaped by peak moments and retention economics (Yang et al., 2025;

Ehimen et al., 2021; Blut et al., 2023; Han et al., 2011; Strijbosch et al., 2019; Marinkovic et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2022). Service encounters influence revisit intention directly and via emotions (Bitner, 1992; Bagozzi, 1986; Clore et al., 2007).

From the literature review, there are three hypotheses:

H1: Front office service quality has a positive and significant effect on customer emotions.

H2: Customer emotions have a positive and significant effect on revisit intention.

H3: Front office service quality has a positive and significant effect on revisit intention

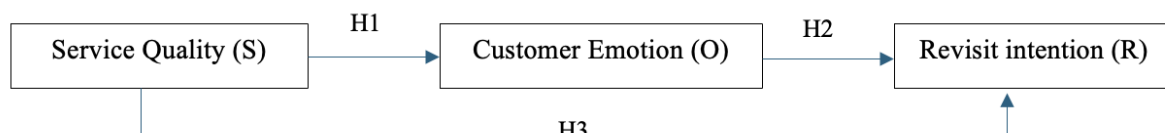


Figure 1. Conceptual framework by authors (2025)

METHOD

This study follows a positivist philosophy, using objective measurement and statistical testing to examine causal links between front office service quality, customer emotions, and revisit intention (Park et al., 2020; Sharp et al., 2011). A quantitative cross-sectional survey was administered to guests who stayed in four- and five-star hotels in Da Nang, Vietnam within the past 12 months. Purposive sampling ensured respondents were aged above 18, had completed at least one front office interaction, and provided informed consent. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, and invalid or incomplete responses were excluded from the final analysis. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) guideline, 400 responses were collected and 391 valid cases retained. The questionnaire measured SERVQUAL-based front office quality (12 items), customer emotions (5 items), and revisit intention (5 items) on a five-point Likert scale. SPSS supported screening, while SmartPLS tested measurement and structural models using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2012).

FINDINGS

Pilot testing (n=40) showed very low reliability for Assurance (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.147$); this dimension was removed and the questionnaire refined. In the main study, 391 valid responses (from 400) were analyzed. The measurement model was acceptable: indicator loadings >0.70 , composite reliability >0.70 , AVE >0.50 , and discriminant validity via cross-loadings and Fornell-Larcker. VIF values were <5 . PLS-SEM supported all hypotheses:

H1: Front Office Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Customer Emotions ($\beta=0.897$, $p<0.001$)

H2: Customer Emotions $\rightarrow$ Revisit Intention ($\beta=0.706$, $p<0.001$), and

H3: Front Office Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Revisit Intention ($\beta=0.204$, $p=0.017$).

Explanatory power was strong ($R^2=0.805$ for emotions; $R^2=0.798$ for revisit intention). Mediation analysis showed emotions as the primary pathway, implying loyalty is mainly emotion driven. Managers should prioritize empathy, responsiveness, and authentic recognition at the front desk.

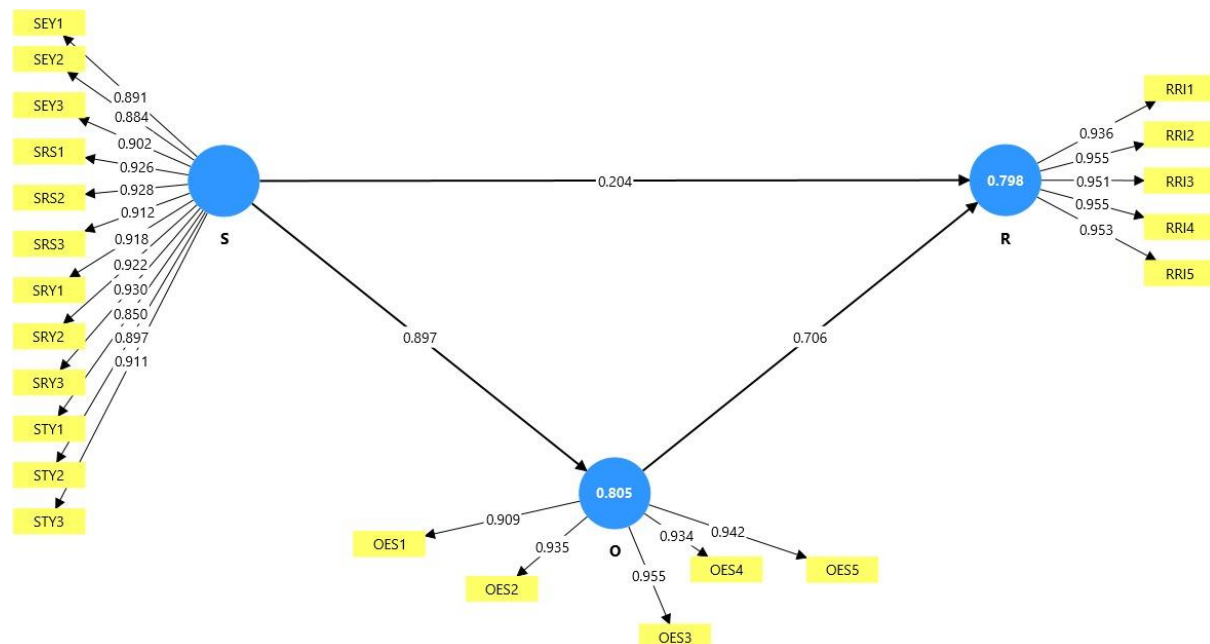


Figure 2. Research findings - Source: PLS-SEM result by author (2025)

CONCLUSION

Based on 391 valid responses from luxury hotel guests in Da Nang, Vietnam, this study shows that front office service quality strongly shapes customer emotions ($\beta=0.897$), which in turn drives revisit intention ($\beta=0.706$). Although service quality also directly affects revisit intention ($\beta=0.204$), the emotional pathway is substantially stronger, indicating that loyalty in luxury hotels is primarily emotion-based. The model explains about 80% of variance in emotions and revisit intention, highlighting strong predictive power. The study's key contribution is showing that front office service quality is a distinct touchpoint shaping revisit intention through customer emotions. Theoretically, the findings extend SERVQUAL by demonstrating emotions as the key mechanism linking front office performance to loyalty, supporting affect-based decision frameworks. Practically, hotels should prioritize emotional intelligence training (empathy, listening, service recovery) and use technology to reduce waits while preserving high-touch interactions. Limitations include one-city sampling, a predominantly Asian sample, luxury-only context, cross-sectional self-report data, and limited qualitative depth.

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