

# Correlation of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty and Life Style at Hot Springs Hotels

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## ABSTRACT

*Taking Lushan Hot Springs Recreational Area as an example, this research explores the relationship between hot springs hotels' service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and lifestyle. Research outcomes indicate that hot springs hotel operators need to enhance customer satisfaction in order to improve customer loyalty directly or enhance service quality in order to improve customer loyalty indirectly to enhance profitability and sustain operations. Because customers of different lifestyles differ in every dimension, hot springs hotel operators can segment the market via lifestyle variables and undertake different strategies in response to the service quality and customer satisfaction factors valued by the target market segment in order to attain the goal of enhancing customer loyalty and corporate profitability.*

**Keywords:** Hot Springs Hotel, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Lifestyle

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of an enhanced standard of living, people in Taiwan have begun to appreciate the value of recreational activities, which boosts the development of the recreational service industry and has made Taiwan one of the leading service countries. In 2005, the production value of Taiwan's service industry reached US\$ 231 billion, or 73% of GDP. The figure is higher than that of Singapore (63%) and South Korea (55%). In 2008, the production value of Taiwan's service industry is expected to reach US\$288 billion, or 74% of GDP (Economic Development Commission, 2006). Since 1999, which was named "Taiwan Hot Springs Tourism Year," the hot springs bath, which incorporates the benefits of recreation and healthcare, has become the a vital part of the entire tourism industry in Taiwan. What hot springs hotel managers must do to win consumers' attention in the heated marketing race has become an important issue.

When investing in the hot springs industry, enterprises have often neglected to consider the differences among consumers in terms of their psychological characteristics and behavioral preferences, with the result that many hot springs hotels of similar quality are highly redundant and forgettable. This study attempts to determine whether lifestyle fits the role of a market segment variable and helps enterprises determine the needs, preferences and consumption behaviors of different customer groups by understanding their vacation lifestyles. Based on the findings, enterprises may plan recreational environments that better meet their customers' demands so customers' travel satisfaction and willingness to revisit will be enhanced, and development of local tourism will be furthered as the content and quality of visits improve.

Thus, this study will attempt to incorporate service quality, customer satisfaction and customer

loyalty into an integrated model and explore their relationships, and to understand the role of lifestyle as it relates to the three factors. The study may serve as a reference for hot springs hotels for design and implementation of customer relationship strategies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Service Quality**

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) developed the PZB Model to measure consumer perceptions of service quality. Parasuraman et al. (1988) followed up with research on the extended model for service quality and developed the Multiple-Item Scale for Measuring Consumer Perceptions of Service Quality (SERVQUAL), in which the measuring dimensions for service quality were classified into five principle dimensions, including Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Dabholkar et al. (1996) developed a set of service quality scales exclusive for the retail trade, the Retailing Service Quality Scale (RSQS), with five dimensions of service quality: Physical Aspect, Reliability, Personal Interaction, Problem Solving, and Policy.

The current research defines service quality as the service effect which is actually perceptible by consumers. Upon comparing all three kinds of service quality measuring scales, the RSQS scale was determined to be the best choice with which to measure the relative service quality because its reliability and validity are superior to the SERVQUAL scale. Items in the questionnaires were modified in keeping with cultural differences.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Czepiel et al. (1974) suggested that customer satisfaction level is an integrated assessment response which represents the summation of customers' subjective responses to different attributes of a product; thus, Integrated Product Satisfaction Level has become an item for measuring customer satisfaction. Handy and Pfaff (1975) disagreed with the idea that the best method of measuring customer satisfaction level would be evaluating a product's overall, integrated satisfaction level and thought that using this kind of evaluation method to ask customers to make a quick response while they are facing complex circumstances would result in the loss of relevant information. Therefore, many scholars have also measured the customer satisfaction level on each attribute of a product, in addition to the integrated satisfaction level.

The current research defines customer satisfaction as the perceived value acquired by a consumer in purchasing a particular product, as well as the satisfaction level with service during the trading process. In addition, using multiple items to measure customer satisfaction will ensure more precise analysis results with which to judge customer satisfaction item by item, thus facilitating the industry's ability to determine a strategy for improving customer service. Thus, this research will utilize multiple items in measuring customer satisfaction levels.

### **Customer Loyalty**

Jones and Sasser (1995) classified customer loyalty into three parts: Re-buy intention, Primary behavior and Secondary-level behavior. Re-buy intention refers to a customer's intention for future product-purchasing or service, primary behavior means the practical re-visiting behavior of a customer, and secondary-level behavior refers to whether a customer will recommend the product or service to others and facilitates customer loyalty by means of human relationships.

The current research defines customer loyalty as the behavior or tendency of a customer toward a particular product and service and has defined three variables with which to measure customer loyalty: re-buy intention, cross-purchase and recommendation to others. In addition, because nearly every hot springs hotel operator in Taiwan is trying to attract consumers with promotion activities, the current research would take “feeling unconcerned at all with other hotel operators’ promotion activities” revealed by Griffin (1995) as the fourth variables for measuring customer loyalty.

### Lifestyle

According to Reynold and Darden (1974), lifestyle is measured mainly by three dimensions: Activity (A), Interest (I), and Opinion (O), the so-called AIO scale. Plumer (1974) added population statistic variables into lifestyle to make four dimensions. Zins (1998) developed lifestyle variables, which have also been utilized widely, to perform market segmentation of resort hotel consumers in order to study the consumers’ behavior in selecting their hotels.

The current research is focused primarily on the study of consumers’ recreational behaviors and on determining the influence of lifestyle in the selection of hot springs resort hotels. Sixteen questions were developed to examine 5 factors or dimensions of lifestyle variables with reference to the lifestyle variables developed by Zins (1998). These questions seek out the hot springs hotel operators opinions as well as those of the consumers.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Framework

The relationship framework of service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty was established based on the literature review. Service quality will directly affect customer satisfaction and customer loyalty; through the intermediate variable of customer satisfaction, service quality will also influence customer loyalty. In addition, customer satisfaction will directly affect customer loyalty. Finally, the lifestyle variable and demographic variable is added to examine whether different customer groups have different impacts on perceptions of service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

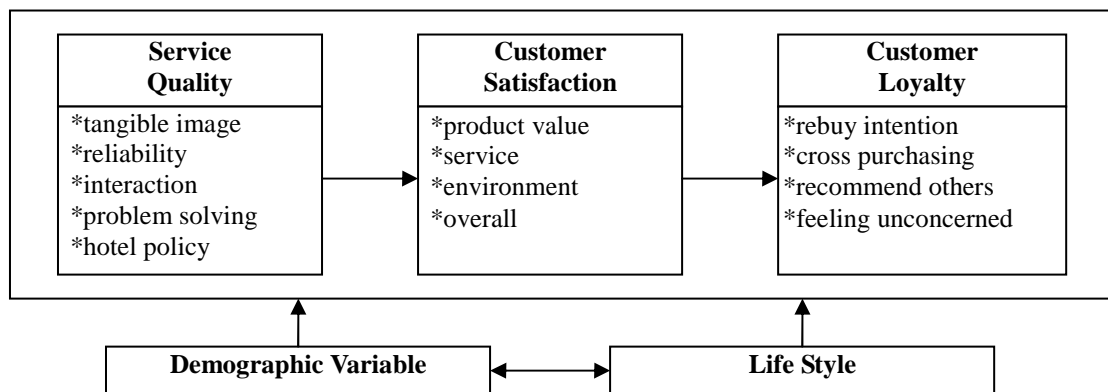


Figure1: Research Framework

### **Establishment of Research Hypothesis**

Many scholars have indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996), and that service quality is the most important factor that affects customer satisfaction (Ruyter, Bloemer, & Peeters, 1997). Barnes (2001) contended that customer satisfaction is the prerequisite to customer relationship, since highly satisfied customers will be more willing to maintain good relations and continue to do business with a company with which they are satisfied. Wulf et al. (2001) also showed that relationship will affect customers' loyalty, and Barnes (2001) agreed that establishing good relationships with customers helps develop loyal customers who repeat their purchases, introduce others to the company and come back for other products. Studies of correlations between lifestyle on one hand, and service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty on the other (Gutman and Mills, 1982; Raju, 1995) have shown that consumers of different lifestyles show significant differences in shopping behaviors and in how they evaluate service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Thus, we establish the five hypotheses of this study:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 4: Through customer satisfaction, service quality significantly and positively affects customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 5: Different lifestyles significantly affect perception of service quality, as well customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Hypothesis 5-1: Different lifestyles significantly affect the way consumers perceive service quality.

Hypothesis 5-2: Given the same set of circumstances, customers with different lifestyles will have significantly different degrees of satisfaction with product value and service.

Hypothesis 5-3: Given the same set of circumstances, customers with different lifestyles will have significantly different degrees of loyalty.

### **Questionnaire Design and Sampling Method**

The questionnaire used in this research has 6 portions. Portion 1 asks the answerer (consumer) to choose one hot springs resort hotel in the Lu-shan area where he or she has most often stayed (or ever stayed). Portion 2, which has 28 items, measures the chosen resort's service quality utilizing the RSQS scale. Portion 3, which measures the customer's satisfaction with the hotel, contains 15 items. Portion 4 measures the customer's loyalty and contains 6 items. Portion 5 uses 16 questions to measure the lifestyle of the consumer in terms of the 5 lifestyle factors or dimensions developed by Zins (1998). Portion 5 was also administered to the resort hotel operators to determine their perspective on their customers' lifestyles. The scale used in Portions 2, 3, 4 and 5 is the Likert 5-point scale. Portion 6 is the basic data of answerer, including gender, marital status, age, current occupation, residence area, education status and average monthly income.

The research uses convenience sampling, and the timing for the formal investigation was 12 February to 25 February, 2006. A total of 500 questionnaires were delivered, and there were 3888 final valid samples, for a retrieval rate of about 77.6%.

### **Validity Analysis**

The validity analysis for this research was carried out by utilizing the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient. The validity for the potential variables were 0.8872 for service quality, 0.8643 for customer satisfaction, and

0.8026 for customer loyalty. Since all were significantly higher than a value of 0.7, the questionnaire was deemed to have excellent stability and consistency.

## EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

### Descriptive Analysis of Sampling Data

The analysis of both the social and economic backgrounds of hotel guests revealed that most (59.54%) were female. The majority (75.25%) of the sample was younger people ranging in age between 21-40 years. Most (62.62%) of the sample of hotel visitors lived in the central Taiwan area. More than half (51.67%) of the sample had a college education, and the most frequent occupation of these visitors was student, at 32.47%. Most (63.14%) in the sample were single, and the most frequent personal monthly income was in the range of US\$300-1,000, at 37.11%.

### Empirical Analysis Evaluation of Theoretic Model

Analysis of the evaluation model is shown in Table 1. In terms of construction of service quality, comparison of factor loads of different facets indicates that, when it comes to customers' perception of service quality, interaction with hotel staff is the most important factor ( $\lambda_{x31}=0.85$ ), followed by reliability ( $\lambda_{x21}=0.78$ ), tangible image ( $\lambda_{x11}=0.74$ ), and problem-solving ( $\lambda_{x41}=0.70$ ). Hotel policy ( $\lambda_{x51}=0.65$ ) was least important. This result reveals that attention must be fastened on key factors such as interaction with hotel staff and reliability in order to enhance customers' perception of service quality.

In terms of construction of customer satisfaction, overall performance ( $\lambda_{y41}=0.82$ ) is the most significant factor that affects customer satisfaction, followed by services provided by hotel staff ( $\lambda_{y21}=0.78$ ) and service environment ( $\lambda_{y31}=0.74$ ), with product value ( $\lambda_{y11}=0.64$ ) the least significant. This result indicates that attention must be paid to key factors such as overall performance, services and service environment in order to improve customer satisfaction.

In terms of construction of customer loyalty, "I will come back to stay with this hot springs hotel" ( $\lambda_{y62}=0.75$ ) is the most significant loyalty indicator, followed by "This hot springs hotel will be my first choice" ( $\lambda_{y52}=0.72$ ) and "I will recommend this hot springs hotel to my relatives and friends" ( $\lambda_{y72}=0.63$ ). "This hot springs hotel will still be my preference even if other hot springs hotels are engaging in promotional activities" ( $\lambda_{y82}=0.50$ ) is least significant. This result indicates that the top two significant factors are pertinent to customers' willingness to repurchase. Therefore, attention must be fastened on key factors related to customers' willingness to repurchase in order to enhance customer loyalty.

**Table 1: Analysis of Evaluation of Overall Theoretical Models**

Variables	MLE's Estimate Parameters		Combined Credulity	Extracted Variation
	Factor Load ( $\lambda$ )	Evaluation Error ( $\delta$ or $\epsilon$ )		
Service Quality			0.84	0.58
x1 Tangible Image	0.74 <sup>***</sup>	0.42		
x2 Reliability	0.78 <sup>***</sup>	0.36		
x3 Interaction	0.85 <sup>***</sup>	0.20		
x4 Problem Solving	0.70 <sup>***</sup>	0.41		
x5 Hotel Policy	0.65 <sup>***</sup>	0.46		
Customer Satisfaction			0.80	0.51
y1 Product Value	0.64 <sup>***</sup>	0.63		
y2 Services	0.78 <sup>***</sup>	0.47		

y3 Service Environment	0.74 <sup>***</sup>	0.42		
y4 Overall Performance	0.82 <sup>***</sup>	0.35		
Customer Loyalty			0.78	0.42
y5 Re-buy Intention	0.72 <sup>***</sup>	0.41		
y6 Cross Purchasing	0.75 <sup>***</sup>	0.37		
Y7 Recommend to Others	0.63 <sup>***</sup>	0.54		
Y8 Feeling Unconcerned	0.50 <sup>***</sup>	0.70		

$\chi^2=274.456$ , d.f.=70, GFI=0.845, RMSR=0.015, RMSEA=0.068, AGFI=0.864, NFI=0.857, CFI=0.924, PNFI=0.736, PGFI=0.558 ( Computation mode is dummy mode  $\chi^2=3864.910$ , d.f.=82 )

※Factor load is standardized value; \*\*\*Indicating  $p<0.001$

### Examination of Relationships among Hypotheses

*Relationships between service quality and customer satisfaction.* Hypothesis 1 posits that there is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction. Table 2 shows that there is significant discrepancy in the “goodness of fit” ( $\Delta\chi^2 =526.43$ ;  $\Delta$ d.f.=1;  $p<0.01$ ) of  $M_1$  mode, indicating that service quality does affect customer satisfaction significantly. As shown in Table 3, there is also a positive path coefficient from service quality to customer satisfaction. In other words, there is a significant direct impact ( $\gamma_{11}=0.91$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), indicating that, the higher customers’ perception of service quality, the higher their satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported in that there is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction.

*Relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.* Hypothesis 2 posits that there is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer loyalty. Table 2 shows that there is significant discrepancy in the “goodness of fit” ( $\Delta\chi^2 =0.38$ ;  $\Delta$ d.f.=1;  $p<0.01$ ) of  $M_2$  mode, indicating that service quality does not affect customer loyalty significantly. Table 3 shows that the path coefficient from service quality to customer loyalty has not reached a significant level, so there is no significant direct impact ( $\gamma_{21}=0.11$ ). In other words, the enhancement of customers’ perception of service quality does not directly raise customer loyalty, and Hypothesis 2, that there is a significant positive correlation between service quality and customer loyalty, is not supported.

*Relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.* Hypothesis 3 posits that there is a significant positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Table 2 shows that there is significant discrepancy in the “goodness of fit” ( $\Delta\chi^2 =14.68$ ;  $\Delta$ d.f.=1;  $p<0.01$ ) of  $M_3$  mode, indicating that customer satisfaction does affect customer loyalty significantly. Table 3 shows a positive path coefficient from customer satisfaction to customer loyalty. In other words, there is a significant direct impact ( $\beta_{21}=0.69$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), indicating that the more customers are satisfied, the higher their loyalty will be. Thus, Hypothesis 3, that there is a significant positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, is supported.

Data analysis results support Hypotheses 1 and 3 but do not support Hypothesis 2. Because both Hypotheses 1 and 3 are supported, it is reasonable to conclude that Hypothesis 4 will also be supported. In other words, through customer satisfaction, service quality significantly and positively affects customer loyalty. Table 3 shows the outcomes from examination of the hypotheses.

### Analysis of the Impact of Lifestyle Groups on Variables

This section of the study employs single-factor multi-variation variable analysis to examine whether individual lifestyle impacts perception of service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. In this analysis, Wilks’ Lambda value is 0.78, F is 7.55 and  $P<0.001$ , indicating that different lifestyle groups differ significantly in the way each perceives overall service quality. Further analysis reveals that

different lifestyle groups perceive all 5 aspects of service quality significantly differently because all P values are less than 0.001. Thus, Hypothesis 5-1 is supported.

In the examination of whether the individual lifestyle impacts customer satisfaction, Wilks' Lambda value is 0.85, F is 7.36 and  $P < 0.001$ , indicating that different lifestyle groups differ significantly in customer satisfaction. Further analysis reveals that different lifestyle groups perceive all 4 aspects of customer satisfaction significantly differently because all P values are less than 0.001. Thus, Hypothesis 5-2 is supported.

In the examination of whether individual lifestyle impacts customer loyalty, F is 24.16 and  $P < 0.001$ , indicating that different lifestyle groups differ significantly in customer loyalty. Therefore, Hypothesis 5-3 is supported.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis According to Net-shape Model**

Mode	$X^2$	d.f.	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSR
$M_f$ : Theoretic Mode	274.46	70	-	0.85	0.87	0.93	0.02
$M_1$ : $\gamma_{11}=0$	812.47	71	526.43***	0.79	0.79	0.80	0.08
$M_2$ : $\gamma_{21}=0$	275.32	71	0.38	0.85	0.87	0.93	0.02
$M_3$ : $\beta_{21}=0$	296.43	71	14.68**	0.85	0.86	0.92	0.02

※Computation of  $\Delta\chi^2$  is based on Theoretic Mode ( $\chi^2=274.46$ , d.f.=70)

\*Indicating  $p < 0.05$  ( $\chi^2=3.76$ )    \*\* Indicating  $p < 0.01$  ( $\chi^2=6.26$ )    \*\*\* Indicating  $p < 0.001$  ( $\chi^2=9.78$ )

**Table 3: Verification of Path Coefficients and Hypotheses of Theoretic Structure Mode**

Path	Inter-Variable Relations	Path Coefficient	Corresponding Hypothesis	Verification Result
$\gamma_{11}$	Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction	0.91***	Hypothesis 1	Supported
$\gamma_{21}$	Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Customer Loyalty	0.11	Hypothesis 2	Not Supported
$\beta_{21}$	Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Customer Loyalty	0.69***	Hypothesis 3	Supported
$\gamma_{11}\beta_{21}$	Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Customer Satisfaction $\rightarrow$ Customer Loyalty	0.64***	Hypothesis 4	Supported

※Path coefficient is standardized value; \*\*\* Indicating  $p < 0.001$

### Factor Analysis on Consumers' Lifestyles

This research executed a factor analysis on 16 items related to lifestyle variables for 388 valid samples and extracted factor dimensions of lifestyle by utilizing the Principal Component Analysis Method, finally acquiring 5 factors with characteristic values larger than 1, where the Total Variance Explained is as high as 72.56% and the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient for lifestyle lies in the acceptable range of 0.60-0.75. Where there 5 factors were assigned an individual name and the detailed description for each factor is provided as follows:

*Factor A: "Touring player group".* In this factor, the sorting result based on factor load would be "experiencing folk activities provided by the hotel", "tasting local specialties provided by the hotel", "attending touring package provided the hotel", and "learning local humanities customs around the hotel". In light of these variables, all belongs to the motive factor more or less related to the selection of hot spring resort hotel for accommodation, thus the name was assigned accordingly.

*Factor B: "Family fun group".* In this factor, the sorting result based on factor load would be "experiencing the great nature", "enhancing affection of the family or friends", "enjoying natural landscape around the hotel", and "enhancing the health of body". In light of the above variables, these

variables are all related to satisfy with physical health and mental needs to the natural affection, thus the name was assigned accordingly.

*Factor C: "Learning and refreshing group"*. In this factor, the sorting result based on factor load would be "meeting new friends", "learning new business", and "inspiring creative capability". In light of above variables, these variables are all related to the positive characteristic of self-learning, thus the name was assigned accordingly.

*Factor D: "Weekend enjoyment group"*. In this factor, the sorting result based on factor load would be "releasing living pressure and anxiety", and "leaving all routine daily business". Because these two variables are expressing a kind of mental performance in releasing living pressure, thus the name was assigned accordingly.

*Factor E: "Relaxing and pleasure-releasing group"*. In this factor, the sorting result based on factor load would be "killing time and keeping away from a boring life", "enjoying hot spring therapy process" and "running away from noise and crowded environment". Because these three variables were expressing a kind of status in enjoying the natural and keeping away from routine experience, thus the name was assigned accordingly.

The above five groups differ significantly in lifestyle, demographic characteristics and consumer behavior, supporting the idea that the tourism/recreation market has become segmented so that no single tourism product can satisfy all consumers. Therefore, hot springs hotel operators should develop unique features in accordance with the characteristics and demand of specific consumer groups in order to attain their marketing goals.

## RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

### **Correlations between Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty**

Through its overall theoretic model, this study has determined that service quality can significantly and positively affect customer satisfaction, but service quality cannot directly, significantly and positively affect customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction can significantly and positively affect customer loyalty so that, the higher the customer satisfaction, the more loyal the customer. Finally, through customer satisfaction, service quality can indirectly but significantly and positively affect customer loyalty. Therefore, if hot springs hotels want to increase their profits and maintain their growth via enhancement of customer loyalty, they must focus on improving customer satisfaction for the purpose of increasing customer loyalty or improve service quality and take advantage of its indirect positive effect on customer loyalty. The ultimate goal is improved profitability and sustainable operations.

### **Concepts Affected by Customers of Different Lifestyles**

This study employs single-factor multi-variable variation analysis to explore whether there are significant differences in the way different lifestyles affect service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty for the purpose of verifying if lifestyle is an appropriate variable for market segmentation. Research outcomes indicate that there are significant differences in the way customers of different lifestyles perceive service quality, and that different lifestyles significantly affect customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Because different lifestyles significantly affect each concept, hot springs hotels can divide the market through the lifestyle variable and choose one or more market segments to which they can specifically appeal, adopting different strategies in response to service quality

elements and customer satisfaction elements which the target market segment values for the purpose of enhancing customer loyalty and profitability.

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