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# Tourism Service Quality and Destination Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Perceived Value from International Tourists' Perspectives

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## Abstract:

This study is aimed at investigating the direct relationships between service quality dimensions with perceived value and the destination loyalty, in addition to examining the mediating effect of perceived value. Using data from 508 international tourists visiting UAE and applying structural equation modeling we found the following. First, we found a significant and positive relationship between the five dimensions of service quality and perceived value. Second, we found direct, a positive and significant relationship between four service quality dimensions and destination loyalty. In addition, there exists a mediating effect of perceived value on the relationship between all the dimension of service quality and destination loyalty. The relationships of all the service quality dimensions are partially mediated except tangible facilities dimension which is fully mediated by perceived value. The study recommended that destination managers should focus on what make the tourists feel that the value they received is equal or more than what they expected to create positive tourist loyalty behaviour and enhance destination attractiveness. Thus, high level of perceived value service quality provided can be achieved if government and managers fully understand the key importance of providing quality service and continues evaluating and enhancing the quality of service provided.

**Keywords:** Destination Loyalty, Perceived Value, Service Quality Dimensions, Destination Loyalty, Tourism Sector.

## 1. Introduction

The recent economic crisis plus the free fall of oil prices in the recent years has made GCC governments rethink their sources of income (According to a senior foreign policy fellow and the deputy director of the BDC, Ibrahim Farihat in "The Impact of Low Oil Prices", Feb 10, 2016; "How Gulf Cooperation Council", Sep 16, 2016 ). One of the countries that have started doing this long before the financial crisis and the oil prices downward movement is the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE has diversified its sources of revenue to include many sectors such as the service sector. The tourism industry is an important part of the service sector in the UAE that contributes much to the national economy (According to UAE Minister of Economy, Al Mansouri, in "tourism adds $36.4bn 9", April, 2016). For instance, the recent statistics pointed that this sector contributed $36.4 billion in 2015 (Al Mansouri, in "tourism adds $36.4bn 9", April, 2016). Also, this sector contributes 8.7 percent to the UAE GDP and is expected to increase by 4.4 percent in 2016, making the tourism industry more resilient after oil dependable economy (Al Mansouri, in "tourism adds $36.4bn 9", April, 2016).

Due to its importance, the UAE government has designed and implemented some strategies to boost the tourism sector. For example, in 2012 Dubai 2020 Vision was announced with the goal to increase the number of tourist's arrival from 10 million to 20 million by 2020. It also plans to triple the annual share of tourism from $27 billion to $81 billion by 2020 (Shweta Jain, September 25, 2016).To achieve these goals, the UAE government needs to focus on tourist loyalty because loyalty with the destination is an important business opportunity to improve the destinations' economic value, image, and government revenue (Som, & Badarneh, 2011; Campón, Alves, & Hernández, 2013). Thus, an adequate assessment is required to identify which factors influence tourists' destination loyalty.

Tourist's destination loyalty has been proven to be critical for individual attraction as well as the overall economy (Truong & King, 2009). Loyal customers (i.e. frequent purchasers) are found to be more reluctant to change their brand preference, which implies that they have a sense of belonging (McKercher, &Guillet, 2010). Due to the importance of tourism industry, tougher competition faces destinations and it is expected to be become even tougher in coming years; thus tourism industry managers need to know the reason behind faithful tourists to certain destination and their loyalty antecedents (Baker &Fulford, 2016). Tourism indusrty have to create and maintin it competitive edge by focusing on features which are attractive to visitors as well as linking travelers and their prefernces in order to foster positive effect on their loyalty behaivor (Glińska& Florek, 2013; Moreira & Iao, 2014). However, in a tourism context, the measurement of loyalty is particularly challenging because purchasing tourism product is not done on a daily basis (Oppermann, 1999); at least, it may occur on a yearly or twice yearly basis (Jago& Shaw, 1998).

Tourism products are often purchase in advance. In other words, the purchase of the tourism product is done far before the consumption, where the purchasers experience it out of their home and this in turn make them susceptible and demanding. These constraints make achieving loyalty in tourism products harder than normal products (Jones, Mothersbaugh, & Beatty, 2000). Therefore, choosing destination is risky and this risk may be overcome if tourist feels the service provided as well as perceived value matches or exceeds expectations (Akroush et al., 2016; Song, Su, & Li, 2013; Ramseook-Munhurrun, Seebaluck, & Naidoo, 2015). Therefore, the main purpose of this study is aimed at investigating the following objectives. First, this study examines the impact of the dimensions of service quality of different hospitality firms in UAE on perceived valueof these servicesandconsequently the UAE destination loyalty. Second, this study investigates the relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty. Finally, this study assesses the mediating effect of perceived value

on the relationship between service quality dimensions and destination loyalty.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Perceived value and destination loyalty

Woodruff (1997) mentioned that one of the important missions of managers in tourism industry is to well understand what do tourists' value and how their desires can be met. In the same way, Hartnett (1998) pointed out stronger position in the long run happens when service providers delivering value which is achieved by satisfying people needs. Perceived value has received extensive emphasis in the current literature of marketing research (Prebensen, Woo, Chen, &Uysal, 2012; Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). Perceived value is commonly defined as the overall evolution of the value of a product based on comparing what is perceived and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988). In his definition Zeithaml (1988) recognized four elements of his definistion. First he identified value is represented by low price. Second, value is about what is expected from a product. Third, value is the quality received based on the price paid. Lastly, he identified value as the worth of money. Equally, Lovelock (2000) stated that the trade-off between perceived benefit and perceived cost is considered perceived value.

Although several studies have used satisfaction as a predictor of tourists' destination loyalty (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015; Bajs, 2015), there is usually a bias in measuring customer satisfaction. As Jones and Sasser (1995) pointed out, many customers declared that they are satisfied but would purchase elsewhere. Furthermore, Um et al. (2006) identified the relative weight of tourist evaluation constructs affecting destination loyalty based on survey results of tourists who visited Hong Kong. They found that tourists' loyalty could be determined more from what value they perceived from the destination than by what actually satisfied them. Thus, it can be concluded that using perceived value to predict tourists' loyalty can lead

to a better understanding of tourists' after-decision-making behaviors (Rasoolimanesh, Dahalan, &Jaafar, 2016). From this perspective, empirical studies showed that perceived value significantly impact tourists decisions to revisit the destination and recommend to others (Wang, &Leou, 2015; Serirat, 2010; Kim, Holland, & Han, 2013; Song, Su& Li, 2013). Consequently, the higher the tourists' perceived value of the destination, the more loyal tourists are.

However, other researchers only found an indirect and significant relationship between perceived value and destination loyalty (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015; Bradley & Sparks, 2012). Other studies such as Sun, Chi, and Xi (2013) found a negative but insignificant link between perceived value and destination loyalty. They indicated that this might be because some service providers engage in price gouging especially during peak seasons. Since price is one of the measurements of perceived value, these price scandals not only cause tourists to be dissatisfied but also reduce the chances of tourists' revisit.

The conflicts in the previous findings suggest a need to conduct more studies to explore the relationship between tourists' perceived value of visiting tourism destination and destination loyalty. Based on this, the first hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H1:Perceived value of destination will significantly and positively affect destination loyalty.**

## 2.2 Service quality, perceived value, and destination loyalty

The importance of service quality has been acknowledged in many industries as a key for organizational success as well as satisfy and retain customer (Murali, Pugazhendhi, &Muralidharan, 2016; Wu, & Ai, 2016; Mohsin, &Lengler, 2015).In addition, Competitive advantage which distinguishes one organization from others is achieved by providing excellent service quality (Murali et al., 2016; Garg, &Dhar, 2014;Buttle,

1996). Despite the wide acknowledgement of the importance of service quality researchers have yet to agree on its measurement (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Previous studies mentioned that measuring service quality is complex because the nature of service is considered multi-dimensional and subjective. Therefore, a number of proposed frameworks have been put forth. They include SERVQUAL(Service Quality) (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Schembri & Sandberg, 2003), RECQUAL(Reconciliation Quality)(Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), SERVPERF(service performance) (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), SERVICESCAPE(service setting) (Bitner, 1992), QUESC(Quality Excellence)(Kim & Kim, 1995), TEAMQUAL (instrument designed to evaluate consumer perceptions of the spectator sport service environment)(McDonald et al., 1995) and CERM-CSQ(Customer Service Quality)(Howat et al., 1996). Of all these frameworks, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985) is the most successful assessment tool of service quality (Akroush et al., 2016; Parasuraman et al., 1988). SERVQUAL is a model designed to measure service quality and customer expectations. SERVQUAL consists of five dimensions.

They are assurance (knowledge and courteousness of personnel and their ability to instill confidence and trust), responsiveness (readiness to help customers and provide fast service), reliability (ability to perform the promised service accurately), tangible (equipment, employees appearance, and physical facilities) and empathy (the ability to provides care and individualized attention to customers) (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

Numerous tourism studies have used SERVQUAL to value the quality of services provided in the tourism and similar industry (Akroush et al., 2016; Hapsari, Clemes, Dean, 2016; Baker &Fesenmaier, 1997). Childress and Crompton (1997) stated that the SERVQUAL model was developed to help managers analyze the sources of quality problems and find the proper ways to reform the quality of services. The SERVQUAL model could be applied to various service contexts (Dang & Huang, 2014). It is

a critically well-built relationship between customer services and value of service quality in the tourism industry (Augustyn& Ho, 1998, as cited in Atilgan et al., 2003). Dang and Huang (2014), Mey, Akbar, & Fie, (2006) and Bigne et al. (2003) pointed out that SERVQUAL is still a valuable and reliable model to measure the service quality offered by the tourism industry. For these reasons, this study considers the use of SERVQUAL model appropriate for measuring service quality in UAE where not much research in this aspect has been found in the UAE context.

Empirical research reports that service quality has a positive and significant influence on perceived value (Wu, Cheng, & Hsu, 2014; Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2016 ) and loyalty (Chand & Ashish, 2014). However, in the tourism industry, the literature review showed few studies done on the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL model) with perceived value and destination loyalty. Also, the tourism literature showed a lack of studies that investigated the mediating effect of perceived value on the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality and tourists' destination loyalty, particularly in the UAE. Therefore, it is important to know which facet of destination service quality is the most important driver for destination loyalty (Cong, 2016) and perceived value (Raza, Siddiquei, Awan, &Bukhari, 2012). Also, the role of perceived value as a mediator in the relationship between the dimensions of service quality and destination loyalty in the tourism industry has not been widely examined. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

**H2:Service quality and its dimensions (i.e., assurance, responsiveness, reliability, tangible facilities and empathy) will significantly and positively affect tourist's destination loyalty.**

**H3:Service quality and its dimensions (i.e., assurance, responsiveness, reliability, tangible facilities and empathy) will significantly and positively affect tourist's perceived value.**

**H4:Perceived value mediates the relationship between service quality and its dimensions and destination loyalty.**

## 3. Methodology

This study examined the impact of service quality dimensions, perceived valueon destination loyalty. The study also explored the potential mediating effect of perceived valueon the relationship between service quality dimensions and destination loyalty. Figures 1 and 2presents the relationship proposed. We followed a deductive research approach. This approach best explains the relationships between the variables (Saunders et al., 2011). In a deductive approach, the researcher collects specific quantitative information and with the practice of rational reasoning reaches at a conclusion which will either prove or disprove the hypothesis.

### 3.1 Data and Sample

In this study, data were collected from from individuals' tourists in the departure halls of international airports in three major cities in UAE(Abu Dhabi airport, Dubai Airport and Sharjah Airport).The sampling technique used was judgmental sampling.Since departing individuals might be residents or transit travelers, only international tourists of 18 years old and above who visited the UAE and experienced some of the facilities provided were taken into account. This group of respondents was also considered in previous studies on destination loyalty (MostafaviShirazi&Som, 2013; Mohammad, 2014).

To collect accurate and representing data, research assistances were employed to help in data collection. The methodology used to collect data was the intercept approach. The research assistants were instructed to intercept travelers inside the airport terminals (Gursoy& Kendal, 2006) and inquire whether he or she was an international tourist who visited UAE. If the traveler does not fit the criteria then the research assistant would

move to the next traveler. This process will continue until an international tourist is being identified and willing to participate in the survey. Once an international tourist is interested to take a part in the study, the assistant would explain the purpose of the study and hand them the survey to complete. A total of 700 questionnaires were delivered and 508 valid ones were returned, resulting in an 73% response rate.Data were collected by researchers between July9thand October18th, 2016.

## 3.2 Measures

To achieve the objectives of the present study, a survey instrument consisting of four parts was developed. The first three parts were designed to gauge tourists' response to the key variables namely, service quality, perceived value, and destination loyalty. The fourth part was designed to gather demographic information about the tourists including their gender, education, age, marital status, nationality, visitation frequency, and length of stay. The study's scales were adopted from marketing loyalty literature to fit destination loyalty. The dependent variable was destination loyalty which measures the international tourist's attitude towards the UAE. Four items measuring destination loyalty were adopted from Reynolds and Beatty (1999) and Sirakaya-Turk et al. (2015). To measure service quality, 22 questions on five dimensions that assessed the international tourists' attitudes related to the services offered in the UAE such as airports, shopping malls, hotels, etc. were used. The items were adopted from past studies (Akroush et al., 2016; Armstrong et al., 1997; Atilgan et al., 2003; Berry et al., 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Choi & Chu, 1998; Parasuraman et al., 1988). Lastly, perceived value which had three questions were adopted from Hankinson (2005) and Akroush et al. (2015). This study added a new perspective to measuring service quality at the country level and not the firm level as previous studies did. Constructs were measuredusing five-point Likert scalefrom 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 5 "Strongly Agree."The questionnire is available in the appendix.

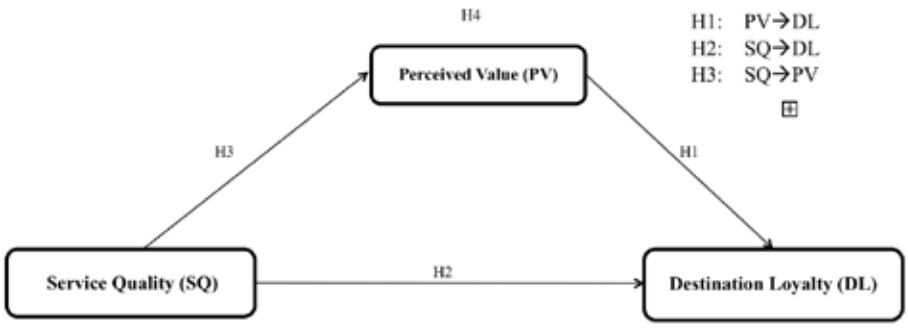



Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model

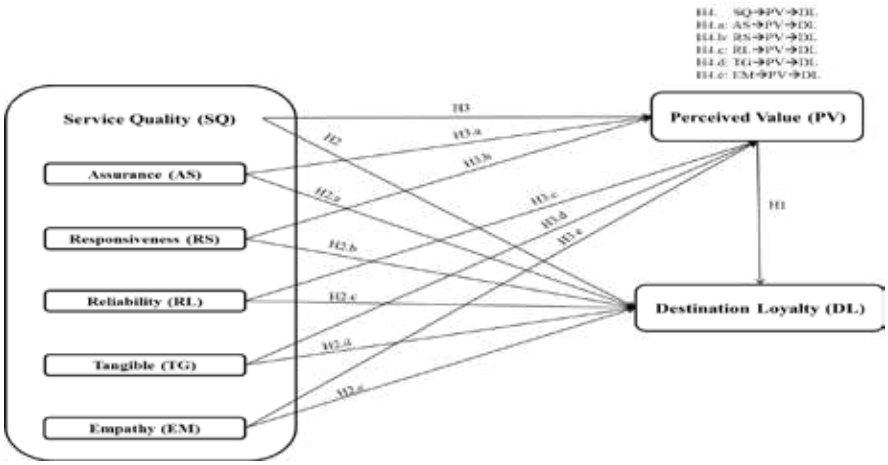



**Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model with sub hypotheses**

## 4. Result and Analysis

This section reports the demographic profile of the respondents, the descriptive statistics of the study variables, and the results of the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationship.

Table 1 show that the majority of the international tourists were female, young, married, and educated. Also, the majority of them can be described as regular visitors to the UAE. Furthermore, less than two-third (57.7%) of the international tourists visited a UAE destination between three and ten days.

**Table 1. Demographic profile**

| Characteristic description | Groups | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 34.6% (176) |
| | Female | 65.4% (332) |
| Age | 18-20 | 37.6% (191) |
| | 21-30 | 54.5% (277) |
| | 31-40 | 5.7% (29) |
| | 41 year and above | 2.2% (11) |
| Marital status | Married | 52.8% (268) |
| | Single | 47.2% (240) |
| Education | Bachelor | 30.9% (157) |
| | Master | 37.4% (190) |
| | PhD | 31.7% (161) |
| Visitation | First time | 35.6% (181) |
| | Second time | 35.6% (181) |
| | Third time and above | 28.7% (146) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Length of stay | 3 to 6 days | 14.2% (72) |
| | 7 to 10 days | 43.5% (221) |
| | 11 to 14 days | 39.6% (201) |
| | 15 days and more | 2.8% (14) |

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics of the variables in this study. The mean ranged between 3.10 for tangible facilities and 3.34 for perceived responsiveness. The standard deviation was higher than 0.5 but lower than one which indicated moderate variability in the responses. Lastly, the skewness and kurtosis indicated that the study variables were close to normal distribution since both values were between -1 and +1.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the variables**

| Variable | Mean | Standard deviation | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assurance | 3.18 | 0.84 | -0.039 | -0.439 |
| Responsiveness | 3.30 | 0.73 | -0.251 | -0.100 |
| Reliability | 3.15 | 0.68 | -0.091 | -0.099 |
| Tangible facilities | 3.10 | 0.75 | -0.025 | -0.269 |
| Empathy | 3.21 | 0.87 | 0.008 | -0.500 |
| Perceived value | 3.34 | 0.83 | -0.439 | 0.041 |
| Destination loyalty | 3.20 | 0.89 | -0.263 | -0.684 |

## 4.1 Measures of reliability and validity

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the measures adopted from previous studies. Table 3 presents the result.

**Table 3. Result of CFA for measurement model**

| Construct | Items | Convergent validity | | | Internal reliability Cronbach alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Factor loading | Average variance extracted (AVE)[a] | Composite reliability (CR)[b] | |
| Assurance (AS) | AS1 | 0.823 | 0.680 | 0.895 | 0.894 |
| | AS2 | 0.839 | | | |
| | AS3 | 0.811 | | | |
| | AS4 | 0.826 | | | |
| Responsiveness (RS) | RS1 | 0.806 | 0.647 | 0.917 | 0.916 |
| | RS2 | 0.785 | | | |
| | RS3 | 0.832 | | | |
| | RS4 | 0.819 | | | |
| | RS5 | 0.794 | | | |
| | RS6 | 0.789 | | | |
| Reliability (RL) | RL1 | 0.742 | 0.593 | 0.897 | 0.897 |
| | RL2 | 0.77 | | | |
| | RL3 | 0.75 | | | |
| | RL4 | 0.771 | | | |
| | RL5 | 0.795 | | | |
| | RL6 | 0.79 | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tangible (TG) | TG1 | 0.78 | 0.616 | 0.889 | 0.889 |
| | TG2 | 0.833 | | | |
| | TG3 | 0.793 | | | |
| | TG4 | 0.746 | | | |
| | TG5 | 0.77 | | | |
| Empathy (EM) | EM1 | 0.867 | 0.732 | 0.891 | 0.891 |
| | EM2 | 0.845 | | | |
| | EM3 | 0.855 | | | |
| Perceived value (PV) | PV1 | 0.866 | 0.788 | 0.918 | 0.917 |
| | PV2 | 0.894 | | | |
| | PV3 | 0.903 | | | |
| Destination loyalty (DL) | DL1 | 0.823 | 0.705 | 0.905 | 0.904 |
| | DL2 | 0.846 | | | |
| | DL3 | 0.838 | | | |
| | DL4 | 0.851 | | | |
| Service quality (SQ) | Assurance (AS) | 0.723 | 0.540 | 0.853 | 0.870 |
| | Responsive-ness (RS) | 0.805 | | | |
| | Reliability (RL) | 0.82 | | | |
| | Tangible (TG) | 0.65 | | | |
| | Empathy (EM) | 0.66 | | | |

Notes: a Composite reliability = (square of the summation of the factor loadings)/{(square of the summation of the factor loadings) + (square of the summation of the error variances)}.

b Composite reliability = (summation of the square of the factor loadings)/{(summation of the square of the factor loadings) + (summation of the error variances)}.

In this study, the convergent validity of the measures was tested. As recommended by Hair et al. (2010), the estimation of the convergent validity is through testing the values of factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). The factor loadings for all items range from 0.650 to 0.903, being above the threshold of 0.5 as suggested by Chin et al. (1997). The AVE, which represents the total amount of variance in the indicators of a latent construct, were in the range of 0.540 and 0.788 which exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability, which describe the degree to which the indicators of a construct exhibit that construct, range from 0.853 to 0.918 which was higher than the proposed value of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010). In the next step, the value of Cronbach alpha was used to measure the reliability of the measures. The values range from 0.870 to 0.917 which were above the threshold of 0.7 as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). The discriminant validity was tested in the next step. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) discriminant validity can be tested by finding the difference between the square root of the variance extracted for a construct and its correlations with other constructs. As shown in Table 4, the square root of the average variance extracted for each construct is higher than the correlations of that construct with other constructs. This result shows adequate discriminant validity. Overall, the demonstration of the measurement model showed adequate reliability, convergent and discriminant validity.

**Table 4. Discriminant validity of constructs**

| Constructs | AS | RS | RL | TG | EM | PV | DL | SQ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Assurance (AS) | 0.825 | | | | | | | |
| Responsiveness (RS) | 0.591 | 0.804 | | | | | | |
| Reliability (RL) | 0.613 | 0.658 | 0.770 | | | | | |
| Tangible (TG) | 0.422 | 0.535 | 0.534 | 0.785 | | | | |
| Empathy (EM) | 0.451 | 0.530 | 0.537 | 0.444 | 0.856 | | | |
| Perceived value (PV) | 0.474 | 0.500 | 0.517 | 0.432 | 0.430 | 0.888 | | |
| Destination loyalty (DL) | 0.506 | 0.553 | 0.556 | 0.455 | 0.479 | 0.571 | 0.840 | |
| Service quality (SQ) | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | 0.639 | 0.693 | 0.735 |

Note: Diagonals represent the average variance extracted, while the other matrix entries represent the square correlations.

## 4.2 Structural Model

The maximum likelihood estimate (MLE) was used for structural model. As presented in Table 5, the test of the overall model fit showed a $\chi 2 = 719.297$ with 413 degrees of freedom. The chi-square is significant

at 0.001 levels. Nevertheless, for the sample size above 200 the absolute fit index of minimum discrepancy chi-square can be ignored (Hair Jr, Anderson, Tatham, & William, 1998).This suggests a very good absolute. Other fit indices also show good fit for the measurement model. The χ2/ df was 1.742, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.919, adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) was 0.903, comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.972, Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was 0.968, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) was 0.972 and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) which refers to the discrepancy per degree of freedom was 0.038. As such, it can be concluded that developed research model in this study could fit the data entirely well upon the different suggested values through expanding the literature.

**Table 5. Fit indices of structural model**

| Fit index | Study | Recommended values | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| df | 413 | | |
| CMIN ($\chi^2$) | 719.297 | | |
| p-value | 0.000 | > 0.05 | |
| $\chi^2$/df | 1.742 | ≤ 5.00 | Bagozzi and Yi (1988) |
| GFI | 0.919 | ≥ 0.90 | Hoyle (1995) |
| AGFI | 0.903 | ≥ 0.80 | Chau and Hu (2001) |
| CFI | 0.972 | ≥ 0.90 | Bagozzi and Yi (1988), Byrne (2013) |
| TLI | 0.968 | ≥ 0.90 | Hair et al. (2006) |
| IFI | 0.972 | ≥ 0.90 | Hair et al. (2006) |
| RMSEA | 0.038 | ≤ 0.10 | Brown and Cudeck (1993) |

Figure 3presents the detailed results of the structural model. The R2

values were 0.41 and 0.51 for Perceived Value and Destination Loyalty respectively. Both scores of $R^2$ value satisfy the requirement for the 0.30 cut off value.

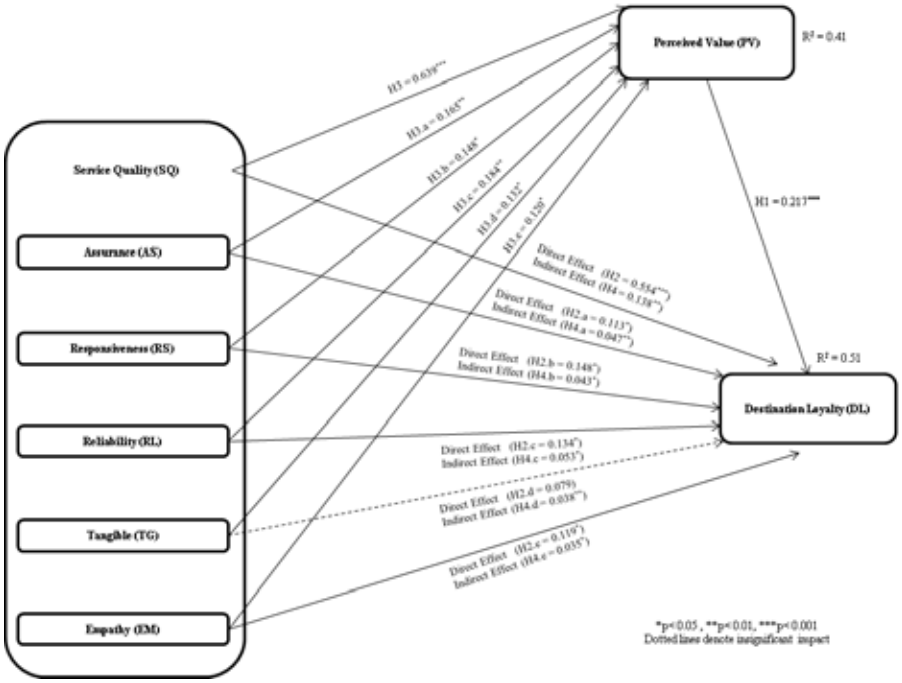



**Figure 2. Result of structural model assessment**

As shown in Figure 2, only the direct path from Tangible to Destination Loyalty was insignificant whereas all the other direct paths were significantly positive. Thus, H2.d was rejected while H1, H2, H2.a, H2.b, H2.c, H2.e, H3, H3.a, H3.b, H3.c, H3.c and H3.e were supported (refer to Figure 2). The results demonstrated that Service Quality was a significant determinant of Perceived Value and Destination Loyalty with the standard coefficient of 0.639 and 0.554 respectively.

The study also conducted a mediation analysis using the bootstrapping approach with 2000 samples (Bagozzi& Yi, 1988). The results indicated

that Perceived Value partially mediated the effects of Service Quality, Assurance, Responsiveness, Reliability, and Empathy on Destination Loyalty. However, the effect of Tangible on Destination Loyalty was fully mediated by Perceived Value. Therefore, hypotheses H4, H4.a, H4.b, H4.c, H4.d, and H4.e were supported.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the relationships between service quality, perceived value and destination loyalty as well as examining if these relationships are mediated by perceived value. To achieve this, the two stages of SEM were applied. The stage one included the establishment of a measurement model for the latent constructs. After confirming the uni-dimensionality, reliability, and validity of the constructs, the stage two involved testing the research hypotheses by assessing the structural model. The result of the confirmatory factor analysis confirmed that the SERVQUAL model is a five-dimensional construct in line with the one proposed by the original developers of the model (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The result supported Dang and Huang's (2014) and Bigne et al.'s (2003) implication that the five-factor SERVQUAL model is applicable to measure service quality in the tourism industry.

The assessment of the structural model supported four research hypotheses. The five dimensions of service quality (assurance, responsiveness, tangible facilities, empathy, and reliability) positively and significantly affected the perceived value of tourist services provided in the UAE. The results parallel the previous research findings on the positive relationship between tourism service quality dimensions and perceived value (Wu, Cheng, & Hsu; 2014, Hapsari, Clemes, & Dean, 2016). We followed the recommendation by previous researchers (e.g., Raza, Siddiquei, Awan, & Bukhari, 2012) that it is important to investigate the most important dimensions of service quality that impact perceived value. We revealed that Reliability is the most important dimension that

determined perceived value (β=0.184) followed by Assurance (β=0.165), responsiveness (β=0.148), Tangible facilities (β=0.132), and Empathy (β=0.120). Perceived value exerted a strong positive and significant effect on destination loyalty (β=0.217). The result is consistent with previous findings (Wang &Leou, 2015; Serirat, 2010; Kim, Holland, & Han, 2012; Song, Su, & Li, 2013).

Moreover, the results support the hypothesized relationship between Service Quality and Destination Loyalty (β=0.554). Four of the service quality dimensions positively and significantly influenced Destination Loyalty similar to the finding of Chand and Ashish (2014): Assurance (β=0.113), Responsiveness (β=0.148), Reliability (β=0.134), and Empathy (β=0.119). Only tangible facilities relationship with destination loyalty was not significant although it was positive (β=0.079). This might be because most of the international tourists have visited several countries and have the impression that tangible facilities such as equipment, physical appearance, and employee appearance do not make them directly loyal to the destination. This finding supports Chiou and Droge (2006) who found that Facility service quality to have no direct role in influencing loyalty. They reasoned that most of the sales point are homogenous and do not differ dramatically leading to similar perception while the human factor or the interaction with service personnel was highly vital. However, we demonstrated that tangible facilities were perceived to have an added value, leading to international tourists' destination loyalty. Our results showed that perceived value fully mediated the relationship between tangible facilities (β=0.038) and destination loyalty. However, perceived value was found to partially mediate the relationships between Service Quality (β=0.138), Assurance (β=0.047), Responsiveness (β=0.043), Reliability (β=0.053) and Empathy (β=0.035), and Destination Loyalty. The result implies that when the levels of perceived value of the service provided increase, the propensity for the foreign tourists to return and recommend the destination to others increases.

The result of the structural model evaluation showed that R2 was 0.51, indicating that 51% of the variation in destination loyalty was explained by perceived value and 41% of the variation in perceived value was caused by tourism service quality.

## 5.1 Managerial implications and recommendations

The current study showed that both service quality (independent variable) and perceived value(mediator) were direct determinants of destination loyalty (dependent variable). This study extends the knowledge of tourism and marketing research and offers empirical underpinning for future research by examining the extended conceptualization of perceived value of services quality provided and destination loyalty at the country level. The results of the study have important managerial implications for tourism marketers. To achieve tourism strategies such as Dubai 2020 Vision, the research finding suggests that the UAE government should put more emphasis on investing in promoting tourism destination by providing high-quality service that is highly valued by tourists.

Therefore, these study findings strongly point to some benefits for managers and practitioners in the hospitality/tourism industry. The findings indicate that service quality dimensions are an essential ingredient for perceived value and consequently to destination loyalty. This would suggest that managers and practitioners could increase perceived value and destination loyalty through a variety of means. First, having well-trained, customer-oriented employees who are able to fulfil tourists' requests promptly and in timely manner. Second, provide tourist with clear and easy guidelines with the most important attractions in the country. Third, ensure that the service provided to the touristsreasonably priced, valuable and worth it and of high quality. Fourth, ensure all physical appearance such as hotels, airports, restaurants; malls etc. are tidy and clean. Lastly, safety and health insurance for tourists should be a priority.

The study results may also help tourism marketers to recognizethe determinants effecting perceived value of destination and loyalty so that they can effectively market tourism products and services to fulfill tourists' wants and needs internationally. Therefore, tourism managers should focus the practical implications of these service quality dimensions and perceived value which fundamentally increases international tourists' loyalty. Tourism managers should emphasize on what make the tourists feel that the value they receive is equal to or more than what they expect to establish positive re-purchase tourist behavior and enhance competitiveness between destinations. Thus, to achieve a better level of perceived value of service quality provided, government and managers must be aware of the critical importance of providing quality service, in addition, to continue assessing and improving the quality of services provided by concentrating on the service quality dimensions.

## 5.2 Limitations and future research

This research as other research hasits limitations which highlighted opportunities for future studies. First, because only international travelers visiting UAE participated in the survey, the results may have generalizability constraints to other destinations. For this reason, future studies should investigate the appropriateness to apply the model in other countries. Secondly, data collection was done in short time period. Consequently, the results stated here may not echo seasonality. Future research should collect data different times of the year to take seasonality into consideration. Finally, demographic variables are receiving increased consideration in the tourism literature because these variables may have an influence on destination loyalty. Therefore, the current research may be extended to examine the impact of tourists' demographics on destination loyalty.

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Appendix: the questionnaire of the study.

| ASSURANCE |
|---|
| -Generally, I was served by a well-trained, customer oriented personnel. |
| -The level of service quality reinforces my confidence in the service provided. |
| -A detailed, experienced and competent tour and hotel escorts was provided to facilitate my stay. |
| -Generally, staff communicated with me fluently and in an understandable manner. |
| RESPONSIVENESS |
| -Generally, staff showed sincere interest in problem-solving. |
| -Generally, staff provided adequate and clear information about the service they deliver. |

| |
|---|
| -Generally, staff were able to fulfill my requests promptly in a timely manner. |
| -Generally staff provided me with full information regarding the entertainment offered. |
| -Generally, staff showed sincere willingness and interest in helping and assisting me. |
| -Generally, staff provided me with advice on how to best utilize my free time. |
| RELIABILITY |
| -Directions and signs were available properly. |
| -Directions and signs easily guided me in finding the needed locations e.g., hotel. |
| -Services delivered were correct from the first time. |
| -Services were delivered as promised to tourists. |
| -Scheduled tours were met on a timely manner. |
| -No troubles occurred with the service provided during my stay. |
| TANGIBLE FACILITIES |
| -Modern and technologically relevant vehicles were available. |
| -The infrastructure is designed well and in high quality standards. |
| -The meals that were served are of high quality. |
| -The accommodation and facilities were appealing and in good design. |
| -Physical appearance such as hotels, airports, restaurants, malls etc. were tidy and clean. |
| EMPATHY |
| -Services offered were provided by pleasant and friendly personnel. |
| -My exceptions and special needs were met as expected. |

| |
|---|
| -Personal safety was considered as a major aspect in every service provided. |
| PERCEIVED VALUE |
| -Visiting UAE is reasonably priced. |
| -While visiting UAE, I received good service. |
| -Visiting UAE is valuable and worth it. |
| DESTINATION LOYALTY |
| -I intend to visitUAE in the future. |
| -UAE would be my first choice as a vacation in the region. |
| -UAE provides more benefits than other destinations in the region. |
| -I would advise/recommend other people to visit the UAE destination. |

# جودة الخدمة وولاء السائح ـ الدور الوسيط للقيمة الملموسة من منظور السياح الدوليين

**شاكر بني ملحم**

**محمد البيتي**

كلية إدارة الأعمال ـ جامعة الشارقة

الشارقة ـ الإمارات العربية المتحدة

**ملخص البحث:**

وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في العلاقات المباشرة بين أبعاد جودة الخدمة مع القيمة المتصورة والولاء للوجهة السياحية؛ بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يتم التحقق من تأثير القيمة المتصورة كمتغير وسيط. باستخدام تحليل البيانات عن طريق تطبيق SEM والتي تم جمعها من 508 سائح دولي يزور الإمارات العربية المتحدةوجدت الدراسة ما يلي. أولا، توجد علاقة ذات دلالة إحصائية وإيجابية بين الأبعاد الخمسة لجودة الخدمة والقيمة المضافة. ثانيا، توجد علاقة مباشرة ذات دلالة إحصائية وإيجابية بين أربعة من أبعاد جودة الخدمة والولاء للوجهة السياحية. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، هناك تأثير جزئي للقيمة المضافة على العلاقة بين كل أبعاد جودة الخدمة والولاء للوجهة السياحية باستثناء المرافق الملموسة التي تتم عند وجود المتغير الوسيط القيمة المضافة.وتوصي الدراسة بأنه يجب على مدراء الوجهات (في القطاع السياحي) التركيز على ما يجعل السياح يشعرون بأن القيمة التي يتلقونها هي مساوية أو أكثر مما كانوا يتوقعون والذي سيخلق سلوك ولاء سياحي إيجابي ويعزز جاذبية الوجهة. وبالتالي، يمكن تحقيق مستوى عال من جودة الخدمة المضافة المقدمة إذا كانت الحكومة والمديرين يفهمون تماما الأهمية الرئيسية لتقديم خدمات عالية الجودة ومستمرين في تقييم وتحسين نوعية الخدمة المقدمة.

**الكلمات الدالة:** ولاء السائحللوجهةالسياحية، القيمة المتصورة، أبعاد جودة الخدمة ، قطاع السياحة.