The impact of differential pricing on perceived service quality and guest satisfaction: An empirical study of mid-scale hotels in India

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to identify the key factors of differential pricing and its impact on perceived service quality and guest satisfaction. Great attention has been given by researchers to service quality and guest satisfaction in the tourism and hotel industry. This study however examines an integrated model of differential pricing, perceived service quality and guest satisfaction linked to value perception and satisfaction among guests for prices offered at the time of room booking, and the services available during their stay. A self-administered questionnaire was given to guests who stayed in mid-scale hotels and 334 responses were collected randomly. Structural equation modelling was used to examine the data set, a second-generation method that enables simultaneous modelling of a large number of independent and dependent variables. Partial least square SmartPLS 4.0 was used to evaluate the data. The measurement model and the structural model are the two used to examine the data. According to survey results and findings, booking channel and booking volume are significantly related to guest satisfaction. Additionally, the booking channel has a significant relationship with perceived service quality. Maintaining high-quality websites is crucial to attracting visitors and keeping them, eventually leading to more people using travel websites out of loyalty.

KEYWORDS

guest perception, guest satisfaction, differential pricing, perceived service quality, mid-scale hotels, re-visit intention, pricing strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Hotels are classified by grade into three different levels: economy, mid-scale, and luxury (Xu & Li, 2016; Zhang et al., 2011). The dynamics of the Indian market help in the growth of the hospitality industry and encourage foreign hotel chains towards the Indian market. Although hotel chains each have their business philosophy and have differing market techniques, for example, Premier Inn, a budget hotel chain in the UK, presents itself as a mid-market value hotel brand. Many international hotel chains have pitched themselves

high in India and provide specialty restaurants, modern architecturally-designed banquet halls and in-room dining facilities. Because of the wide services gap between various market segments, i.e. upmarket, mid-market or budget, each operates in a particular way creating opportunities in the Indian hospitality market (Sinha & Ekka, 2021). A hotel is a commercial establishment that mainly provides accommodation, food and beverages and related services to its guests. Mid-scale hotels have become the largest segment in India, falling between five-star and budget/economy, and have a growing demand from middle-income and international budget travellers. They are expected to hold a 40.21% market share over the forecast period to fill the gap between economy and luxury hotels. Economy hotels offer limited guest services and room amenities, a lack of trained and professional employees, along with small bedrooms and bathrooms. Luxury hotels offer top-class guest services and guest room amenities with well-trained and professional employees to meet international standards. Because of the rising expectations of guests, the hospitality sector has a higher service quality than any other. Many characteristics that have been created and put through testing in other service sectors can be applied to the hospitality industry. Quality plays a vital role in customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Due to its vast breadth covering a range of business settings, few studies have used a comprehensive viewpoint to analyse service quality in tourism.

Guest perceptions and expectations, related to a hotel's products and services, vary according to the level of the hotel (Xu & Li, 2016; Zhang et al., 2011). Hotel room booking through online portals is becoming more popular and customers generally post, share and recommend their previous stay. Hotels have been receiving booking requests historically both directly and indirectly. The online role has increased over recent decades through the global distribution system within the travel sector (Ampountolas et al., 2019). Hotels focus on social media platforms and their presence to standardize customer experience against their competitors and expect an impact on profitability. An active presence on social media of a hotel has the potential to increase direct booking which can help a hotel to enhance business and profitability. This activity focuses on hotel managers who have authority over revenue management and price distribution decisions. This differential pricing allows managers to charge customers a different price for the same product or service (Lii & Sy, 2009), as per customer, location, time and product. The hotel can charge a lower price to attract new customers but offer a higher price to loyal customers for the same product. Perceived service quality (PSQ) is the key which measures a hotel's performance and is evaluated by guests based on various parameters such as sleep quality, room service, hotel staff behaviour towards in-house guests, product quality, etc. PSQ leads to guest satisfaction and in return encourages re-purchasing intention, builds brand image and provides advantages to the hotelier in the competitive hotel market (Cronin & Taylor, 1992). Offering basic hotel services and amenities, such as housekeeping-related services, can provide advantages and a good experience (Bulchand-Gidumal et al., 2011). Key attributes are tangible services that can create positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Yen & Tang, 2019). Since hotel rooms are seen as 'perishable goods', hoteliers use a variety of room pricing techniques, such as high-demand and low-demand strategies, to try to optimize revenue. Take-up and customer demand affect room price tactics (Su, 2007). Because pertinent information is easily accessible and anyone can quickly compare prices for various solutions on the internet, it fosters more accurate price analysis. The cost of a hotel room varies depending on where it is located, allowing the employment of tactics for differential pricing (Bull, 1994). Differential pricing is widely executed for revenue maximization and hotels generally charge more when a buyer is closer to the use date because the hotel room inventory is fixed. Potential customers are segmented and categorized into groups, as per their demands, and a hotel controls prices accordingly. A hotel charges more to those who have less elastic demand and less to those who have more (Gwartney, 2009).

Although corporate offices and shopping malls are conveniently located nearby, hotels in the heart of a city also have the drawbacks of being close to traffic, noise and air pollution. On the other hand, hotels that are close to the seaside or mountains will offer their guests fascinating vistas as well as rest and refreshment. Location is a prominent factor in hotel selection and strongly impacts guest satisfaction (Arbel & Pizam, 1977). Hotels that are close to airports, railway stations or bus stops are preferred most by travellers.

2. Literature review

A hotel is often perceived as one of the oldest commercial establishments recognized as a global service industry (Whitla et al., 2007). A hotel provides a bundle of products and services for example, accommodation, food, beverage, room service, 24-hour a la carte and a multi-cuisine restaurant, banquets, swimming pool, spa, gymnasium, transportation-related services, etc. Global customers book the hotel and experience its products and services however many customers prefer to stay in a branded hotel chain for high-quality service. The customer is considered and treated as a guest in the hospitality industry which differs in service quality and value perceived (Baker et al., 2003).

Rate parity, which refers to a homogeneity in prices across different distribution channels from direct booking to all intermediate channels of traditional or electronic distribution. Rate integrity refers to the consistency of prices charged to the same customers throughout the same time period. Various factors have been identified by researchers that affect customer choice when selecting a hotel, such as price, services, location, brand image, 24-hour meal availability, etc. (Albayrak & Caber, 2015; Chu & Choi, 2000). A combination of the tangible (physical attributes) and the intangible (hotel services) have been identified by researchers in the hospitality industry (Kotler, 1991). In the same way, it has been proposed to divide hotel properties into the following: intangible services, hotel security, hotel reputation and service quality, which are then evaluated by the customer (Chow et al., 1995). In the same context, it has been suggested segregating a hotel's attributes into two categories, core and facilitating, an example of a core attribute is the facilities offered (tangible) by the hotel and an example of a facilitating attribute is the services offered (intangible) by a (Yen & Tang, 2015). Recently, several studies have investigated the impact of different hotel attributes on hotel booking, for example, value and room are critical attributes that contribute to a high level of hotel rating (Rhee & Yang, 2015). Guest expectations are very high for hotel staff and food, and they often express dissatisfaction against room personnel, front office personnel and hotel services. Cleanliness was found one of the most important areas for travellers but that did not meet expectations. The centre of attraction for any guest is sleep quality in evaluating a hotel's performance (Liu et al., 2013).

A location which is convenient for the airport, business mall, bus stops and parking facilities plays a vital role (Dolnicar & Otter, 2003). Furthermore, approaches to the study of constructs are briefly overviewed in Table 1.

2.1. Differential pricing in the hotel industry

Differential pricing is the strategy of charging different prices for the same category of rooms to different guests depending on the booking channel, booking volume and booking timing (Biełuszko & Marciszewska, 2018; Lii & Sy, 2009; Suklabaidya & Singh, 2017). Furthermore, hotel rooms are considered 'perishable goods' therefore hoteliers use a variety of room pricing techniques such as high-demand and low-demand tactics to try to optimize revenue for the hotel (Napierała & Leśniewska-Napierała, 2022). Prices for hotel rooms focus on three different levels: low, best available and average daily rate (ADR), and as a result unique pricing methods, tactics and decisions are needed (Napierała & Leśniewska-Napierała, 2022).

According to Law et al. (2007), hotel room prices change depending on peak season, off-season and different market segments. Differential pricing is used in the hotel industry with rates such as corporate, discounted, best available, package, extended stay etc. (Enz et al., 2008; Mattila & Gao, 2016). Guest opinions on pricing strategies such as fairness, acceptability, reasonableness and honesty, on the other hand, varied for different pricing strategies. The internet encourages more accurate pricing inspection since it is highly transparent and makes it easy for anyone to quickly and easily compare prices for a variety of possibilities

Table 1. Approaches to the study of constructs

Authors and dates	Brief overview	Constructs
Abdel-aleem (2017), Lii and Sy (2009), Kimes and Wirtz (2003)	The authors revealed the differential pricing strategies for revenue maximization of hotels by using tactics. The survey was conducted based on 367 responses	Booking timing (BT)
Tomalieh (2014), Lii and Sy (2009)	The study demonstrated how booking volume and combination price discrimination impacted the marketing performance of hotels	Booking volume (BV)
Biełuszko and Marciszewska (2018), Abdel-aleem (2017), Choi and Mattila (2009)	The study ascertained how far hotels may use rate parity and price discrimination across a range of direct and indirect electronic distribution channels	Booking channel (BC)
Ali et al. (2021), Sujay and Afza (2019), Sadeghi et al. (2017), Kondasani and Panda (2015)	The authors revealed that customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions such as recommendations, loyalty and willingness to pay can be impacted by PSQ. The survey was conducted in three-, four- and five-star hotels	Perceived service quality (PSQ)
Sujay and Afza (2019), El-Adly (2019), Ali et al. (2017)	The authors highlighted how the dimension of service quality significantly influences the prediction of customer satisfaction. Furthermore, depicting the impact of price and hotel pricing on service quality	Guest satisfaction (GS)

Source: authors.

(Su, 2007). The market is segmentable, hence lower-price segment customers cannot afford higher-prices, and competitors cannot undersell a room in the higher-price segment (Enz et al., 2008). Due to the fact that this specific form of discrimination is lawful, the practice does not increase customer unhappiness. Guest pricing behavior also leads hotels to consider guest preferences over rivals when determining prices in a market with a wide range of competitors (Napierała & Leśniewska-Napierała, 2022). Price differentials create a situation where guests are faced with a decision of where to buy to escape a poor room booking decision (Enz et al., 2008).

2.1.1. Price discrimination

The practice of charging different prices to different customers for the same goods (Ahmed, 2010). According to Kotler (2000), price discrimination works on the following circumstances:
– market segmentation,
– competitive hotels cannot undersell rooms in the upper-price segment,
– it does not lead to resentment among guests,
– the specific type of pricing discrimination is allowed. This revenue management tactic is made possible because of fixed capacity such as the hotel inventory (rooms) and typically, the guest who books rooms closer to the use date is less price sensitive. Furthermore, different offers to distinct guest categories, with different price sensitivities, may be the cause of differential price services through the diverse channels of distribution by hotels (Sipic, 2010).

2.1.2. Price fairness

According to Bolton et al. (2002), determination of whether a transaction or process of carrying it out is reasonable, acceptable or just. Additionally, the idea of pricing fairness includes two conceptually separate elements: economic and social. The method hotels use to determine their pricing structure has a significant impact on a guest's perceived price fairness (Lii & Sy, 2009). The negative effect of perceived unfair pricing happens because of the difference in appraised price and the reference prices (Xia et al., 2004).

2.2. Booking channel

Differential pricing occurs when a guest seeks a room through various booking channels such as direct booking, online travel agencies, hotel websites etc. (Biełuszko & Marciszewska, 2018). In the internet era, multiple booking channels have appeared and a hotel charges different prices for the same product on a different channel. According to Park et al. (2017), since the advent of the internet, many prospective travellers now make use of hotel websites or online travel companies to reserve rooms. Furthermore, by using websites, these travellers can quickly access a variety of information like cost, availability and past customer feedback. In other words, customers are using a relatively small screen, and managers are attempting to stimulate their booking intentions by presenting succinct yet powerful messaging on it.

2.3. Booking timing

Prices are adjusted in accordance with fluctuations in demand for example when two different customers have planned to visit the same hotel category based on seasons (peak and off-season) and time of reservation (Abdel-aleem, 2017). Furthermore, there can be a time gap for the purchase of a hotel room i.e. Customer A booked a month before the date of arrival and Customer B booked just a week before (Kimes & Wirtz, 2003; Lii & Sy, 2009).

2.4. Booking volume

Prices vary in accordance with customer purchase capacity for the same category, for example, bulk booking and single-night booking for the same category (Tomalieh, 2014). Hotels offer very attractive pricing to groups, long-stay guests, travel agencies, etc. to take a huge chunk of business for the same category of hotel room (Lii & Sy, 2009). These hotel pricing practices help to maximize revenue but with a high chance of losing a regular free individual travelers and discourage them from re-visiting.

2.5. Perceived service quality in the hotel industry

In today's competitive market, hotels should aim at focusing on customers' perceived service quality (PSQ) to meet their expectations. Research has disclosed the significant impact of PSQ on customer loyalty and satisfaction (Donnelly et al., 2006). PSQ also helps in increasing the profitability of a hotel, improving its performance and factors such as guest satisfaction and consequently word of mouth (WOM) etc. (Seth et al., 2005). PSQ has been defined by researchers as customer-received PSQ and is compared with their expectations (Grönroos, 1984). These dimensions are classified into two categories: functional quality (process of service delivery to guests) and technical quality (PSQ that is received by the guest in the hotel). Further, five different dimensions were identified in the SERVQUAL model (Sujay & Afza, 2019); tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

In the same context, a further five dimensions of service quality under 'technical' were disclosed by the researcher and aligned with perceived service quality

(Ali, 2015): ambience, courteous service, quality of food and beverages, presentation and expertise of staff and the service quality of the hotel restaurant, together with overall value.

There is rising evidence that PSQ is the most significant factor that impacts on guest perception and an intention to re-visit (Zeithaml et al., 1996). PSQ has defined the capability to meet a guest's requirements and expectations (Lin & Su, 2003). In the hotel industry, PSQ is a measurement of service delivery that matches guest expectations.

2.6. Guest satisfaction

Satisfaction is a guest's feelings of happiness or disappointment based on a comparison of perceived service performance and expectation (Sujay & Afza, 2019). In the differential pricing literature, the concept of guest satisfaction is the key outcome of PSQ. Guest satisfaction is an integral part of improving the product and service quality of a hotel which helps in the retention of a guest in today's competitive market. A positive impression of a hotel in terms of product and service quality leads to re-visiting intentions and eWOM (Ghaith et al., 2019). The key objective of the hospitality industry is to make guests happy. A hotel's reputation will suffer if it is not specifically focused on its customer's needs, wants and expectations. This also applies to other hospitality-related properties. Using customer input from a hotel, this study looks at how service quality influences customer happiness and how it affects the hotel's reputation overall. Guest satisfaction measures how satisfied guests are with the services they have received in relation to what they had expected from the hotel. Further emotions could satisfy the guest if exceeding their expectations.

Based on an extensive review of the literature, three variables for differential pricing and their impact on PSQ and guest satisfaction are examined: booking channel, booking timing and booking volume (Figure 1).
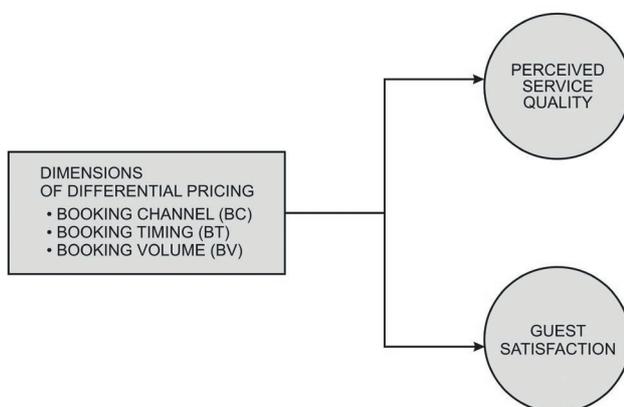

Figure 1. Conceptual model of study
Source: authors

2.7. Research gap

According to Sipic (2010), price is the key consideration for customers when choosing a booking channel because they always look for better deals. Pricing is one of the primary tools for marketing hence price discrimination is considered one of the major pricing strategies (Tomalieh, 2014). According to Ng (2010), hotels use a yield management approach due to fluctuations in supply and demand and charge different prices depending upon the channel, product, customer and time. PSQ is operationalized in the hotel industry by including reliability, confidence, responsiveness and communication (Sadeghi et al., 2017). Guests have faith in service providers when they sign up, switch or need support. According to Garbarino and Johnson (1999), a guest who trusts a firm is confident in the services provided and is more likely to recommend it. As a result, a guest compares expectations and PSQ and are said to be satisfied or dissatisfied (Sujay & Afza, 2019). According to Enz et al. (2008), location pricing is one of the numerous types of segmented techniques that hotels use to charge different rates for various locations. Numerous studies have been done at the international level on aspects of pricing strategies and hotel service quality revealing the impact of differential pricing in the hotel industry and then describes its relationship to PSQ and guest satisfaction.

3. Objective of the study

The purpose of the current research is to look at the importance of the impact of differential pricing on PSQ and guest satisfaction in mid-scale hotels situated in Delhi, India. According to Ahmed (2010) and Gwin and Gwin (2003), differential pricing consists of charging different prices for the same product and service. Value perception and satisfaction among guests for offered products and services at the time of booking hotel rooms and availing services during a stay is always very different. PSQ and guest satisfaction are both recognized as critical ideas concerning guests (Ghaith et al., 2019). The research objectives within this context are as follows:
1. To assess the impact of differential pricing on perceived service quality in mid-scale hotels.
2. To assess the impact of differential pricing on guest satisfaction in mid-scale hotels.

4. Development of hypotheses

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of differential pricing on perceived service quality and guest satisfaction in mid-scale hotels. Based

on the extensive literature reviews, three variables for differential pricing in the hotel are examined: booking timing, booking volume, and booking channel. The impact of these variables on perceived service quality and guest satisfaction in hotels. Further, the development of hypotheses is as follows:

H_1: There is a significant relationship between booking channel and perceived service quality.

H_2: There is a significant relationship between booking channel and guest satisfaction.

H_3: There is a significant relationship between booking timing and perceived service quality.

H_4: There is a significant relationship between booking timing and guest satisfaction.

H_5: There is a significant relationship between booking volume and perceived service quality.

H_6: There is a significant relationship between booking volume and guest satisfaction.

5. Research methodology

The goal of this study is to assess the impact of differential pricing on perceived service quality and guest satisfaction. As a result, the hotel's application of rate parity was examined at various levels. To achieve the objective, the researcher concentrated on both primary and secondary research (literature review).

5.1. Sampling and data collection

The study was conducted by using a self-administered questionnaire distributed to hotel guests focused on the mid-scale hotel segment and data was collected from January to April 2023 in Delhi. According to the Ministry of Tourism (2023), foreign tourist arrivals were 865,779 in February 2023. Delhi is the capital of India, one of the major destinations for both domestic and international travellers and has always been a strong market in terms of business demand as it is the center of all political and economic activity. With the growth of commercial centres in satellite towns like Gurugram and Noida, this demand has increased even more. Also emerging as a new hub for business and transit travel is Delhi's Aerocity. A five-point Likert scale was used and the statements were 1 – *strongly disagree*, 2 – *disagree*, 3 – *neutral*, 4 – *agree* and 5 – *strongly agree*. The target population was guests who stayed in mid-scale hotels i.e. three and four-star hotels (Soifer et al., 2021). A convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data through a self-administered questionnaire survey. A total of 57 mid-scale hotels were randomly chosen out of which 42 hotels permitted the collection of data. A set of questionnaires was distributed to 485 guests and 334 responses were collected, hence

the response rate was 68.86%. Out of these 70.1% were male and 28.7% were female; 1.2% gave 'other' and the demographic profile of respondents are highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Demographic variables		$n = 334$	Percent
Gender	male	234	70.1
	female	96	28.7
	other	4	1.2
Age	20–29	95	28.5
	30–39	109	32.6
	40–49	90	26.9
	50–59	33	9.9
	60 or above	7	2.1
Material status	single	128	38.3
	married	199	59.6
	separated	5	1.5
	widow(er)	2	0.6
Education	up to intermediate	37	11.1
	graduate	150	44.9
	post-graduate	114	34.1
	doctorate	26	7.8
	others	7	2.1
Occupation	private business	113	33.7
	self-employed	71	21.3
	professional	72	21.6
	government service	37	11.1
	others	41	12.3
Annual income	up to 5 lakhs	90	26.8
	5–9 lakhs	69	20.7
	10–14 lakhs	73	21.9
	15–19 lakhs	62	18.6
	20 lakhs or more	40	12.0

Source: prepared by the authors.

5.2. Data analysis and results

SEM, or structural equation modelling, was used to examine the data. SEM is a second-generation method that enables simultaneous modelling of a large number of independent and dependent variables. The partial

least square (PLS) program SmartPLS 4.0 was used to evaluate the data. The measurement model and the structural model are the two used to analyse the data. The measurement model expresses the link between latent components and their relevant variables, whereas the structural model illustrates the causal relationship between the constructs (Chin, 1998).

5.3. Measurement model

The outcomes of the measuring model based on the PLS algorithm are displayed in Table 3. Based on the results of the investigation, convergent validity and internal consistency are evaluated. Internal consistency is evaluated using composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity is calculated using average variance extracted (AVE). To establish internal consistency, Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that the value of CR must be equal to or higher than 0.7. As it cannot account for more than half of the variance by item or variable, an AVE value of less than 0.5 is unacceptable (Henseler et al., 2009). To obtain an AVE value of 0.5, various variables are thus eliminated. Item BT1 and PSQ 2 removed from the 'working conditions' construct "Hotel room rates are high during peak season. As per price, the hotel room cleaning service was deemed to be good". According to Table 3, all constructions have an AVE value better than 0.5. Similarly, the CR value of each construct is more than 0.8. As a result, the model is found to have internal consistency, dependability and convergent validity.

An important aspect of structural equation modelling is to use discriminant validity to assess differences between different constructs in a model, as suggested by Fornell and Larker (1981) in which case discriminant validity is considered to be obtained when inter-construct correlations are less than the root of the square of the average variance extracted (AVE) represents, while non-covariance values indicate correlations between constructs referred in Table 4.

Table 3. Measurement model

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
Booking timing (BT)	Do you feel that early booking attracts a lower price?	0.853	0.579	0.797
	Do you feel that a hotel offers a high price for last minute booking?	0.834		
	The hotel offers a special occasion price such as for New Year's Eve	0.797		
Booking volume (BV)	Do you find that a hotel offers a special discounted rate for a long stay guest?	0.902	0.655	0.741
	Do you feel that a hotel offers a rebate for bulk booking of a room?	0.925		
	The hotel offers a special discounted rate for family booking	0.907		
	Do you feel that hotel offers a high price for an individual guest?	0.617		
Booking channel (BC)	Do you think that a hotel quotes a high price for a walk-in guest?	0.678	0.718	0.814
	The hotel offers low price for online room booking	0.828		
	Do you think that the hotel website rate is high?	0.848		
	The hotel offers attractive rates to increase direct booking	0.669		
Perceived service quality (PSQ)	Do you feel that hotel services vary according to the high price offered to the guest?	0.810	0.580	0.782
	Hotel staff were well behaved and courteous	0.818		
	Hotel service quality varied according to the low price offered to the guest	0.866		
Guest satisfaction (GS)	The service quality that I experienced met my expectations	0.780	0.692	0.858
	Overall, I was satisfied with the service quality provided	0.865		
	I associated service quality with positive experiences and recommend the hotel	0.780		
	For a slight increase in price, I would still return to this hotel	0.832		
	Do you feel that the hotel has overcharged?	0.635		
	Do you feel that the hotel has treated you differently due to a room booked at a low price?	0.084		

Note: AVE – average variance extracted, CR – composite reliability.
Source: authors' own work.

Table 4. Discriminant validity

Construct	BC	BT	BV	GS	PSQ
BC	0.760				
BT	0.522	0.809			
BV	0.789	0.614	0.848		
GS	0.704	0.567	0.734	0.715	
PSQ	0.794	0.481	0.677	0.687	0.832

Note: BC – booking channel, BT – booking timing, BV – booking volume, GS – guest satisfaction, PSQ – perceived service quality.
Source: authors' own work.

5.4. STRUCTURAL MODEL

The structural model is given in Figure 2. The model represents the relationship between the various constructs. These relationships are tested by running the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS 4.0 software.
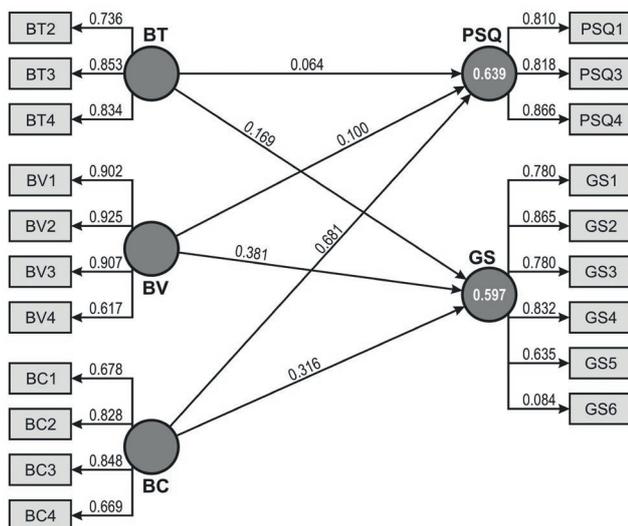

Figure 2. Structural model results
Note: BC – booking channel, BT – booking timing,
BV – booking volume, GS – guest satisfaction,
PSQ – perceived service quality
Source: authors' own work

5.4.1. STANDARDIZED PATH COEFFICIENTS

These are an essential output in structural equation modelling. They represent the strength and direction of the relationships between variables in a SEM model while taking into account the scale of measurement. Unlike unstandardized coefficients, which depend on the measurement units of the variables involved, standardized coefficients are unitless and facilitate direct comparisons of the strength of relationships.

Chin (1998) provides a guideline for evaluating the significance of standardized path coefficients. David W. Chin is a prominent researcher in the field of SEM, and his work has significantly contributed to best practices in structural equation modelling. In the context of the research and the information provided, Chin's guideline suggests that standardized path coefficients should ideally be at least 0.2 and, if possible, greater than 0.3 to be considered significant. This means:

1. Standardized path coefficient of 0.2: if a standardized path coefficient is equal to or greater than 0.2, it indicates that there is a moderate relationship between the variables involved in that path. In this context, a coefficient of 0.2 suggests that there is a reasonably significant association between the constructs or variables being examined.
2. Standardized path coefficient of 0.3: if a standardized path coefficient is equal to or greater than 0.3, it indicates a relatively strong relationship between the variables. This suggests that the variables have a more substantial and meaningful impact on each other.

6. DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The study has delved into the intricate relationships between various factors, including booking channel, booking volume, booking timing, guest satisfaction and perceived service quality. Rigorous testing of

Table 5. Results of hypothesis testing using structural model analysis

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	*t*-statistics	*p*-value	Decision
BC → GS	0.316	0.131	2.416	0.016	supported
BC → PSQ	0.681	0.084	8.132	0.000	supported
BT → GS	0.169	0.106	1.592	0.111	not supported
BT → PSQ	0.064	0.091	0.707	0.480	not supported
BV → GS	0.381	0.132	2.879	0.004	supported
BV → PSQ	0.100	0.114	0.881	0.379	not supported

Note: BC – booking channel, BT – booking timing, BV – booking volume, GS – guest satisfaction, PSQ – perceived service quality.
Source: authors' own work.

hypotheses has revealed critical insights with wide-ranging implications for both academics and hospitality practitioners referred to in Table 5.

6.1. Booking channel and booking volume

The findings unequivocally confirm the significant impact of booking channels on guest satisfaction (H_1 and H_5). Additionally, booking channels significantly influence PSQ, lending empirical support to H_2. These outcomes accentuate the indispensable role of booking channels encompassing websites, online travel agencies and other platforms, in showcasing goods and services, while enticing and retaining clientele (Akincilar & Dagdeviren, 2014). In the contemporary landscape of the hospitality industry, a hotel management's strategic imperative is to maintain a dynamic website, effectively serving as a marketing tool. This strategic approach aligns with the competitive dynamics within the industry, underscoring the paramount importance of businesses maintaining high-quality websites. This is substantiated by previous research suggesting that repeat business from loyal customers tends to be less price-sensitive (Bowen & Chen, 2001). Notably, returning guests not only bolster a hotel's bottom line but also play a pivotal role in fostering positive WOM (McMullan & Gilmore, 2008). Hence, investing in high-quality websites and optimizing booking channels remains imperative for enhancing guest satisfaction and cultivating customer loyalty.

6.2. Booking timing and booking volume

In this study, an investigation was conducted into the impact of booking timing and booking volume on PSQ within the context of the hospitality industry. Contrary to prior research by Ozturk et al. (2016) and the studies conducted by Choi and Chu (2001) as well as Kim et al. (2009), the findings indicate a different outcome. The study reveals that, in the specific research context, booking timing (represented by H_3) and booking volume (represented by H_4) do not demonstrate a statistically significant influence on PSQ. Therefore, in contrast to the previously mentioned works, these factors do not appear to impact perception of service quality, as evidenced by H_6. These results offer a unique and intriguing perspective on the relationship between booking dynamics and service quality within the hospitality industry. This statement succinctly summarizes the research paper's key findings, highlights the contrast with previous research, and underscores the significance of the results.

6.3. Implications for practice and academia

In today's dynamic hotel industry, the selection and management of booking channels emerges as a critical determinant of guest satisfaction and PSQ. Hotel management must give paramount attention to the effectiveness of booking channels, including websites and third-party platforms. Sustaining high-quality websites is imperative for not only attracting but also retaining users, thereby fostering customer loyalty to travel websites. Practitioners can leverage these insights to inform their strategies, allocating resources judiciously to optimize their online presence.

6.4. Nuanced pricing strategies based on booking volume

The study spotlights the importance of understanding the influence of booking volume, particularly its significant role in guest satisfaction. To maximize guest satisfaction and occupancy rates, the hospitality sector should consider framing pricing strategies that cater to the diverse segments of guests and adjusting pricing strategies in response to booking volume fluctuations.

6.5. Future research directions

Future research could delve deeper into the mechanisms that mediate the relationship between booking channels, guest satisfaction and perceived service quality. Understanding the processes through which booking channels impact guest perceptions could uncover additional insights for hotel management.

6.6. Cross-cultural considerations

Investigating how these relationships may vary across different cultural contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in the global hospitality industry. By expanding on the discussion and implications of the findings, a more comprehensive perspective is offered on the practical implications and potential avenues for future research. These insights can guide strategic decision-making and research endeavours within the ever-evolving hospitality sector.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, informed by the extensive body of literature in the field, this work has explored the intricate relationships between booking channels, booking volume, booking timing, guest satisfaction and PSQ within the competitive and ever-evolving landscape of the hospitality industry (Cembruch-Nowakowski, 2019). By drawing upon the research contributions of scholars and conducting empirical investigations, a deeper understanding of how these factors interplay and impact overall guest experience has been made.

7.1. Practical conclusions

Holistic marketing strategies reinforce the notion that in contemporary hospitality management, success hinges on the integration of various marketing tools and channels. As suggested by Akincilar and Dagdeviren (2014), businesses in the hospitality sector deploy a plethora of online marketing tools, including social media marketing, email campaigns and online advertising. Therefore, hoteliers should aim for holistic marketing strategies that harness the synergy of these tools to optimize guest satisfaction and PSQ (Hopf, 2018).

The strategic focus on booking channels builds on the insights of San Martín and Herrero (2012) and the research underscores the enduring significance of booking channels in shaping guest perceptions. The online booking experience, whether through a hotel's website or third-party platforms, plays a crucial role in attracting and retaining guests. As highlighted by Zhang et al. (2010), hoteliers should continue to invest in user-friendly websites and cultivate strong partnerships with booking platforms to enhance the overall guest experience.

7.2. Research contributions

Advancing the understanding of booking channels, this work aligns with the findings of Akincilar and Dagdeviren (2014) and contributes to the body of knowledge within the field of hospitality management by providing empirical evidence of the substantial impact of booking channels on guest satisfaction and PSQ. Emphasizing the complexity of marketing tools, as highlighted by Law and Cheung (2006), the modern marketing landscape in the hospitality sector extending beyond websites is emphasized. While websites are a cornerstone, the broader online marketing toolkit, encompassing social media, online advertising and email marketing, deserves equal attention (Abdel-Basset et al., 2019). The research highlights the complexity of marketing in the digital age, echoing the sentiments of Ryan et al. (2011) and encourages a nuanced approach.

7.3. Limitations and future research directions

The work is not without limitations. It primarily focuses on internal factors, yet the hospitality industry is also influenced by external factors such as economic conditions, cultural trends and market dynamics. Future research should consider these external influences and their impact on guest perceptions, as Casaló et al. (2008) and Ryan et al. (2011) have proposed.

There are unexplored dimensions of online marketing as this work has primarily explored the influence of booking channels, leaving open avenues for future research, in alignment with the suggestions of Law and Cheung (2006). Future investigations could delve deeper into the role of other online marketing tools and their synergy with booking channels, as recommended by Ryan et al. (2011) and Casaló et al. (2008). Investigating emerging technologies, mobile applications and the influence of social media engagement could provide a more comprehensive understanding of modern hospitality marketing echoing the sentiments of Law and Cheung (2006). The sample size and its representativeness could limit the broader applicability of the findings within the hospitality industry.

In closing, guided by the contributions of scholars in the field, this research underscores the enduring importance of booking channels while recognizing the dynamic nature of the hospitality industry's marketing landscape. A strategic balance between website quality and the broader online marketing toolkit is encouraged echoing the insights of Ryan et al. (2011), to meet the ever-evolving expectations of guests in an increasingly digitalized world. By acknowledging research limitations and charting future research directions, the work aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse in hospitality management, ultimately guiding practitioners and researchers toward a deeper comprehension of this dynamic sector.

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