

DO SERVICE QUALITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IMPROVE CUSTOMER RETENTION IN HOTELS? TESTING THE MEDIATION EFFECT

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Abstract: Customer retention is a critical factor in companies' survival, and both service quality and social media are important means of retaining customers. However, despite this importance of these antecedents, only a few studies considered the effects of these factors in the hotel industry literature. With the application of social exchange theory, the current research aims to evaluate the effect of service quality and social media marketing on customer retention in hotels, and evaluates how customer satisfaction, brand awareness and brand image mediate this association. After pre-testing the questionnaire, data of this research was collected from 4- and 5-star hotel customers in various cities of the Czech Republic. Before testing the hypotheses, data have been tested in term of checking reliability and validity. Moreover, the probability of common-method bias was also tested in order to ensure there is no variation caused by study method or instrument. Testing the hypotheses was done using correlation and regression analysis afterwards. Findings of this research indicated that service quality and social media marketing improve customer satisfaction, brand awareness, and brand image. Moreover, customer satisfaction, brand awareness, and brand image are also antecedents of customer retention. Findings also confirmed that these three factors (customer satisfaction, brand awareness, and brand image) play the mediation roles between Service quality and revisit intention, and also between social media marketing and revisit intention. Results of this research showed the importance of both service quality and social media marketing in order to achieve better customer outcomes and encourage clients to revisit the hotel. The findings can provide important managerial and practical implications to the hotel industry.

Keywords: Service quality, social media marketing, brand awareness, brand image, customer satisfaction, customer retention.

JEL Classification: M30, M31.

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Introduction

The hotel industry has turned out to be one of the most competitive industries in the world. The competition among hotels forced them to increase the quality of services and improve the relationship with customers. Today business development is fast (Wijaya et al., 2021), and

hotels require to deal with ongoing monitoring across a variety of service areas in order to improve the services at the best levels.

The service quality is known as a fundamental determinant in differentiating service providers (Mey et al., 2006). It is an important element in customers' initial decision-

making, and their return intention. However, in today's business world, hotels may face major challenges, such as frequent changes in customers' preferences, and demands that are more complex. Therefore, there is room for this question of whether the perceived service quality is a sufficient stimulant to retain a relationship in a long term?

Hotels are required to make great efforts to give superior services to their customers. However, further than service quality itself, there is a need to create a proper connection with customers in order to encourage them to return. When it comes to choosing a hotel, clients may search for service quality, and social media marketing allows customers to learn about the services a hotel can provide. Indeed, combining these two components of service quality and social media marketing can increase brand awareness by offering more information, improve brand image by allowing users to see other people's opinions, and also improve customer satisfaction by making decision-making easier.

Moreover, the development of information and technology has affected people's lifestyles and reflected in their shopping behavior (Muzakir et al., 2021). While customers are reaping the benefits of social media through faster communication tools, companies are using this technology to attract customers, receive their feedbacks, and measure service and business performance much faster and less costly than before (Demircioglu et al., 2021). Social media help business owners to enhance customer awareness and raise the success of brand creation to attract customers (Yost et al., 2021). Connecting with customers will make customers to understand the new changes, and may encourage them to return.

Despite the importance of social media in consumer communication and its dynamic nature, there has not been enough research done on it. The majority of social media publications date back to 2006, and in comparison, to traditional marketing research, and the dynamic nature of social media, this area is still relatively new. Further research in this area can help in a better understanding of social media and its implications on customer behavior, which could impact business performance.

Moreover, both service quality and social media marketing are important determinants of customer retention. However, there is no

research that addresses both factors in the research model and in the context of the hotel industry. The relevant studies have been done either in different sectors (Zahara et al., 2021; Demircioglu et al., 2021), or only one of these predictors were considered (service quality and social media marketing) (Kim & Ko, 2012; Seo & Park, 2018).

Moreover, the existing literature on social media marketing mostly considered customer purchase intention than customer retention as outcome (Wijaya et al., 2021). Indeed, customer retention in the hotel industry needs more consideration comparing to other service sectors, since this industry is mostly related to leisure and comprises different characteristics. There are occasions when customers are satisfied with the hotel services, however they may tend to stay at other accommodation next time simply to experience differently. Therefore, hotel customers are more concerned about services since they expect to get good value for their money. As a result, these clients are more interested with receiving information about the services provided by the hotels further than the price they pay for those services.

Therefore, this research tries to fill these gaps and aims to understand how service quality and social media can affect customer retention. For this, we assess the effect of service quality and social media marketing on brand image, brand awareness, customer satisfaction; and how these in turn lead to customer retention. This can provide an understanding of effectiveness of service quality and social media to attract those customers who already visited the hotels.

In section Theoretical background the idea behind the research model was explored. The section also discusses the link between variables and the relevant literature. In section Research methodology the procedure for conducting the research, creating the questionnaire, data collection method, and data analysis procedure have been covered. Section Research results contains the results of reliability, validity, and testing for common-method bias. In addition, this part includes hypotheses tests results and confirmation of hypothesis' acceptance or rejection. In section Discussion research findings were discussed and compared to the existing literature. Last section Conclusion includes theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and research directions for the future.

1. Theoretical Background

To understand the proposed research model, the social exchange theory explains how the interaction between individuals is regarded as exchange of resources (Luo, 2002). The theory assumes that if the cost of the exchange is higher than the benefits which one may receive (and not compensated as expected), it can be considered as undesirable (Emerson, 1976). Both parties of an exchange build relationships with the intention of getting rewards or benefits. When people receive benefits such as good service quality as well as convenient way of communication and information collection (through social media), they are more likely to compensate these benefits such as showing the return intention. Fig. 1 shows a research conceptual model.

1.1 Effect of Service Quality on Brand Image, Brand Awareness, and Customer Satisfaction

The quality of services is a critical element in success of service companies (Venetis & Ghauri, 2004). It can be assumed as a type of judgment on the excellence of a service and therefore, is an intangible sign affecting customer satisfaction and the post-purchase behaviors (Lai, 2019). Customers' evaluation of service quality is also important for companies when the goal is to enhance business performance and positioning in the market. Companies with higher service quality can benefit from customer satisfaction and experience greater economic outcomes (Omar et al., 2016).

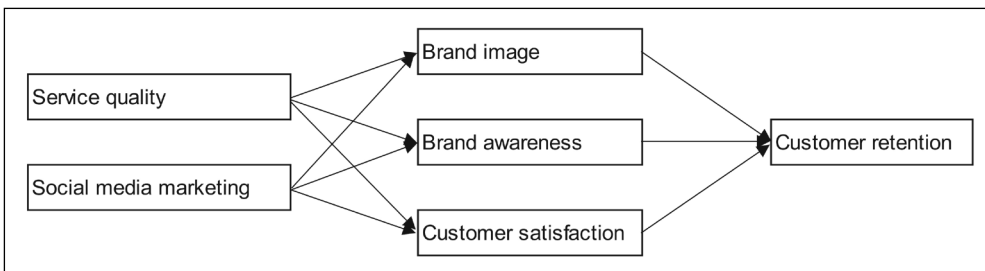
Service quality was found to be a predictor of customer behavior and to have a positive

impact on customer satisfaction in previous studies (Dam & Dam, 2021; Putro & Rachmat, 2019). Based on the literature, service quality is one of the most important antecedents of customer satisfaction (Balinado et al., 2021; Mey et al., 2006), and according to Mosahab et al. (2010), satisfaction is an internal perception based on the customer's own experience with the service.

Furthermore, quality of services in a company can also form the brand image. The brand image is critical because it represents a collection of beliefs and perspectives about a specific brand. As one of the most important factors in decision-making, the brand image expresses its characteristics and value. Moreover, brand awareness, loyalty, and competitiveness are also influenced by a strong brand image. Maintaining a positive brand image, as well as consistently meeting or exceeding customer expectations, can help brands acquire new customers and keep existing ones, enhance creditability and loyalty. According to Dam and Dam (2021), service quality has a positive influence on brand image, customer satisfaction, as well as customer loyalty.

Based on Ostrowski et al. (1993), positive experience will ultimately result in positive brand image over time. The service quality is often linked with efficiency, the capability to respond to customers' needs, as well as empathy (Sürücü et al., 2019), and brand awareness enables customers to perceive what can be expected to receive from a service provider. Brand awareness also results in the prominence of a brand in the customers' mind and is the most precious asset of a company as it shows the distinction and uniqueness

Fig. 1: Research model



Source: own

of services and products. Based on the abovementioned discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The service quality has a positive effect on H1a) brand awareness, H1b) brand image, and H1c) customer satisfaction.

1.2 Effect of Social Media Marketing on Brand Image, Brand Awareness, and Customer Satisfaction

Social media contain internet-based applications that are created on the technological and ideological web foundations, and allows users to create and exchange contents (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media are platforms helping brands to keep customer relationships, while creating the opportunity to connect to new leads. Customer satisfaction is currently one of the main focus of all organizations around the world. It determines whether the organization can be successful in the market or even survive (Praveenraj et al., 2021). To create higher customer satisfaction, companies should attain the information about satisfaction level; so they can offer what makes higher values for customers. Social media enable companies to understand users' satisfaction/dissatisfaction through communication channel. If companies are successful to implement marketing programs and social media effectively, they will be able to build beneficial connections with their customers and therefore, attain higher customer satisfaction. Online platforms provide such information that enables people to compare their expectations with the actual services. Once customers believe their expectations are likely to be met, they will be confident about the quality of services delivered by the service provider (Zahara, 2021).

Social media can affect brand awareness as it can strengthen the ability of customers to recognize the brand in different conditions. It involves several facts, ideas, and instances containing network of the brand knowledge. These associations are critical for marketers and managers in brand differentiation practices, and for positioning, and further, creating positive attitudes toward the brand (ElAydi, 2018). Additionally, brand awareness is critical because it is the important stage in marketing and a necessary basis for acquiring customers. People's ability to recall and recognize a company is emphasized by brand awareness.

Therefore, it can help in the achievement of a variety of business objectives and goals.

Brand image, in addition to brand awareness, is an essential factor of successful business. Because social media are open to the public, other individuals can observe company-customer interactions, and information can spread to other customers. And therefore nowadays, using social media to share information is a superior way to spread a brand's image. Based on Seo and Park (2018) in terms of brand awareness and image, social media have shown to be an important component. This is due to the fact that social media are excellent venues for brands to maintain client interactions while also increasing their chances of being discovered by new leads.

Furthermore, based on Kim and Ko (2012), social media marketing has a positive effect on brand equity. Based on their research, the key levers of brand equity is brand awareness. Positive comments and recommendations, as well as favorable reviews have prompt effects on customers' interaction with hotels and can promote the brand worldwide. This can enhance the brand awareness among customers and is linked with brand image when the brand can be situated in consumers' memories with the combination of several brand reminders (Seo & Park, 2018). Based on the abovementioned discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social media marketing has a positive effect on H2a) brand awareness, H2b) brand image, and H2c) customer satisfaction.

1.3 Customer Retention

Customer retention is the tendency of people to continue with the same service provider and repeat the purchase. Wu et al. (2012) mentioned that when the service quality meets customers' expectations, the awareness and image will improve, which in turn can affect customers' repurchase intentions (Liu & Jiang, 2020). Quality can be judged by customers through comparing expectation and performance; and is considered as the key predictor of customer retention (Petrick, 2004). Providing high-quality services has corporate advantages. Customers who receive excellent service are more likely to keep their connections with the service provider more than they had intended and repeat the purchase.

Further than service quality itself, creating a proper relationship with customers can also

affect customer retention. For this purpose, companies need to obtain a better understanding of customer demands and experiences with the brand in order to satisfy them. Customer relationship is associated with the utilization of information, analyse them, and serve the relevant products and services to consumers in order to enhance customer retention (Charoensukmongkol & Sasatanun, 2017). This relationship may also affect brand awareness, as well as brand image and in turn improve customer retention. According to Yost et al. (2021), when the usage of social media and communication between users is more active, the likelihood of purchase intention will increase.

Specially, current customers have already experienced the services at the hotel; and social media enable hotels to stay connected with their customers, update them of new services and changes, and encourage them to revisit. Based on the abovementioned discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3a) Brand awareness, H3b) brand image, and H3c) customer satisfaction positively affect customer retention.

1.4 Mediation Effects

Venetis and Ghauri (2004) indicated that the service quality improves the relationships with customers and their retention. Indeed, service quality does not only affect further service transactions, but also boosts the creation and retention of long-term relationship with customers. When clients recognize that they are obtaining higher quality services, they will be convinced they are receiving a good value, which results in improving loyalty to the respective service provider (Bolton et al., 2000).

According to Gong and Yi (2018), overall service quality has a positive impact on customer satisfaction, which leads to customer loyalty. Service quality is one of the first factors customer may look for once making their decisions which may also lead to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Satisfied customers are more likely to repeat their purchase and remain loyal. Similarly, strong brand images boost perceptions toward quality and benefits, lower risk, and reduce the consumer tendency to judge only on the basis of price. These factors collectively, boost consumer loyalty and retention.

Smith and Swinehart (2001) pointed out a strong relationship between the service

quality and customer satisfaction indicating that perception towards the service quality is a critical antecedent of a customer satisfaction level. Moreover, based on Boonlertvanich (2019), the quality of service perceived by the customer can affect customer loyalty through satisfaction. Similarly, Caruana (2002) mentioned that the service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty are connected to one another, and indicated that customer satisfaction mediates the association between the service quality and customer loyalty. Moreover, Romaniuk and Sharp (2003) mentioned that when there is a positive image associated with brand attributes, customers tend to show higher purchase intention. This provides an understanding regarding the importance of the service quality in order to improve the brand image and in turn the likelihood of customer purchase.

Regarding the importance of social media in order to improve customer retention, the connections among the peers, and between customers and service providers, can stress the affectivity of social media to enhance brand awareness, improve brand recognition and recall, and boost brand loyalty (Gunelius, 2011). Brand awareness will also help in cultivating customer loyalty, allowing to gain the benefits of customers supports, returning customers, and word-of-mouth marketing. Customers' contents are important since they can largely affect the brand image and provide beneficial opportunities to perceive brand performance (Nanne et al., 2020). Social media help service providers to create brand loyalty that is through networking, and communication. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4a) Brand awareness, H4b) brand image, and H4c) customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between the service quality and customer retention.

H5a) Brand awareness, H5b) brand image, and H5c) customer satisfaction mediate the relationship between social media marketing and customer retention.

2. Research Methodology

This study was conducted in the Czech Republic and targeted at the customers of 4- and 5-star hotels. Data of this research was collected through questionnaire in touristic places in the Czech Republic from May to July 2021. Data was collected by researchers, and not through

the hotels to avoid obtaining irrelevant data due to distribution of questionnaire only between some desired customers by hotels. Instead, researchers triggered people in touristic places in various cities in the Czech Republic. After they explained purpose of the research, they asked people to fill the questionnaire. There was a question at the beginning of the questionnaire asking in what type of hotel the respondent was stayed. Indeed, this question was prepared in order to distinguish and trigger only the responses based on hotel star later. Thus, after collecting the questionnaires, researchers only considered the responses of those who stayed in 4- and 5-star hotels. This filter was made since the customers of luxury hotels might expect higher service quality, while customers of economy hotels might be more concerned about costs. This classification would obtain more relevant data.

Since the data was gathered during COVID-19 pandemic, the data collection was based on a convenience sampling method. In order to obtain more relevant statistics, after the data was collected only the responses of individuals who stayed in 4- and 5-star hotels were considered.

In total, 310 questionnaires were distributed, 253 were collected and 228 were usable with the response rate of 74%. The questionnaire was distributed to people of various ages, genders, marital statuses, and educational levels in an attempt to acquire proper data. A pilot test was conducted before distribution of the questionnaire in a large scale. 20 people were asked to respond to the questionnaire to ensure items are clear and understandable. The respondents confirmed there was no issue in understanding the questions, and confirmed the clarity.

The questionnaire was prepared in English. The items were obtained from relative literature, which have been applied and tested previously. Three items from a study done by Chua et al. (2015) measured the service quality; moreover, 11 items from Seo and Park (2018) assessed social media marketing. Brand image has been assessed using five items applied by Kim et al. (2018); and brand awareness was tested by three items used by Liu and Jiang (2020). Three items from ElAdly (2018) assessed customer satisfaction; and two items from Kim et al. (2009) were applied to assess revisit intention. The wording of questionnaire was adapted based on the concept of this research.

There were 52% percent of male respondents, and 48% of female respondents. Regarding the Marital status, 44% of respondents were married, while the rest (56%) were single. 20% of participants were aged between 18 and 27, 33% were between 28 and 37, 36% were between 38 and 47 and the rest 11% were 48 and older. Regarding educational level, 58% of respondents had bachelor's degree or lower, while 38% had masters' degree. Only 4% had postgraduate degrees. The questions of nationality and country of residence were considered optional to reassure respondents that their identity remains anonymous. However, efforts were made to ensure that respondents were not limited to a particular countries and were selected from a variety of nationalities.

After the data collection, it went through the reliability and validity tests. Furthermore, to test the model fit, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. To test the existence of the common-method variance statistically, this research applied the Harman's single factor test and common latent factor approach suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003). To test the hypotheses, correlation and regression analysis was applied.

3. Research Results

3.1 Testing Reliability, Validity, and Common-method Bias

Reliability test was conducted by applying Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) in order to examine the extent to which the individual items that constitute a scale correlate with one another. Tab. 1 shows that all values of Cronbach's alpha and CR were greater than common accepted level of 0.70 (George & Mallery, 2005). To test the reliability, all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were met at the common accepted level of 0.50, and confirm the convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The discriminant validity was tested by comparing maximum-shared variance (MSV) with AVE. Results indicated that all MSV values were lower than AVE values which confirms discriminant validity. In addition, the result of confirmatory factor analysis showed the good model fit. That is, chi-squared was below the accepted cut level of 5 ($\chi^2/df = 1.36$), RMSEA (0.04) was lower than common accepted level of 0.08 (Byrne, 1998). Goodness of fit index (GFI = 0.90) (Greenspoon & Saklofske,

1998), comparative fit index (CFI = 0.97) and incremental adjustment index (IFI = 0.90) were over 0.90.

Result of Harmans' single factor test indicated that after loading all items on a single factor, only 37.09% of variance is explained. Moreover, to apply the common latent factor test, a common factor was added to the model and connected with the regression line to all observed items. The square of all the regression weights, which explain the common variance, is 0.176. This represents the common shared variance on average and provides the evidence that common-method bias is not a threat in this research and is below that cut level of 50% (Eichhorn, 2014).

3.2 Testing the Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, results of Tab. 2 and Tab. 3 show the significant and positive relationship between the service quality and brand awareness ($r = 0.353$; $\beta = 0.223$; $p < 0.01$), the service quality and brand image ($r = 0.330$; $\beta = 0.220$; $p < 0.01$), and also between the service quality

and customer satisfaction ($r = 0.392$; $\beta = 0.313$; $p < 0.01$). These findings provide the evidence to support *H1a*, *H1b*, and *H1c*.

In addition, Tab. 2 and Tab. 3 demonstrate that the association between social media marketing and brand awareness is significant and positive ($r = 0.502$; $\beta = 0.447$; $p < 0.01$). Moreover, the association between social media marketing and brand image ($r = 0.436$; $\beta = 0.378$; $p < 0.01$), and between social media marketing and customer satisfaction ($r = 0.375$; $\beta = 0.287$; $p < 0.01$) are positive and significant. These findings support *H2a*, *H2b*, and *H2c*.

Furthermore, the relationship between brand awareness and customer retention ($r = 0.524$; $\beta = 0.242$; $p < 0.01$), between brand image and customer retention ($r = 0.570$; $\beta = 0.343$; $p < 0.01$), and between customer satisfaction and customer retention ($r = 0.482$; $\beta = 0.237$; $p < 0.01$) are positive and significant. These results support *H3a*, *H3b*, and *H3c*.

To test the mediation effects, Tab. 4 shows brand awareness (LLCI = 0.075; ULCI = 0.266; $p < 0.05$), brand image (LLCI = 0.066;

Tab. 1: Factor loadings, reliability test, AVE – Part 1

	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Composite reliability
<u>Service quality</u>		0.829	0.68	0.859
SQ1	0.802			
SQ2	0.644			
SQ3	0.987			
<hr/>				
<u>Social media marketing</u>		0.897	0.50	0.898
SM1	0.658			
SM2	–			
SM3	–			
SM4	0.634			
SM5	0.662			
SM6	0.653			
SM7	0.585			
SM8	0.753			
SM9	0.810			
SM10	0.776			
SM11	0.772			

Tab. 1: Factor loadings, reliability test, AVE – Part 2

	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Composite reliability
<u>Brand awareness</u>		0.848	0.65	0.850
BA1	0.828			
BA2	0.826			
BA3	0.770			
<u>Brand image</u>		0.831	0.63	0.835
BI1	0.718			
BI2	–			
BI3	0.807			
BI4	–			
BI5	0.847			
<u>Customer satisfaction</u>		0.874	0.70	0.876
CS1	0.749			
CS2	0.898			
CS3	0.860			
<u>Customer retention</u>		0.862	0.76	0.862
CR1	0.866			
CR2	0.875			

Source: own

Note: **. Significant at the 0.01 level.

Tab. 2: Mean, standard deviation, and correlation between variables

	SQ	SMM	BA	BI	CS	CR
Service quality (SQ)	1					
Social media marketing (SMM)	0.315**	1				
Brand awareness (BA)	0.353**	0.502**	1			
Brand image (BI)	0.330**	0.436**	0.591**	1		
Customer satisfaction (CS)	0.392**	0.375**	0.439**	0.471**	1	
Customer retention (CR)	0.359**	0.357**	0.524**	0.570**	0.482**	1
Mean	3.829	3.916	3.864	4.053	4.370	4.134
Standard deviation	0.709	0.706	0.811	0.752	0.727	0.769

Source: own

Tab. 3: Regression analysis – direct effects

Proposed effect	β	P	Accepted/rejected
Service quality → Brand awareness	0.223	<0.01	H1a: Accepted
Service quality → Brand image	0.220	<0.01	H1b: Accepted
Service quality → Customer satisfaction	0.313	<0.01	H1c: Accepted
Social media marketing → Brand awareness	0.447	<0.01	H2a: Accepted
Social media marketing → Brand image	0.378	<0.01	H2b: Accepted
Social media marketing → Customer satisfaction	0.287	<0.01	H2c: Accepted
Brand awareness → Customer retention	0.242	<0.01	H3a: Accepted
Brand image → Customer retention	0.343	<0.01	H3b: Accepted
Customer satisfaction → Customer retention	0.237	<0.01	H3c: Accepted

Source: own

Tab. 4: Regression analysis – indirect effects

Proposed effect	β	P	LLCI	ULCI	Accepted/rejected
Service quality → Brand awareness → Revisit intention	0.17	<0.05	0.075	0.266	H4a: Accepted
Service quality → Brand image → Revisit intention	0.18	<0.05	0.066	0.293	H4b: Accepted
Service quality → Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.17	<0.05	0.071	0.276	H4c: Accepted
Social media marketing → Brand awareness → Revisit intention	0.25	<0.05	0.143	0.364	H5a: Accepted
Social media marketing → Brand image → Revisit intention	0.24	<0.05	0.13	0.365	H5b: Accepted
Social media marketing → Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.17	<0.05	0.065	0.282	H5c: Accepted

Source: own

ULCI = 0.293; $p < 0.05$), and customer satisfaction (LLCI = 0.071; ULCI = 0.276; $p < 0.05$) mediate the relationship between the service quality and customer retention. These findings provide the evidence to support H4a, H4b, and H4c.

Moreover, Tab. 4 demonstrates that brand awareness (LLCI = 0.143; ULCI = 0.364; $p < 0.05$), brand image (LLCI = 0.130; ULCI = 0.365; $p < 0.05$), and customer

satisfaction (LLCI = 0.065; ULCI = 0.282; $p < 0.05$) mediate the relationship between social media marketing and customer retention. These findings provide the evidence to support H5a, H5b, and H5c.

4. Discussion

In this research, a model to explain how the service quality and social media marketing contribute to the customer retention was

developed. The main purpose was to evaluate the effects of the service quality and social media marketing on brand awareness, brand image, and customer satisfaction and in turn, customer retention.

The findings of this research support the results of previous studies that showed the connection between the service quality and customer satisfaction, brand image and brand awareness (e.g., Mey et al., 2006; Ostrowski et al., 1993; Balinado et al., 2021; Dam & Dam, 2021). However, the relevant literature mostly focused the importance of service quality in other industries rather than hotel sector. For instance, consistent with Dam and Dam (2021) and Mosahab et al. (2010) importance of service quality on customer responses was confirmed in this research. However, those previous studies were conducted in other sectors such as retail stores and banks. Findings of the current research expand the knowledge in field of hotel industry indicating that importance of service quality in this sector.

In order to remain competitive, hotels need to attract new customers and retain the existing ones. This can be achieved by improving the perception of customers regarding the service quality and customers experiences, and subsequently, enhancing the level of satisfaction, brand awareness and improving the brand image. In line with Sim et al. (2006), customer satisfaction was identified as antecedent of higher customer retention. This adds to our knowledge of the relationship between customer satisfaction and improved customer retention in the hotel industry. Moreover, consistent with Syaqrirah and Faizurrahman (2014), importance of service quality evaluation can be proved by the fact that when a hotel provides good service, it often results in higher satisfaction, which means higher customer retention. That is, customer expectations might be met with high service quality, which encourages people to return to the same hotel.

The results of this study further support the findings of previous research that showed the positive effects of social media marketing on customer satisfaction, brand image, and brand awareness (e.g., Seo & Park, 2018; Kim & Ko, 2012). Application of social media enable hotels to learn more about the level of customers satisfaction, the reason behind satisfaction/dissatisfaction, and furthermore,

communicate with customers in order to fulfil their requirements. Therefore, hotels can use social media platforms more effectively to increase the level of satisfaction, as well as brand awareness and brand image, and findings of this research confirm this. Consistent with Seo and Park (2018) social media marketing improves brand awareness and image, however inconsistent with Seo and Park (2018) which conducted the research in airlines, the current research was conducted in the hotel industry. Moreover, findings of this research confirmed previous studies that highlighted functional quality. For instance, as indicated by Kim and Han (2022), smooth check-in/out, value for money, and professionalism are important factors in hotel selection. Specially after COVID-19 outbreak, the importance of cleanliness, hygiene, and safety has intensified even more. The importance of these factors can determine the value of social media since social media can provide people with fast and up-to-date information on any of abovementioned subjects.

This research also indicates that the service quality and social media marketing positively affect customer retention and this can happen through mediating role of customer satisfaction, brand awareness and brand image. The result is consistent with Caruana (2002) which indicated the connection between the service quality, customer satisfaction as well as loyalty. The result is also in line with Kim and Ko (2012) which showed the effect of social media marketing on brand equity, and in turn on purchase intention. Further than importance of customer satisfaction on improving customers retention, hotels need to concentrate on improving brand image and brand awareness as well as customer satisfaction due to their positive effect of customers retention.

Conclusions Theoretical Implications

This research indicates the importance of service quality and social media marketing as drivers of favorable customer behavior and specifically customer retention as outcome. The research model of this study is unique, and findings of this research provide beneficial information in hotel industry context. Previous studies considered only one of the factors of service quality or social media marketing in their research models as driver of customer outcomes.

Moreover, in past studies, the ideas of service quality and customer behavior were applied in marketing texts. However, all the relevant studies were not conducted specifically in hotel industry. For instance, study of Dam and Dam (2021) as well as the research done by Mosahab et al. (2010) indicated the importance of service quality on customer responses however the researches were conducted in different industries such as retail shops and bank industry. Similarly, importance of social media marketing on customer behavior was discussed in the literature, however only limited studies were conducted in hotel sector. Therefore, this research improves the knowledge regarding the effects of service quality and social media marketing in hotel industry, and provides beneficial implications to the theory.

Furthermore, social media platforms are highly demanded by individuals in last decades, and findings of this research also highlights the importance of these platforms for users. Since social media marketing is a relatively a new trend comparing to the traditional form of marketing, findings of this research could enhance the knowledge in the marketing field.

Managerial Implications

Findings of this research indicate the importance of providing high quality services to customers by hotels and further highlights the significance of social media marketing in the hotel industry. In today's competitive world, it is critical for hotels to be aware of industry developments, new changes, improvements in trends, and deliver high-quality services to the customers. At the same time, giving excellent service encourages customers to behave favorably, but hotels must notify their customers about existence of those services. If the hotels provide the best and highest quality products and services but customers are not aware, the hotels will not benefit as expected. Hotels should reinforce customer retention by emphasizing the service quality and social media marketing in order to create a good connection with their customers. These can be done to increase a hotel's brand image, brand awareness, and customer satisfaction, resulting in higher customer retention.

In order to do so, hotels must first understand their target consumers and what they desire. It is critical to understand what customers expect from social media and what hotels can offer.

To stay up to date, it is necessary to go with the industry's trending topics, look for relevant hashtags, get insight from competitor channels, and watch industry leaders. This will help the development of a deeper understanding of how audiences interact with social media and what information hotels should provide to their users.

Based on that shared information, customers can compare hotels before making a final decision. People may find some general information about the hotel's products and services on social media platforms. However, the information offered by the hotel's social media might not necessarily be what the clients are seeking for such as special offers, services included in the price, park space availability, pet friendliness, and so on. Having an active social media assure customers of the most up-to-date information that can address their questions. Customers might continue their search by looking into other options if they cannot discover the information they are looking for on social media. It is critical for hotels to avoid sharing information at random or only certain types of information all of the time. Instead, they should concentrate on the topics that are most important for customers. It may, for example, be discovered based on the most frequently asked questions on platforms or direct messages on social media.

Moreover, since social media platforms are a powerful tool for retaining clients, hotels should use a variety of social media channels to stay in touch with their customers. Therefore, customers will be able to find the respective hotels more conveniently and easily as a result of the increased availability and access.

Research Limitations

Since the data of this research were collected during COVID-19 pandemic, the research sample is relatively small. Due to the situation of the time, there were strict restrictions for travels. However, this research tried to obtain the quality of the data (targeting at various age groups, gender, and different educational levels) in order to obtain the valid results. For the future research, a larger sample, which can cover wider variety of people is recommended.

The generalizability of this research needs to be under concern, and the results can be used for similar context and conditions. This research was done with regard to the hotel industry that is related to leisure. The concept

of this sector is different from other service providing industries such as fashion, insurance etc. Therefore, the findings of this research may not be relevant to other industries. For the future research, it is recommended to apply the customer perception towards service quality and social media in various service sectors and compare the results.

Data of this study exclusively include clients of 4- and 5-star hotels. Customers of luxury and economy hotels have distinct criteria for making judgments in order to choose a hotel. Clients at luxury hotels may be more focused regarding service and product quality, whereas customers of budget hotels may be more concerned with price which is why this classification was made. Therefore, the findings of this study should not be applied to economy hotels. In future research, it is suggested that clients of economy hotels be included in the same research model and the results be compared.

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Appendix

Dear Respondent,

This research is being conducted to understand the effect of social media marketing on customer behavior in hotel industry. Questions are about the experience you had with your hotel stay in the Czech Republic. This questionnaire is anonymous and will not ask identical data. We appreciate your time in responding this questionnaire.

Thank you

In the Czech Republic, I stayed in 4- and 5-star hotel 3-star hotel and below

My gender is..... Female Male

My marital status is Single Married

My age is..... 18–27 28–37 38–47 48–57 >57

Last academic degree I have achieved is

High school/college Bachelor’s degree Master’s degree Post graduate degree

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Please mark the level of your agreement with the states below (strongly disagree to strongly agree).						
Social media	The social media of the hotel was enjoyable.					
	The content shared by the social media of the hotel was enjoyable.					
	It was possible to share the information in social media of the hotel.					
	The discussion and exchange of opinions in the social media of the hotel was possible.					
	The expression of opinions in the social media of the hotel was easy.					
	The information shared in the social media of the hotel was up to date.					
	The use of social media of the hotel was modern.					
	The information that you needed could be found in the social media of the hotel.					
	The social media of the hotel provided the information I needed.					
	The social media of the hotel alleviated my concerns regarding the hotel's service.					
	The social media of the hotel alleviated my concerns about staying in the hotel.					

	Please mark the level of your agreement with the states below (strongly disagree to strongly agree).	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Brand image	The hotel is distinguishable.					
	The hotel has personality.					
	The hotel has a unique image.					
	The hotel is unlike any other.					
	The hotel is fascinating.					
Brand awareness	This hotel has a good reputation.					
	I can easily remember services in this hotel.					
	This hotel immediately comes to mind when I think about hotels.					
Service quality	Overall, this hotel provides a good and consistent quality service.					
	Employees at this hotel provide efficient and speedy service.					
	Employees at this hotel deliver the promised service in a consistent and accurate manner.					
Satisfaction	The staying experience at this hotel made me satisfied.					
	My choice to stay at this hotel was a wise one.					
	Overall, I feel satisfied about this hotel.					
Return intention	I consider this hotel as my first choice compared to other hotels.					
	I have a strong intention to visit this hotel again.					

.....
 Nationality (optional):

.....
 The country of residency (optional)

.....
 If you have any comments please write here: