

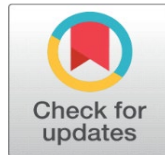
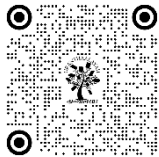
THE INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE'S PROFESSIONALISM, COURTESY AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

In today's competitive environment, customer satisfaction and loyalty are crucial to the success of the service industry. This study examines the impact of employee professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving skills on customer satisfaction and their role in building long-term loyalty within the hotel sector. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates quantitative data collected from 391 employees and customers of budget hotels in the Delhi NCR region. The findings reveal a significant positive correlation between employee professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving abilities with customer satisfaction, ultimately leading to increased customer loyalty. The study highlights the importance of investing in employee training and development, particularly in these key areas, to enhance customer satisfaction and drive lasting loyalty.

Keywords: Professionalism, Courteous, Problem-Solving, Service quality, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

1. INTRODUCTION

Hospitality is frequently seen as a type of service that exceeds the usual standards, reflecting not only the way the service is provided but also the attitude behind it. (Macmillan, 2010) The dictionary offers two interconnected definitions of hospitality. The first describes it as "the display of friendly and generous behavior towards customers, aimed at creating a welcoming environment." Conversely, the second defines hospitality as "the provision of food, beverages, and entertainment by hotels to their guests." (Lashley, 2001) described the concept of hospitality requires that guests recognize the host's warmth through acts of kindness, a genuine desire to please, and respect for the customer. Employee behavior encompasses the various actions that hotel staff undertake while carrying out their responsibilities. (Hanna et al., 2004). Some of these behaviors can be positive, involving employees taking proactive steps that benefit the hotel, their colleagues, and the customers. On the other hand, there may also be negative behaviors that could disrupt a productive work environment. (Bowen & Shoemaker, 1998). In the service industry, employee behaviors

are essential for creating connections with customers. They are a key factor in developing successful working relationships with clients.(Grönroos, 2015). The primary factors affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty are employees' professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving skills. Therefore, a strong brand presence in the service industry is largely built through the interactions of service employees, especially those on the frontlines who directly interact with customers. The attitudes, skills, behaviors, and personal traits of employees play a significant role in shaping customer loyalty. (Bowen, 1985) This study explores how three key employee traits—professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving skills—impact customer satisfaction and loyalty. **Professionalism** refers to the skills, behavior, and attitude displayed by employees when engaging with customers. **Courtesy** encompasses the politeness, respect, and attentiveness that employees demonstrate during interactions. **Problem-solving skills** involve an employee's ability to manage customer complaints, resolve issues effectively, and provide solutions that address customer needs. While the connection between employee performance and customer outcomes has been widely acknowledged in service management research, there is limited focus on how specific employee attributes directly influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. Existing studies often address these qualities separately but there is a gap in research that examines individual impact of professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving skills on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Given the growing competition in today's market, understanding how these employee attributes affect customer satisfaction is essential for companies aiming to retain customers. Loyal customers contribute not only to repeat business but also to positive personal referral, enhancing the hotel's reputation. Moreover, satisfied customers are more likely to overlook service failures if they believe the employee is professional, courteous, and capable of resolving issues effectively. Therefore, the aim to this research is to investigate the influence of employee professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving skills on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The insights gained will offer practical guidance for businesses seeking to improve employee-customer interactions, optimize service delivery, and foster lasting customer relationships that support long-term organizational success.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Fostering and maintaining customer loyalty is essential for sustaining and enhancing the frequency of hotel business operations (Kumar & Shah, 2004). Loyalty can be categorized into two main types: behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. Behavioral loyalty refers to actions such as repeatedly purchasing from the organization, providing referrals, and actively endorsing it ((Nadiri et al., 2008). In addition, behavioral loyalty can also be defined as re buying of a (Yang & Peterson, 2004) and the regularity of purchases by existing customers and the degree of brand switching observed over a specific timeframe (Lewis & Soureli, 2006). (Liu-Thompkins, Y., Williams, E. V., & Tam, L., 2010) Attitudinal loyalty refers to a positive assessment that is strong and consistent enough to consistently generate favorable responses toward a product or hotel. Maintaining relationships with current customers is crucial, as the costs of acquiring new customers are generally quite high. (Jahanshahi, Gashti, Mirdamadi, Nawaser Khaksar, 2011) describe one can also attempt to meet customers' unanticipated requirements, as this can result in customer satisfaction and subsequently foster their loyalty to the hotel. Furthermore, customers tend to maintain a positive outlook and remain loyal to their current service providers.(Szymanski & Henard, 2001). While numerous studies offer empirical proof of a favorable connection between customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013), The strength of the satisfaction-loyalty relationship varies significantly in different settings.

(Liljander, 2000) The significance of employees' professionalism, courtesy and problem- solving skill during hotel service interactions was highlighted, underscoring the crucial role of personal connections between service providers and customers. It was suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on employees, including front desk , waitstaff, door and bell personnel, as well as cleaning and stewarding staff, who directly interact with customer(Arnett et al., 2002) In the hotel industry, it is noted that since the majority of hotels depend on their employees to provide excellent service, hotel employees can serve as a competitive advantage. (Seiied Mohammad Aghapour Hasiri a,*; Mona Afghanpour, 2016) investigating and examining customer loyalty in the service sector pointed out that traits like behaviour, attentiveness and problem solving skills in staff members were found to play a significant role in influencing hotel customer loyalty." In the same vein, (Tweneboah-Koduah & Yuty Duweh Farley, 2015) identified that employee assurance, expertise, courtesy, and their capacity to instill trust and confidence were the key elements contributing to satisfaction and served as crucial catalysts for customer loyalty.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Previous research has also suggested a connection between a hotel's star rating and customer satisfaction (Zhou et al., 2014a) Previous studies have demonstrated that cultural distinctions, such as geographic location, have a noticeable influence on customer loyalty (Rhee et al., 2016) . (Padma & Ahn, 2020) discovered that patrons of upscale hotels possess particular expectations concerning room quality, hygiene and sanitation, and service standards and (Zhou et al., 2014b) explained that most perishable product room and apartment (such as quality of room), hygiene, location (such as close to monument places and convenience travel mode) and worth (such as tariff of room) are dissatisfiers for customers of luxury hotels. No research has been carried out on the influence of employee's professionalism, courtesy and problem – solving skills on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

4. RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL MODEL

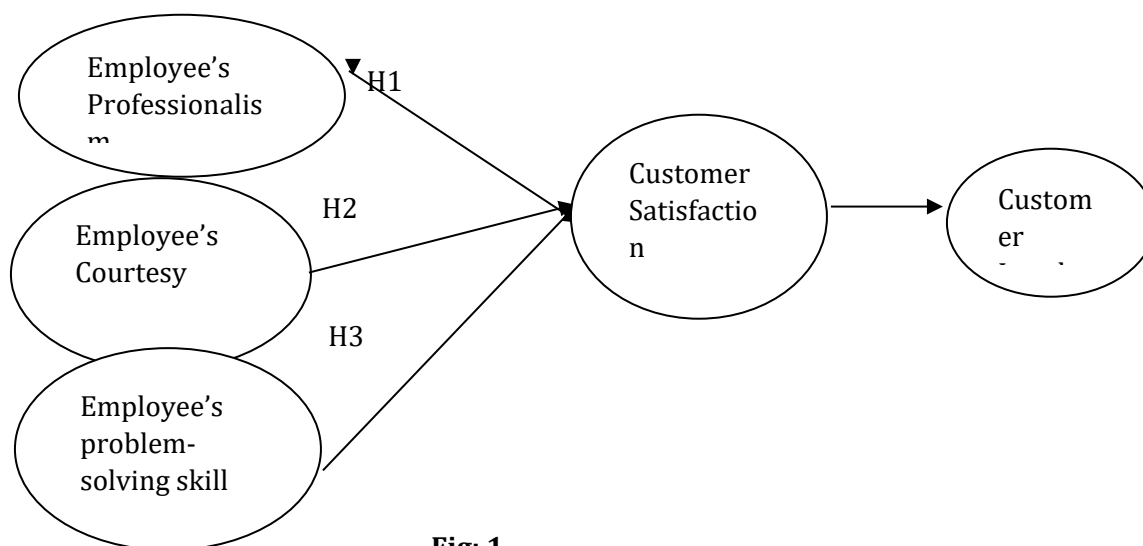


Fig: 1

Hypothesis

From the above-mentioned model, the following hypotheses are developed:

H1: Employee's professionalism positively influences customer satisfaction.

H2: Employee's courtesy positively influences customer satisfaction.

H3: Employee's problem-solving skill positively influences customer satisfaction.

H4: Customer Satisfaction Influence Customer Loyalty.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Employee Professionalism, Employee Courtesy, and Problem-Solving Skills are typically exogenous variables (independent variables). Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty are endogenous variables (dependent variables). This study is classified as descriptive research, as it involves collecting and analyzing specific data, and it falls under the category of correlational research (Harandi, 2008). Since the data is aimed at examining the characteristics of the statistical population through sampling, the study employs a survey method based on judgmental sampling.

6. DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS TOOLS

In this study, a 30-item questionnaire was developed based on multi-item measurement scales adapted from previous research. Sixteen questions focused on assessing employees' professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving

abilities, while fourteen questions evaluated customer satisfaction and loyalty. Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "Extremely Satisfied" to "Extremely Dissatisfied." Additionally, five questions gathered demographic information about the respondents. For data analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, and Chi-square tests were employed. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

7. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE STUDY

The degree of systematic or inherent error in a questionnaire is referred to as validity. This will be assessed using SPSS through Pearson correlation (r), where the calculated r value is compared with the critical table value of Pearson correlation. The correlation matrix in Table 1 is aligned with the overall score provided. The significance value for the total score must be less than 0.05 to be considered significant. Table 1 illustrates the correlation matrix, indicating that the total score for all constructs contributes sufficiently to the questionnaire, as its significance value exceeds the minimum threshold (Odom, 2006).

Table 1.1

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Employee's Professionalism	.449	.000	60
Employee's Courtesy	.610	.000	60
Employee's problem-solving skill	.631	.000	60
Customer Satisfaction	.557	.000	60
Customer Loyalty	.648	.000	60

Cronbach's alpha coefficient is a metric used to assess the internal consistency reliability of a scale, also known as the coefficient alpha method or reliability alpha coefficient. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha value calculated for the 30 items/constructs was 0.913, as shown in Table 2.1. According to (George, 2003), the developed constructs exhibited appropriate consistency metrics. As shown in Table 2.1, the overall Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency was 0.913. Importantly, none of the items were excluded, as all individual item values were above the threshold for reliability.

Table:2.1 Reliability Testing

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.913	30

8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 3.1

Section A		
Domain Wise Employee behaviour	Mean	SD
Employee's Professionalism	12.52	2.79
Courtesy	10.16	3.34
Problem Solving Skill	13.01	4.27

Employee Professionalism: With an average score of 12.52 and a low standard deviation of 2.79, professionalism emerged as the most prominent aspect of employee performance. A moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.5359$, $p < 0.00001$) was observed between employee professionalism and customer satisfaction and loyalty. This indicates that employees exhibiting high levels of professionalism significantly enhance customer satisfaction, which, in turn, strengthens loyalty. The strong statistical significance of this relationship underscores its reliability and highlights the critical role professionalism plays in driving positive customer outcomes.

Employee Courtesy: Courtesy recorded a mean score of 10.16 with a standard deviation of 3.34 and showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.5477$, $p < 0.00001$) with customer satisfaction and loyalty. Although this correlation is slightly higher than that of professionalism, it remains statistically significant. These findings emphasize that polite, respectful, and friendly interactions are vital for fostering customer satisfaction and building loyalty.

Problem-Solving Skills: Employees' problem-solving skills achieved a mean score of 13.01 with a standard deviation of 4.27, reflecting strong proficiency in this area. A robust positive correlation ($r = 0.6689$, $p < 0.00001$) was found between problem-solving skills and customer satisfaction and loyalty. This highlights that employees who efficiently address and resolve customer issues significantly enhance customer experiences, making problem-solving an essential factor in promoting satisfaction and cultivating long-term loyalty.

Employee's professionalism, courtesy and problem-solving skills influence customer satisfaction and Loyalty

Table 4.1

	Mean	SD	r value	p value	Correlation
Employee's Professionalism	12.52	2.79	0.5359	< .00001	moderate positive correlation
Customer satisfaction	10.83	4.54			

The data analysis in Table 4.1 shows a moderate positive correlation between employee professionalism and customer satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of 0.5359 and a highly significant p-value of < 0.00001 . Employee professionalism has a mean score of 12.52 and a relatively low standard deviation of 2.79, indicating consistent perceptions of professionalism among employees. In comparison, customer satisfaction has a mean score of 10.83 and a higher standard deviation of 4.54, suggesting greater variation in customer satisfaction experiences. This moderate correlation suggests that increased professionalism among employees is associated with higher customer satisfaction, although other factors may also play a role. The extremely low p-value confirms the statistical significance of this relationship, reinforcing the strength of the link between professionalism and customer satisfaction and reducing the likelihood of the results being due to chance.

Table 4.2

	Mean	SD	r value	p value	Correlation
Employee's Courtesy	10.16	3.34	0.5477	< .00001	moderate positive correlation
Customer satisfaction	10.83	4.54			

The analysis in Table 4.2 shows a moderate positive correlation between employee courtesy and customer satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of 0.5477 and a highly significant p-value of < 0.00001 . Employee courtesy has a mean score of 10.16 and a standard deviation of 3.34, indicating that while employees generally display courteous behavior, there is some variation in how this trait is perceived. Customer satisfaction, with a mean score of 10.83 and a higher standard deviation of 4.54, reflects a wider range of satisfaction levels among customers. The positive correlation suggests that greater courtesy from employees is linked to higher customer satisfaction. The extremely low p-value confirms the statistical significance of this connection, emphasizing that courteous behavior plays a key role in enhancing customer satisfaction.

Table 4.3

	Mean	SD	r value	p value	Correlation
Problem Solving Skill	8.26	4.27	0.6689	< .00001	moderate positive correlation
Customer Satisfaction	10.83	4.54			

The analysis in Table 4.3 reveals a moderate positive correlation between problem-solving skills and customer satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of 0.6689 and a highly significant p-value of < 0.00001 . Problem-solving skills have a mean score of 8.26 and a relatively high standard deviation of 4.27, indicating some variation in how employees'

problem-solving abilities are perceived. Although employees generally exhibit strong problem-solving skills, the effectiveness of their solutions may vary across different situations. The moderate correlation suggests that employees' ability to resolve customer issues directly influences customer satisfaction, with higher problem-solving skills leading to increased satisfaction. The extremely low p-value confirms the statistical significance of this relationship, reinforcing the conclusion that the positive impact of problem-solving skills on customer satisfaction is substantial and not due to chance.

Table 4.4

Relationship between Customer satisfaction and Customer Loyalty

	Mean	SD	r value	p value	Correlation
Customer Satisfaction	8.16	3.56	0.57	0.003	Positive Correlation
Customer Loyalty	10.59	4.63			

Table 4.4 reveals a significant positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty ($r = 0.57$, $p = 0.003$). This suggests that customers who are more satisfied with the service are more likely to develop loyalty, highlighting the importance of satisfaction for sustained business success.

9. CONCLUSION

This study explores how employee professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving abilities influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. The results show that all three employee traits—professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving skills—positively affect both customer satisfaction and loyalty. Specifically, employee professionalism was found to have a moderate positive correlation with customer satisfaction ($r = 0.5359$, $p < 0.00001$), indicating that customers who engage with professional employees are more likely to experience higher satisfaction and increased loyalty. Similarly, employee courtesy demonstrated a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.5477$, $p < 0.00001$) with customer satisfaction, highlighting the role of respectful, polite, and attentive behavior in creating positive customer experiences. Problem-solving skills exhibited the strongest correlation ($r = 0.6689$, $p < 0.00001$) with both customer satisfaction and loyalty, suggesting that employees' ability to effectively address issues plays a critical role in fostering customer retention and long-term loyalty.

The results underscore the importance of investing in employee development, particularly in areas of professionalism, courtesy, and problem-solving. Enhancing these skills can directly improve customer satisfaction, which, in turn, fosters stronger customer loyalty. The study aligns with existing literature that highlights the critical role of employee behavior in shaping customer perceptions and outcomes (Hennig-Thurau, 2002); (Zeithaml, 1996) Given the strong correlations observed, organizations that prioritize training employees in these key areas are more likely to experience higher levels of customer satisfaction and enhanced loyalty, ultimately leading to long-term business success. These findings provide actionable insights for companies seeking to improve their service delivery and customer retention strategies in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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