

The Effects of Service Quality and Service Marketing Mix on Customer Retention Towards Budget Hotels in Iraq The Mediating Role of Service Value

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Abstract

Population growth in Iraq is now becoming a major concern in the Iraq, and in the case of a shortage of hotel rooms, this will affect the demand for luxury hotels as consumers will turn to budget hotels. The budget hotel indeed has a key role in economic sectors, the property market, and human life. Since the demand for budget hotels in the Iraq is very high, they should have excellent hotel facilities and therefore it provides a space to study the service quality and marketing mix offered by these budget hotels. Besides of examining the service value as a mediator in the relationship of these effects on retention. In addition, this paper incorporated a new dimension of service marketing mix, namely after-sale rather than the conventional 7P's marketing service mix. The Stimulus-Organism-Response theory guided the theoretical structure of the analysis. Three of the four main variables, namely service quality, service marketing mix, and service value, were conceptualized and analyzed using the reflective-formative approach as a second-order construct. Customer retention as the dependent variable was assessed reflectively across four multiple items. Data was collected from 385 budget hotel clients residing in budget hotels in the Iraq and analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS software. Findings indicated significant and direct relationships between service quality, service marketing mix, service value, and customer retention. It was also found that service value has a full mediation effect. This study will be of interest to the Hotel industry in understanding how service quality and service marketing mix strategies are essential for maintaining a long-term relationship with customers.

1. Introduction

Iraq's tourism industry has been described as one of the largest contributors to the service sector and has the potential to increase its contribution to Iraq's economic development (Cvetkovski and Milićević, 2018). Tourism is a major source of income and employment for many countries, which are heavily dependent on environmental

resources such as climate and landscape according to Mensah (2012). In Iraq, the tourism industry also serves as a major foreign exchange earner for the domestic economy by attracting investment and providing employment.

Iraq has some of the world's most popular vacation destinations. Local and foreign tourists have made a significant contribution to the growth of tourism in the country. Tourism is regarded as a three-pronged service industry. The accommodation service which includes; hotels, restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues is one of the focuses and a very significant aspect of the service industry. Hotels provide travellers with the opportunity to stay and enjoy leisure during their time of travel. The current study will concentrate on the budget hotel sector, one of the tourism industry's most important parts (Lin et al., 2024).

In the hotel industry, the customer, otherwise known as the hotel guest is an important person because he/she is the person who will experience the level of service offered by the hotel, and the customer will be retained based on the achievement of the hotel. Uzir et al. (2021) said "Customers are the purpose of what we do, and rather than them depending on us, we very much depend on them. The customer is not the source of the problem, and we should not perhaps make a wish that customers 'should go away' because our future and our security will be put in jeopardy".

Nowadays, marketing is focused on meeting consumer desires. The customer tends to make decisions based on their assumptions of buying a product or service based on the value of the goods or services provided. From the point of view of the client, marketing is aimed at generating and maximizing income from customer relationships. To accomplish that goal, marketing, and selling of the product are not enough; rather, the company needs to ensure that the product sold meets the standard and satisfies the expectations of the consumer. The company must, therefore, be aware of and understand the needs, desires, and demands of its customers. This is why many companies put a great deal of effort into studying the actions of their customers and thinking about the best ways to deliver value and retention to the consumer (Othman et al., 2018). The marketing mix is one of the most critical advertising aspects to be handled.

The main idea of advertising, in combination with quality of service, is to influence and convince consumers to buy and use a product or service. To attract and retain consumers, marketing combines 4P's which include; product, price, place, and promotions, and additional 3P's which also consist of; people, physical evidence, and process. These marketing mixes are used as tools to drive demand for products and services for business (Ali et al., 2021).

In low-cost hotels, the service marketing mix (SMM) is crucial because it shapes guests' experiences. For example, hotels' "product" consists of the facilities and quality of the rooms, while their "price" must meet the needs of low-budget tourists. "Place" refers to the deliberate selection of a site close to transportation hubs or tourist destinations, while "promotion" makes use of digital channels to connect with budget-conscious visitors. "People" highlights the professionalism of the employees, "physical evidence" addresses aesthetic appeal, and "process" guarantees operational effectiveness. Furthermore, "after-sales services," such as post-stay surveys, improve retention. These factors work together to influence perceived service value, as demonstrated by the low-cost hotel industry in Iraq, where customized SMM tactics cater to the needs of local tourists.

As the most prominent sector in the hospitality industry, the hotel industry is facing a major setback that challenges prospective investors' attractiveness. While different statistics show that the industry has grown at an astronomical rate, taking a closer look at these statistics, one will find that the industry's significant growth can only be seen in the hotels owned by the chain and the segments cooperating with the industry. The level of competition within the hotel industry has so greatly increased in recent decades, to the extent that it poses a threat not only to new entrants to the market but also to those businesses that have been in the business for many years. It is no longer a secret that many hotels are struggling both within and outside the industry to keep up with the level of competition. It also aims to respond to the gap shown in the budget hotel services literature, namely that the marketing mix strategy of the generic 7P (based on people, promotion, physical evidence, place, product, price, and process) is inappropriate. The researchers proposed a creative and improved Hotel Service Marketing Mix (SMM) that involves the conventional 7P with an additional dimension: (after-sales service as proposed by Ahmed et al., 2023; Purwanto, 2022; Maghsoudlou et al., 2014).

This research suggests investigating the mediating impact of service value in the relationship between service marketing mix and service quality on customer retention in budget hotels in the Iraq. The purpose of writing this article is to examine the role that advertising plays in budget hotel industry development as well as determine how marketing has changed the industry and how it can be used to improve the industry further and create a positive brand image in the minds of budget hotel customers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Customer Retention

There is only one valid business function definition: attracting and keeping a customer. It is the customer who determines what the company is (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Generally speaking, a good tourism organization is not clearly defined (Uldedaj & Orhani, 2024). One that succeeds in achieving the business goals is a good tourism organization. Such targets can be customer growth, customer retention, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, enhanced customer service, or any other goals the company has set. Hotel targets may include providing sustained or increasing levels of satisfaction and maintaining customers through relationship management and promotion (Palmer et al., 2005).

In low-cost hotels, customer retention (CR) is a complex result that is influenced by strategic marketing, perceived value, and service quality. Budget hotel patrons value both functional dependability (e.g., consistent Wi-Fi and clean rooms) and emotional fulfillment (e.g., staff friendliness), which are frequently more important than price alone, according to Han and Hyun (2015). Uzir et al. (2021) discovered that cultural congruence (such as halal-compliant services) increases confidence and encourages return visits in the context of Iraq. CR is further amplified by the service marketing mix (SMM); for example, Ali et al. (2021) connected physical evidence (such well-maintained lobbies) and promotional strategies (such as loyalty awards) to increase guest loyalty. Notably, Othman et al. (2021) emphasized that after-sales services, including post-stay follow-ups, might mediate the gap between SMM and CR, especially in markets where costs are a concern. These findings support Lin et al.'s (2024) focus on digital technologies (such as booking applications) as contemporary retention levers, indicating that for Iraq's low-cost hotels to remain competitive, they must combine traditional social media marketing with technology.

2.2 Service Value

In low-cost hotels, service value (SV) represents a visitor's overall evaluation of whether the advantages (such quality and convenience) outweigh the disadvantages (like cost and effort). Chen et al. (2024), for instance, discovered that visitors associate high SV with "clean rooms" and "effective service," which are qualities that are frequently valued more highly than luxury in lower price ranges. Uzir et al. (2021) have observed that SV is further shaped in Iraq by cultural expectations (such as halal-compliant amenities).

The perceived service value takes place when customers evaluate the benefits of products or services based on the perception of "what to gain and what to give." (Pereira, 2024; Wu & Li, 2017). Moreover, the service value is also significant for buying decisions as Hanaysha (2016) pointed out that service value is the exchange between the perception of quality and that of psychology, by which monetary value is concerned. Ghalandari (2013) explained that the process of service value is derived from structures in terms of targets, frequency, and characteristics of customers. While considering the importance of perceived service a good value for money, an acceptable price, and a good buy, are considered as the three main measurable factors. Further, the customers' buying decisions depend on whether or not the service value is worth the charged money or the cost customers have to pay for it. In addition, customers compare products with those of competitors or alternative products by choosing the one that offers the best value. Among a variety of factors that cause such perceived service value, are brands as well as brand personality which offer a marketing tool for creating identity to distinguish a product from competitors. This may enable customers to perceive the value to be gained from using such a service, which they may consider superior to those provided by competitors and worth the charged fee. (Zhengwei et al., 2019; Mahin Pradana, 2018; Walsh et al., 2013).

2.3 Service Quality

Service quality (SQ) determines the performance or act of selling products and services. Quality is the highest value of service acts. A business applies quality of service corresponding to five criteria: (a) sustaining the company's presence for customers; (b) ensuring consistency of marketing activities; (c) providing customer satisfaction; (d) fostering consumer interest and image; (e) fostering customer loyalty. The expected and perceived quality of service is determined by the quality of service. Measuring SQ consists of assurance, tangibles, responsiveness, empathy, and reliability (Othman et al., 2019; Parasuraman et al., 1994).

Past studies indicate that SQ has a significant impact on service value and customer retention (Chen et al., 2024). Irrefutable evidence from other studies suggests that SQ has a small and marginal impact on service value and customer retention (Aras et al., 2023). Certain study discrepancies revealed that quality of service had a negligible effect on service value and customer retention (Lai et al., 2016). The findings suggest that SQ has a significant effect on service value (Juwaini et al., 2022).

2.4 Service Marketing Mix

The marketing mix of products and services requires advertising. Combining the methods of marketing products and services is a suitable technique to achieve the outcome or benefit. Implementing the selling mix 7Ps theory is a very complicated one. Hence, applying the 7Ps definition implies making efforts to enhance the marketing role in producing maximum income (Sadq et al., 2019). The marketing mix is divided into service marketing mixing modelling consisting of promotion, product, place, price, people, physical evidence, process, and after-sale service. The product mix of products is a marketing strategy to reach the target market (Lambelanova et al., 2023).

Empirical evidence shows that the advertising balance on location size and promotion has a significant effect on service quality, while product size and price are not relevant to service value (Sunarsi et al., 2023). Results from previous studies indicate that customer satisfaction is significantly affected by place, product, people, process, promotion, and physical evidence, but has a marginal effect on customer service value (Hamid, 2021).

2.5 Proposed Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

The model shown in Figure 1 was tested empirically in this study to evaluate the primary theoretical ideas and key goals. Our main interest was to understand the mediating impact of service value in the relationship between service marketing mix and quality of service on customer retention towards budget hotels in the Iraq. To test the proposed model, a total of 7 hypotheses were formulated.

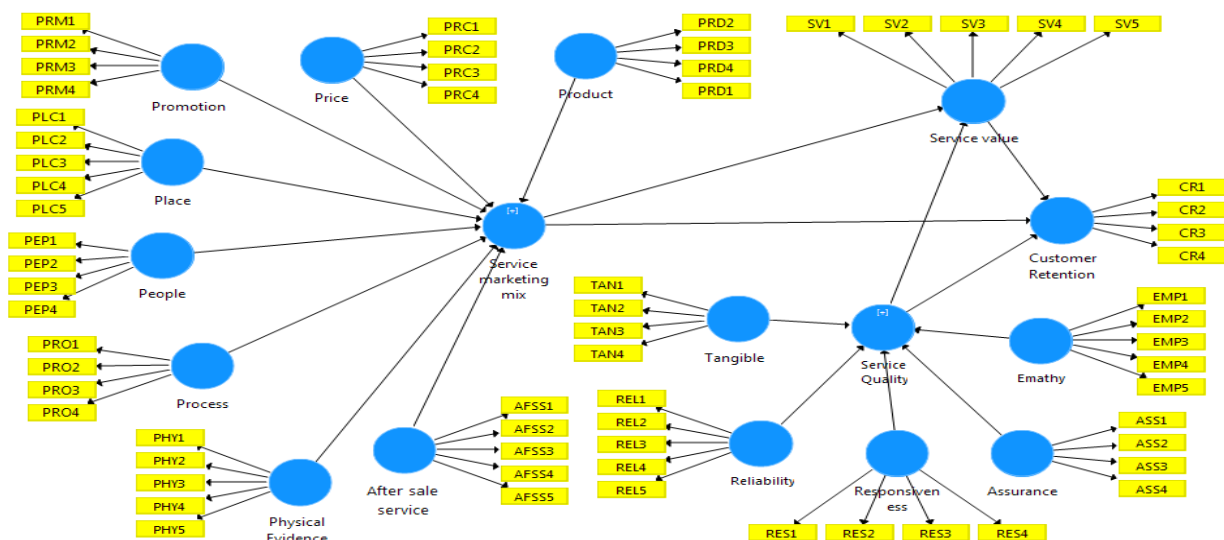


Fig. 1 Research framework

3. Research Methodology

The scope of the study was delimited to budget hotels in Iraq. The service quality, service marketing mix, service value, and customer retention will be studied in budget hotels in Iraq. Iraq was taken as a sampling area. In 2023, the tourist industry in Iraq accounted for over 12% of the country's GDP, with budget hotels accounting for 35% of all lodging (Iraqi Ministry of Tourism, 2023). Few studies have been conducted on low-cost hotels in post-conflict areas, where infrastructure issues and cultural quirks affect service value and retention dynamics (Uzir et al., 2021). This study focused on visitors who were at least 18 years old and stayed at two- to three-star budget hotels in Baghdad, Erbil, and Najaf (an estimated 50,000 each month, based on statistics from the hotel association). To guarantee regional representation, 385 respondents were chosen and hotels were ranked by location (50% Baghdad, 30% Erbil, and 20% Najaf). conducted in-person questionnaires in hotel lobbies over a three-month period (January–March 2024). was determined using Cochran's formula with a 50% response distribution, 5% margin of error, and 95% confidence level (Saunders et al., 2019). A sample of 385 volunteered respondents participated in the study and data were analyzed using Partial Least Square. The present study utilizes the reflective-formative modeling approach, which suits the assessed constructs. At higher-order construct levels, two constructs namely service quality (SQ) and service marketing mix (SMM) were measured using the formative model. The questionnaire comprised of five sections. The first section sought demographic information from the respondents. The second section contains questions linked with the dimensions of SMM: promotion (4 items) (Al-Debi and Al-waely, 2015), price (4 items) (Al-Dmour et al., 2013), product (4 items) (Al-Dmour et al., 2013), place (5 items) (Helm & Gritsch 2014), physical evidence (5 items) (Akroush & Al-dmour,

2006), people (4 items) (Lee et al., 2014), process (4 items) (Sreenivas et al., 2013) and after-sale service (5 items) (Coviello and Renko, 2016). The third part consists of service quality dimensions: assurance (4 items) (Parasuraman et al. 1988), empathy (5 items) (Parasuraman et al. 1988), reliability (5 items) (Parasuraman et al. 1988), responsiveness (4 items) (Parasuraman et al. 1988) and tangible (4 items) (Parasuraman et al. 1988). The fourth part consists of items on service value (5 items) (Eisingerich et al. 2014). The final part contains items on customer retention (4 items) (Han & Sean, 2015).

4. Results

4.1 Profile of Respondents

Explanation of respondents' characteristics used to identify respondents' identity based on the description of the sample of the study that was created. The demographic profile of respondents sought after includes Age, Gender, Qualification, Marital status, Occupation, monthly salary, source information as well as how many days respondents stayed in a hotel each month, for it can be shown as follows:

Table 1 Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–30 years	116	30.1
	31–45 years	96	24.9
	46–60 years	120	31.2
	Above 60 years	53	13.8
Gender	Male	231	60
	Female	154	40
Education	High school or below	39	10.1
	Diploma/Associate degree	89	23.2
	Bachelor's degree	212	55.1
	Master's degree or higher	45	11.7
Marital Status	Single	196	50.9
	Married	170	44.1
	Divorced/Widowed	19	5
Occupation	Government employee	150	39
	Private sector employee	65	16.7
	Self-employed/Business owner	39	10.1
	Student	58	15.1
	Unemployed/Other	73	19
Monthly Income	Below \$500	58	15.1
	500 -1,000	89	23.1
	1,001-1,500	96	24.9
	1,501- 2,000	65	16.9
	Above \$2,000	77	20
Booking Source	Online platforms	243	63.2
	Word of mouth	24	6.1
	Travel agencies	61	15.8
	Hotel websites	15	3.9
	Social media ads	42	10.9
Stay Duration	1 time	116	30.1
	2 times	73	19
	3 times	81	21
	4 times	70	18.2
	5 times	45	11.7

Four age groups were used to describe the respondents: those between the ages of 18 and 30 comprised the largest number (30.1%), suggesting a notable representation of younger people. (31–45 years) constituted 24.9% of the sample, indicating a sizable middle-aged population. (46–60 years) was the second largest category, accounting for 31.2%, indicating that older working persons were actively participating. The smallest group (13.8 %) was above 60, which probably refers to retirees or elderly tourists. While there is a modest preponderance of younger (18–30) and middle-aged (46–60) respondents, the age distribution demonstrates a fair representation across working age groups. Two gender groups were created from the responses: (male) comprising 60% of the participants. Forty% of the participants were female. The sample had a modest male preponderance, which might be indicative of larger patterns in survey participation or travel. The educational backgrounds of the respondents varied: 10.1% had only completed high school, 23.2% had a diploma or associate's degree, 55.1% had a bachelor's degree, and 11.7% had a master's degree or higher. A well-educated sample is suggested by the large proportion of respondents with at least a bachelor's degree, which may have an impact on their preference for booking or travel strategies. A focus on solo travel or younger demographics may be indicated by the predominance of single respondents. The occupations of the respondents varied; the largest category (39 %) was government employees, 16.7% were private sector workers, 10.1% were self-employed or business owners, 15.1% were students, and 19% were unemployed or other. A large proportion of government workers may reflect their steady income and travel patterns, whereas unemployed/other groups may consist of independent contractors or retirees.

The distribution of income levels was as follows: Under \$500: 15.1%; between \$500 and \$1,000: 23.1%; between \$1,001 and 1,500: 24.9%; between \$1,501 and \$2,000: 16.9%; and over \$2,000: 20%. The largest groups in the sample earn between \$1,001 and \$1,500 and \$500 and \$1,000, indicating that tourists with intermediate incomes predominate. Respondents mostly made use of online platforms (63.2 %), travel agencies (15.8 %), social media advertisements (10.9 %), word-of-mouth (6.1 %), and hotel websites (3.9 %). Dependence on online channels emphasizes the importance of e-commerce and digital marketing in the travel sector. Monthly frequency of hotel stays: 30.1% once, 19% twice, 21% three times, 18.2% four times, and 11.7% five times. The majority of respondents indicated that they traveled occasionally rather than frequently by staying in hotels one to three times each month.

4.2 Measurement Model

For the performance of any analysis, accuracy, and validity are critical (Hair et al., 2014). In order to verify the measurement model, the researcher measured composite accuracy, convergent validity, and discriminating validity. For performance and validity, Smart PLS 3 was used. Table 1 shows the Alpha, Composite Design Performance, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Cronbach alpha value, while Table 2 shows the comparisons between variables and the discriminant validity. The range of the composite reliability is between 0 and 1, the lower the values, the greater the reliability. A minimum value of 0.70 is considered good (Hair et al., 2014). Composite reliability below 0.60 implies an internal consistency deficiency and above 0.90 is not needed as all items calculate the same phenomenon (Kock and Lynn, 2012). An AVE value of 0.50 or higher suggests that over half of the variability of its measures is explained by the model. While an AVE of less than 0.50 implies that there is more uncertainty in the products than the variability the construct describes (Hair et al., 2014). Convergence for a latent construct is indicated by high factor loadings. The Average of all factor loadings should be statistically significant. A good rule is that standardized load estimates should be at least 0.5 or higher and 0.7 or higher should be considered ideal (Hair et al., 2014). Fornell-Larcker's criteria are favored by most work as a conservative approach (Kock and Lynn, 2012). This contrasts the AVE square root with the comparisons of the latent factor. Specifically, the square root of the AVE of each construct should be greater than any other construct's highest comparison.

Table 2 Reliability results

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
After-sale service	0.946	0.947	0.959	0.824
Assurance	0.923	0.923	0.945	0.812
Customer Retention	0.851	0.857	0.900	0.692
Empathy	0.940	0.940	0.954	0.808
People	0.942	0.942	0.958	0.852
Physical Evidence	0.944	0.944	0.957	0.818

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Place	0.928	0.930	0.946	0.778
Price	0.917	0.918	0.942	0.802
Process	0.905	0.908	0.934	0.780
Product	0.915	0.916	0.940	0.797
Promotion	0.876	0.877	0.915	0.730
Reliability	0.933	0.933	0.949	0.789
Responsiveness	0.924	0.925	0.946	0.814
Service Quality	0.983	0.983	0.984	0.737
Service marketing mix	0.986	0.986	0.986	0.672
Service Value	0.931	0.933	0.948	0.785
Tangible	0.927	0.928	0.948	0.821

These findings attest to the high degree of validity and reliability of each scale in assessing its particular component. Strong concept representation and small measurement errors are suggested by consistently high scores across all measures.

Table 3 *Correlations among variables and discriminant validity*

	AFSS	ASS	CR	EMP	PEP	PHY	PLC	PRC	PRO	PRD	PRM	REL	RES	SV	TAN
AFSS	0.908														
ASS	0.873	0.901													
CR	0.797	0.799	0.832												
EMP	0.872	0.897	0.830	0.899											
PEP	0.848	0.856	0.751	0.825	0.923										
PHY	0.875	0.856	0.807	0.873	0.834	0.904									
PLC	0.817	0.778	0.749	0.790	0.811	0.828	0.882								
PRC	0.749	0.741	0.712	0.766	0.735	0.807	0.784	0.895							
PRO	0.882	0.862	0.800	0.867	0.861	0.902	0.827	0.809	0.883						
PRD	0.776	0.753	0.690	0.765	0.745	0.798	0.774	0.814	0.859	0.893					
PRM	0.811	0.800	0.739	0.803	0.801	0.842	0.839	0.816	0.841	0.800	0.854				
REL	0.887	0.892	0.799	0.887	0.850	0.877	0.796	0.762	0.882	0.762	0.821	0.888			
RES	0.864	0.897	0.786	0.895	0.824	0.880	0.789	0.771	0.875	0.775	0.800	0.885	0.902		
SV	0.813	0.842	0.823	0.867	0.766	0.840	0.770	0.733	0.832	0.738	0.769	0.821	0.835	0.886	
TAN	0.875	0.876	0.780	0.876	0.798	0.894	0.786	0.749	0.879	0.787	0.811	0.880	0.871	0.812	0.906

Note: PRD = product; PRC = price; PRM = promotion; PLC = place; PEP = people; PRO = process; PHY = physical evidence; AFSS = after-sale service; TAN = tangible, REL = reliability; RES = responsiveness; ASS = assurance; EMP = empathy; SV = Service value; CR = customer retention.

The findings demonstrated that each construct was statistically different and met the conditions for discriminant validity. The robustness of the measurement model was confirmed by both the controlled correlations (Table 3) and high reliability (Table 2). The scales' psychometric qualities were confirmed by both tables. While Table 3 demonstrates that the constructs are different, yet logically linked, Table 2 shows great dependability. The utility of these measurements for additional research, including structural equation modeling, is supported by these findings.

4.3 Testing of Hypotheses and Discussion

H1: service marketing mix provided by budget hotels positively influences service value

The result of the first hypothesis test entails the optimistic and meaningful effect of all aspects of SMM on SV. The result from Smart PLS showed that there was a substantial association between SMM and SV ($p < 0.006$). Another empirical finding is that the R^2 for SV was 0.776, which was approximately a moderate degree of variation compensated for by the service marketing mix. The findings showed that all SMM dimensions have a significant and positive impact on the SV of a budget hotel. Based on discussions regarding the impact of recognition institutions, there is a range of issues that inspire SMM to have a high-quality. And good-sized effect on SV and the outcomes of discussions in a single-budget hotel workplace is recognized as having a positive and tremendous impact on SV by SMM, usually because the business has first-rate hotels and businesses, centers, and facilities. While the consumers may gather information about deals and shopping processes influence the customer's high interest and ability to buy services and use the hotel industry.

The findings support the theory of customer interactions, information dissemination, or the launch of a product and services due to the strong perception of customer-to-customer interactions between products and services (Shukor, 2016). Furthermore, the results of this study support the marketing mix hypothesis that the implementation of a marketing mix strategy is achieved for benefit by incorporating the idea of products and services (Thamrin, 2012). The results of this study partly support the findings of previous researchers, which provide evidence that the marketing mix on site and advertisement dimensions has a significant effect on service quality, while product dimensions and prices are negligible on service value (Fernandes & Solimun, 2018).

We also prefer after-sale service to glamorous after-sale service, responding quickly to requests for service, calling staff to the customer to seek input on the products, and calling to solve the problem by telephone. After-sale service is, therefore, an important aspect of the SMM. The after-sale service aspect results are strongly and substantially linked to the quality of service. Therefore, these findings encourage practitioners to advance their understanding of customer needs when formulating an SMM as they integrate these factors into the vision and purpose of their business.

These studies' findings are aligned with Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) findings, which dramatically mix advertising on the dimensions of an item, place, promotion, people, process, and physical evidence on the dimensions of service quality while price is insignificant to customer satisfaction. Kim & Damhorst (2010) research findings also agree with the results of this study that method, material, and physical evidence have a major impact on the value of service. price, place, promotion, and people have no major impact on the value of the service. Conclusively, findings fully support other researchers' claims that the marketing strategy (marketing mix) has a high and important benefit for service value (Shukor, 2016). The empirical evidence refutes (Fernandes & Solimun (2018) findings that price, product, promotion, and place as the elements of the marketing mix do not have a significant effect on service value. as marketing mix elements do not have a significant impact on service value.

H2: Service quality provided by budget hotels positively influences service value

The second hypothesis sought to test the relationship between SQ and SV and to determine if there was a correlation with a new thing in marketing research. SQ was found to be significantly correlated with SV ($\beta = 0.614$, S.E. = 0.107, $t = 5.721$, $p < 0.000$) and an R^2 value of 0.776 was obtained as shown in Figure 1. Therefore, this study's second hypothesis was confirmed and accepted. SQ variables were coded as REL, RES, TAN, ASS, and EMP had significant characteristics in the development of the SQ construct, which resulted in a significant relationship between SQ and SV.

Because the quality of service has a positive and important impact on the value of the service since the hotel has up-to-date equipment and facilities. The hotel manager provides a service as advertised, another fact is that hotel staff always have time to respond promptly to customer requests, and all hotel staff and employees have the

expertise to answer questions from customers. Based on these conversations, it can be inferred that staff management has increased interest in providing customer services to allow customers to satisfy their desires.

This result highlights the difficulty of service quality management and this scenario shows that service quality assessment is subject to various conditions such as market type (Wu, 2014), service type environment (Alshamsi et al., 2021), consumer segmentation, and external factors (Shukor, 2016) and culture (Othman et al., 2021). The practitioner must, therefore, recognize customer needs, choose the right direction, and regularly conduct performance reviews to accomplish successful business missions.

H3: Service marketing mix provided by budget hotels positively influences customer retention

The hypothesis tests whether the all-dimensional service marketing mix (SMM) has a positive and significant impact on CR. Findings show that the effect between SMM and CR was statistically significant with a very good standardized estimate and a high t-value of over 2,58 ($p < 0,008$). In addition, R^2 was significantly clarified at 0.759 for variation.

A more in-depth analysis of this finding has shown that all the elements of the SMM, namely physical evidence, process, place, price, people, product, and after-sale service play an essential role in developing an SMM that provides a significant relationship with CR. This finding indicates that Iraq budget hotel customers are conservative where they prefer budget hotel accommodation that is sufficient to sleep, and able to provide comfort, security, and enough channels for hotel payment to enable them to pay reasonable hotel fees with prices that are commensurate with marketplace prices and quality. This study also prefers access to the right budget hotel employees and professional staff work. In short, hotel customers in Iraq's budget expect a smooth budget hotel system that can be billed at a reasonable price and have the right staff when they seek help. As discussed earlier, this study integrates one aspect, namely after-sales service, which has been incorporated into the tradition. This research study showed that after-sales service has a significant impact on SV and CR since the aspect of after-sales service was critical in the service marketing mix. Repeating this research and extending it to other parts of the world and other facilities would, therefore, test the usefulness of the present findings.

This finding is also consistent with the SMM definition adopted in the current study, where SMM was pointed out to build the response it needs in the target market (Islam et al., 2013). The important outcome of the relationship between SMM and CR was consistent with past studies such as Loo and Leung (2018) on Thailand's low-cost airlines, Sarker et al. (2012) on Chinese tourism, and Thamrin (2012) on Indonesian passenger satisfaction. The theory and methodology adopted in the above-mentioned studies, as described in the previous paragraph, may not be identical to the present study and therefore considered partially supported.

H4: Service quality provided by budget hotels positively influences customer retention

Another research goal of this study was to determine the impact of service quality on customer retention. The fourth hypothesis that constituted this relationship was subsequently evaluated using the PLS-SEM route coefficient, and the hypothesis was subsequently accepted based on the obtained statistical result. The SmartPLS-generated regression result showed a significant relation between SQ and CR ($\beta=0.250$, S.E.=0.110, $t=2.276$, $p<0.023$). Relatively high was the β price. Another statistical result is that the R^2 for CR was 0.759, which was close to the significant variance rate accounted for by SQ.

The findings usually show that hotel clients staying at budget hotels in the Iraq demand better services from budget hotels. Budget hotel managers should, therefore, take steps to improve the quality of service rendered by budget hotels in all dimensions of service quality. Within these dimensions, dimensional scores and element scores give significant signals about service areas that need to be enhanced in hotels. This could allow limited resources to be better used and advertising campaigns to be more successful.

Several other recent studies such as Ladhari (2009), Ghalandari (2013), Namukasa (2013), Han and Hyun (2015), and Polyorat & Kaen (2015) are validated by the results of this study. The present study agrees with the views of Meidutė-Kavaliauskienė et al. (2014), who argued that emphasis is placed on the fundamental role of service quality in gaining competitive advantage by incorporating high-quality features that have a high potential to influence customer retention and produce positive results for businesses such as customer loyalty and market rivals. This may explain why budget hotel customers expect to be integrated into budget hotel facilities with exceptional quality features. For example, quality of performance will improve customer retention, but if poor quality has been proven, customers will be dissatisfied.

H5: service value provided by budget hotels positively influences customer retention

The last direct relationship assessed in the study was focused on service value and customer retention. To achieve this goal, the fifth hypothesis was formulated to predict whether there was a significant effect on the relationship between SV and CR and this was evaluated using PLS-SEM regression analysis. Likewise, the relationship between these constructs was also important in the sense of hotel service ($\beta= 0.438$, S.E.= 0.085, $t= 5.159$, $p<0.000$).

Because there is a high quality and giant effect of SV on CR, the planning makes complaints about the acquisition of offers because of the very few customers. Service customers feel the value of both the company's products have to consider (use service) to prevent such criticisms. The impact on the ability of consumers to request or buy back the available goods and services is a sign of excessive CR. Pleased customers appear to be CR. SV may render a provider with emotional love and create excessive CR. Retention can be described as someone's faithfulness in using the organization's products and services.

Numerous studies in Muslim tourism such as (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Edward & Sahadev, 2011) on US and UK furniture stores, Chen (2013) on China Agricultural Farm, Wu (2014) on China gaming industry, and Howat and Assaker (2013) in Australia Aquatic Centres had agreed that SV has a significant impact on CR. One way to interpret this result is that the higher value features included in budget hotel service, the more likely it is to have beneficial retention of customers on budget hotel services.

H6: Service marketing mix provided by budget hotels positively influences customer retention mediated by service value

The sixth objective of this study was to explore the impact of SV mediation between SMM and CR. In comparing the mediating variables of service value, SMM on CR can be verified that SMM has a significant impact on SV and SV as well as a significant effect on CR like that SMM. Following the application of regression and bootstrapping methods in tandem with service marketing, CR and SV as mediator factors, the magnitude of the indirect effect of SV was reduced to $\beta = 0.122$ and was statistically significant at $t = 2.181$ ($p < 0.030$) after divided by standard error (S.E.) value = 0.056. The coefficient of the direct path between SMM and CR was reduced to $\beta = 0.218$ at rate $p < 0.008$. It thus verified that SV was supported by complete mediation as a mediator between SMM and CR and it reflected the H6 hypothesis.

The above result can be interpreted as indicating that higher retention of customers can be generated by increasing value features in products by providing the right mix of service marketing, in the case of this report, it implies all dimensions of the service marketing mix. Finally, it comes back to clients' primary goal of staying at hotels especially employing the services of budget hotels. The possible causes for this finding are that Chinese budget hotel customers want a budget hotel that provides convenience, is well-organized, has sufficient area, is secure, reasonable price structure with good payment policies, and sufficient payment channels, and has impressive and useful physical set-up budget hotel. In a suitable scenario, Kwun (2011) proposes that various types of financial incentives could be provided to budget hotel users, such as offering free, discounted group transactions and discounted hotel prices. In addition, the quality performance subscale of SV, followed by price, value, and social factors that drive the marketing mix, showed the highest effect in the model. Although SV mediates the retention of customers, SMM still has a major direct effect on CR. It has been noted in the present statements that all marketing mix factors, namely place, price, physical evidence, product, promotion, people, process, and after-sale service, can directly induce customer retention, especially in the cognitive and overall retention aspects. It is important to be competitive with other budget hotel providers and to be successful in many aspects of the marketing mix, as empirical results show that budget hotel customers tend to compare services between budget hotel facilities and analyze other parts of the service.

H7: Service quality provided by budget hotels positively influences customer retention mediated by service value

The last theory discussed here is about the role of SV as a mediator between SQ and CR relationship. In the same way as the previous theory, the approach used to explain the mediation outcome was evaluated. In the current study, SQ has an important direct effect on CR with a $\beta = 0.250$ direction coefficient. SV's indirect effect was 0.268 and was statistically significant, with $t = 4.139$ ($p < 0.000$) after regression was applied to the mediating variable. The direction coefficient β was decreased to 0.110 for the direct effect between SQ and CR, but still has a significant effect as shown in Table 4. Determine the degree of mediation and the outcome to demonstrate that SV has the maximum mediation effect on the relationship between SQ and CR in the next sample.

This study shows in a budget hotel setting that all dimensions of service quality worked intensively together on service value and retention, especially on the technical aspect. Equally important to this report, it was noted that calculating the quality of service in budget hotel services is easier by combining functional and technical factors rather than functional aspects alone as suggested by Kuo et al. (2013). Therefore, a better understanding of the requirements of budget hotel customers in practical and technical terms through continuous performance assessment is suggested to allow service providers to meet customer needs and ensure long-term business survivability (Chen et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2008).

A total mediation effect between SQ and CR in a Chinese hotel setting is the most convincing reason for SV as SQ has a clear direct impact on SV and CR. Customers are constantly seeking quality in the services they have engaged in and are always a key component in the delivery of marketing and business services. Establishing high-

quality service will result in high service value (Jo et al., 2014) and customer retention (Han & Hyun, 2015; Suki, 2014) and create another opportunity to enhance a company's reputation (Wu, 2014; Sivakumar & Srinivasan, 2009), encouraging positive behaviors such as recycling intent, positive mouth and loyalty (Rozita et al., 2014; Kim & Damhorst, 2010). Poor quality of service, on the other hand, induces negative responses, poor word of mouth, and low customer repurchase to weaken market power (Lovelock & Writz, 2011). In short, there will be garbage in the garbage (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 4 Summary of hypotheses testing results for direct and indirect effect

Hypotheses	Path	β	S.E	t-value	P Values	Result
H1	SMM-> SV	0.279	0.100	2.782	0.006	Significant
H2	SQ -> SV	0.614	0.107	5.721	0.000	Significant
H3	SMM-> CR	0.218	0.082	2.668	0.008	Significant
H4	SQ -> CR	0.250	0.110	2.276	0.023	Significant
H5	SV-> CR	0.438	0.085	5.159	0.000	Significant
H6	SMM -> SV -> CR	0.122	0.056	2.181	0.030	Significant
H7	SQ -> SV -> CR	0.268	0.065	4.139	0.000	Significant

Note: PRD = product; PRC = price; PRM = promotion; PLC = place; PEP = people; PRO = process; PHY = physical evidence; AFSS = after sale service; TAN = tangible, REL = reliability; RES = responsiveness; ASS = assurance; EMP = empathy; SV = Service value; CR = customer retention.

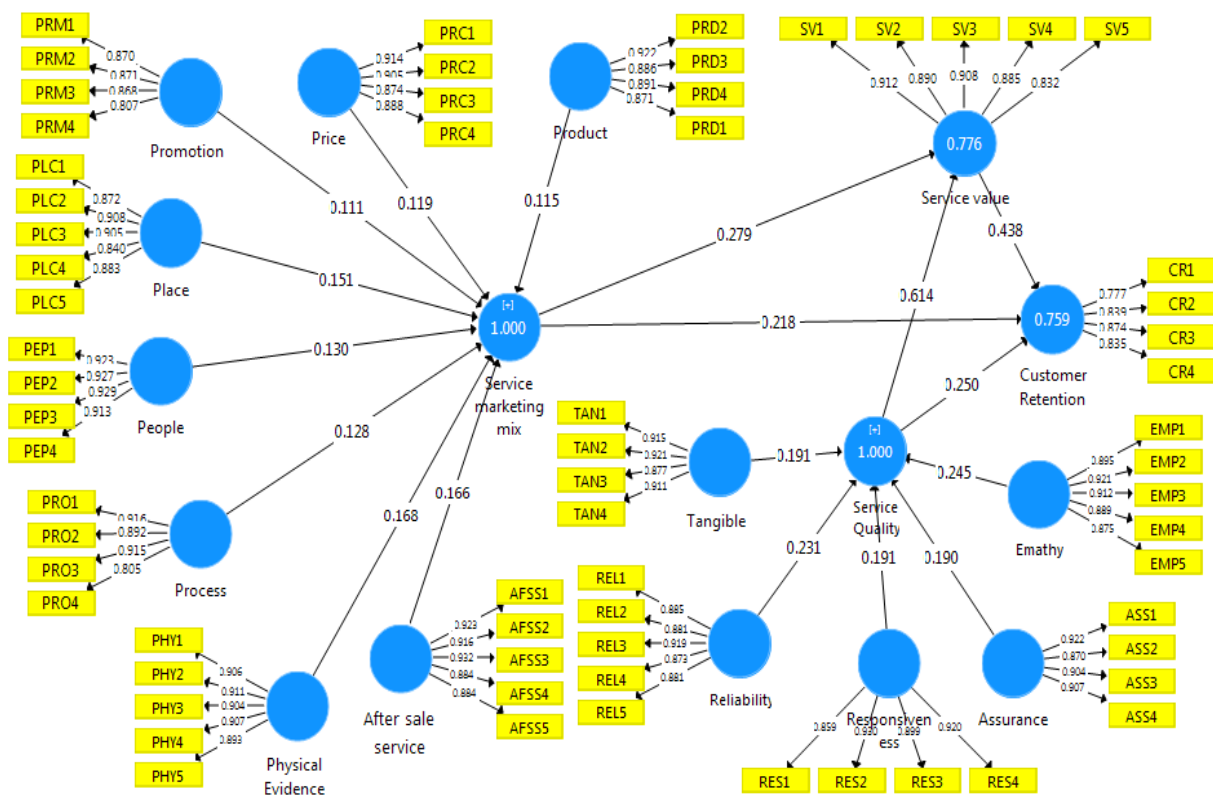


Fig. 2 Result of path coefficient β and R^2 for direct relationship variables

The path coefficients (β) and coefficients of determination (R^2) for the direct links between the study variables are shown in Figure 3. The intensity and direction of the correlations between the independent and dependent variables are shown by the path coefficients (β). A larger effect is indicated by a higher absolute value of β , and the nature of the link is revealed by its sign, which can be either positive or negative. The explanatory strength of the model is revealed by the R^2 values, which show the percentage of variance in the dependent variables that can be accounted for by the independent variables. For example, high R^2 values for some variables indicate that the

model can explain a sizable amount of variability in the results. This figure is essential for comprehending the framework's immediate consequences and for determining the strength of the proposed linkages.

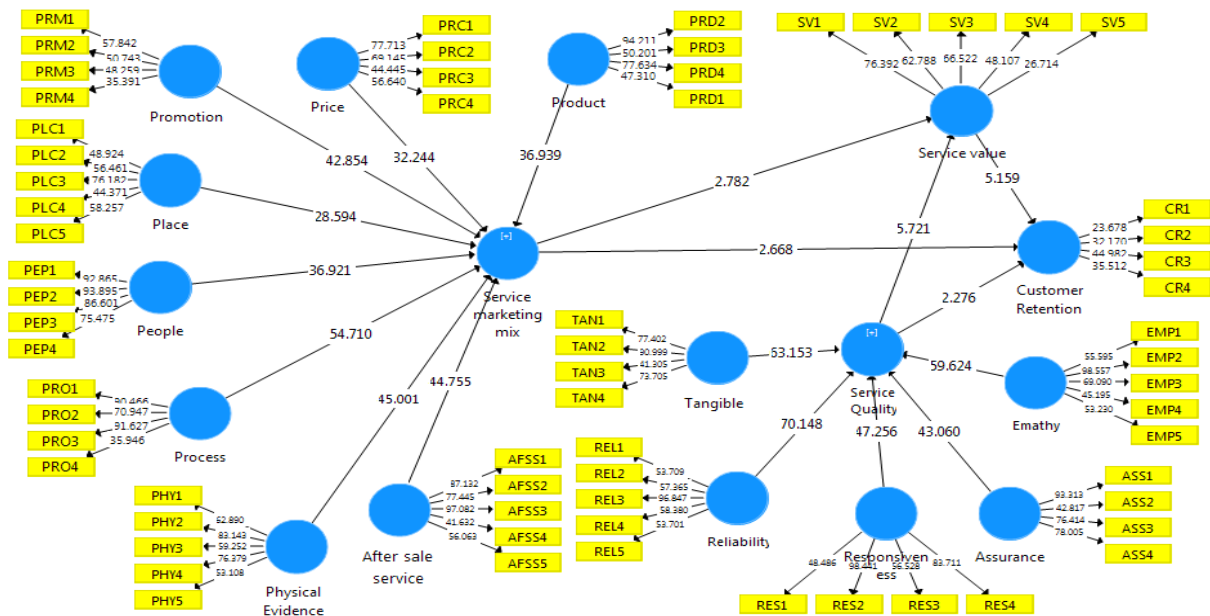


Fig. 3 PLS model path coefficient (bootstrapping at 500 resampling)

The path coefficients for every variable in the framework are shown in Figure 2, which provides a thorough understanding of the connections between them. It is possible to determine the variables that have the greatest effects on others by examining the path coefficients, which show the strength and importance of each link. For instance, a strong positive correlation is suggested by a large positive coefficient between two variables, whereas an inverse relationship is shown by a negative coefficient. This figure is essential for confirming the theoretical framework and emphasizing the model's main motivators. Researchers can assess the relative significance of each variable and improve the model to describe the underlying events more effectively by examining these coefficients. When combined, these data offer a thorough comprehension of the structural connections and the overall efficacy of the suggested framework.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

As discussed earlier, there is an important dimension integrated into this study, namely after-sale service which was integrated into the model. This research study showed that after-sale service significantly affects service value and customer retention since the after-sale service dimension was important in the service marketing mix. Conducting this research and extending it to other parts of the world and other facilities would therefore test the utility of the present findings.

The service marketing mix has a better effect on increasing the value of service in all directions. The fact that the facilities and amenities are of quality in the causes of the budget hotel, the consumers of facilities and utilities should access brand and purchase data to affect the customer's high interest and desire to buy goods and use services. The higher the standard of the services provided, the higher the cost of the service. It is noteworthy that due to the large budget hotels in the Iraq. There are so many alternatives that customers can use to meet their needs, other factors that determine customer retention in budget hotels may include factors such as the budget hotel in Iraq owning facilities that could satisfy the production of service quality, as well as staff whose training was generally considered adequate to satisfy the customer's needs.

Having a good service marketing mix results in high retention. This is because the hotel business is a luxury business. Hotel rooms are spacious and comfortable, cost equal to the benefits you get during your stay in a hotel, the hotel operator offers convenient parking space, customer care staff, and availability of enough facilities and services to enable high customer retention. The lower the value of services offered, the effect does not have a significant impact on the retention of customers. This condition is due to the lack of facilities and the lack of workers displaying products and services, and the appearance implied by both clients cannot increase the consumer's willingness to find the advantages of the hotel over other hotels.

The higher the service value perceived, the higher the customer retention level. This condition is triggered by value creation, and retention is highly dependent on brand or product line growth in the market. If there is an association between customer needs and product offerings, quality can be accomplished at this level. Customer retention can be generated by preserving the availability of supply and increasing the reachability and benefits of products/services resulting in higher service value, which can, in turn, lead to higher customer retention. The decision of the hotel to continue taking remedial action, and systemic service is a definitive shield in tracking consumer complaints about a loss that can tie customer retention in turn.

Service value acts as a mediating factor in defining the effect of the service marketing mix on customer retention and, as a mediating variable, a complete mediation is considered dependent on examination of the variables in the service value research model. It indicates that service quality can increase the retention of customers without increasing the value of service. Therefore, service quality can have a real impact on the retention of customers.

Changing perceptions, behaviour, and paradigms are needed to improve the business marketing mix towards a better direction by utilizing a very important condition, which is to increase the intensity of the release of products and services that can be presented in brochures, flyers, print media, and electronic media. Hotel management is required to increase its seriousness by providing reliable and up-to-date information to customers on budget hotel services and products in hotels in Iraq.

There is also a need for a change in attitude, actions, and mind-set to improve the high quality of service through very vital conditions: which involves enhancing the friendliness of staff, attention and courtesy as well as the personalized care shown by employees in budget hotels so that customers can solve their problems. Having a high level of customer retention through a very significant situation means enhancing the quality of the consumer's desire to make purchases and use services that lead to their decisions to remain a customer and appreciate the services provided as a whole so that the customer aims to use the products and services achieved.

The rise in high customer retention through a very significant condition involves; optimizing the hotel's manager's ability to inspire customers to provide a positive response to the hotel. For advanced scientists, this work is required to be produced by introducing multiple constructs (variables) or experimental objects with specific analytical unit characteristics.

6. Future Research

Future research could examine how well the proposed model works in other geographical and cultural contexts. Cultural differences in customer retention tactics may be revealed by contrasting low-cost hotels in Iraq with those in nearby nations or locations that experience comparable economic difficulties (such as post-conflict zones). A deeper understanding of how these relationships change over time, particularly in dynamic markets such as Iraq, is possible by conducting longitudinal research to evaluate the long-term effects of service quality, service marketing mix, and service value on customer retention.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Author Contributions

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Shwana Akoi, Ferman Ismael, Tina Naseri, and Bestoon Othman; **data collection:** Shwana Akoi, Ferman Ismael, and Tina Naseri; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Shwana Akoi and Bestoon Othman; **draft manuscript preparation:** Shwana Akoi and Bestoon Othman. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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