Examining the Impact of Influential Variables on Tourists' Behavioral Intentions (A Case Study of Iranian and Foreign Tourists in 4- and 5-Star Hotels in Tehran in 2023)

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Abstract

In recent years, tourism—recognized as a green industry—has rapidly expanded worldwide. According to the results published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization on global tourism excellence, export revenues from tourism have reached seventeen trillion dollars annually. The present study aimed to investigate the impact of influential variables on tourists' behavioral intentions, using the case study of Iranian and foreign tourists staying in 4- and 5-star hotels in Tehran in 2023. This study is applied in nature and, regarding data collection and research design, is a descriptive-survey type. The statistical population consisted of customers (tourists) residing in the hotels. The sample size was estimated using Cochran's formula (n = 384) and selected via simple random sampling. The research instruments included two standardized questionnaires developed by Padlee (2019) and Dwyatt (2019), utilizing a five-point Likert scale. To test the hypotheses, the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method was employed. The results indicate that service quality has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, and customer satisfaction significantly influences behavioral intentions. Additionally, employee behavior, room facilities, physical evidence, food quality, and perceived customer value all have significant effects on customer satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction plays a determining role in shaping their behavioral intentions.

Keywords: Employee behavior, customer satisfaction, tourists' behavioral intentions, perceived customer value.

1.   Introduction

In recent years, tourism—recognized as a green industry—has experienced rapid global growth. According to the "World Tourism Highlights" published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the number of international tourists has seen an unprecedented increase, and tourism export revenues have reached seventeen trillion dollars annually (Lin, 2023).

Hotels, as the primary destination for tourists—both Iranian and foreign—must be designed in such a way as to ensure satisfaction in all aspects of service and amenities and, in return, generate revenue from them. Behavioral intentions are largely associated with service providers' ability to retain customers. Business owners across various industries, in order to determine

and guarantee their future success, must recognize and value their customers' behavioral intentions. Since behavioral intentions are predictors of actual behavior, measuring them is essential for researchers in the field of marketing (Haji et al., 2021).

Investors and hotel managers seek to understand which variables influence tourists' behavioral intentions and what factors lead tourists to choose their hotel for a short or extended stay. Therefore, this study focuses on examining the variables that influence the behavioral intentions of tourists (both Iranian and foreign) in 4- and 5-star hotels in Tehran in 2023. The first chapter of this thesis outlines the general framework of the research, including the statement of the problem, the significance and necessity of the study, objectives, research questions, hypotheses, and both conceptual and operational definitions of the study variables.

In response to shifts in consumer behavior, service providers have recognized the need for a new marketing strategy to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty. Within this context, the concept of the "experience economy" emerged due to market saturation. In the experience economy, because tourists are provided opportunities for active participation and interaction with the environment, they are offered novel experiences through creative activities (Campos, 2016). When users engage in activities with thoughtful simplicity, unique experiences—referred to as creative experiences—are formed. Recent studies on tourism experiences emphasize that tourists themselves play a crucial role in shaping their experiences, and tourism organizations and destinations must offer memorable experiences. This trend has pushed businesses and tourist destinations to involve tourists in designing, producing, and consuming these experiences (Sharma & Kumar Nayak, 2018)

Tourists' behavioral intentions—such as repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth—are critical and primary sources of tourism revenue. Consequently, one of the most important subjects in the tourism industry is identifying the factors that lead to repeat visits and, ultimately, the attraction of new tourists. A memorable tourism experience can become a powerful, dynamic driver that motivates tourists to revisit a specific destination or service provider. It is also believed that a memorable experience in tourism leads to customer satisfaction. Therefore, it is essential for tourism businesses to understand the importance of customers' perception of their experiences and to continuously measure and improve methods that enhance tourist satisfaction (Sotiriadis, 2017).

Tourists' behavioral intentions are influenced by factors that affect their needs, motivations, and decision-making processes. These factors play a significant role in predicting tourist behavior and in strategic marketing planning within the tourism industry. Tourists' personality traits, self-confidence, interests and values, needs, and individual motivations can significantly impact their behavioral intentions. Some individuals seek adventurous and thrilling experiences, while others pursue relaxation and tranquility (Golestani & Aali, 2022; Golestani & Eysazadeh, 2022).

Research on behavioral intentions is essential for several reasons. From a product/service perspective, behavioral intention relates to the formation of desire, sharing experiences, and purchasing behavior, which can affect customers in the buying process, such as searching for service information and being influenced positively or negatively by other customers' stories. According to Tavitiyaman (2021), behavioral intention is a predictor of future personal actions. From a destination perspective, behavioral intention is a strategic tool for evaluating the success of a destination. Key elements within the structure of behavioral intentions—such as the willingness to visit or revisit, to purchase or repurchase, to recommend, and to provide feedback—have been studied by researchers. It has also been stated that behavioral intentions are a significant factor in understanding destination choice, future motivations, and tourist behavior (Hong & Hsu, 2024).

The tourism industry constantly seeks to identify behavioral factors that influence tourist decision-making. Behavioral intentions link emotional and cognitive components and play a vital role in giving meaning to tourists' travel experiences. Moreover, it is believed that behavioral intentions in tourism contribute to the formation of memorable experiences and customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following question: Which variables influence tourists' behavioral intentions?

2. Methods and Materials

The present study is applied in nature in terms of its objective and is classified as a descriptive-survey in terms of data collection and research methodology. The statistical population of this study consisted of all customers (tourists) of 4- and 5-star hotels in Tehran in the year 2023. Since the exact number of individuals in the population was unknown and considered unlimited, Cochran's formula for an infinite population was used to determine the minimum required sample size.

It is worth noting that when the value of *p* is unknown in this formula, it can be set to 0.5, which yields the largest and most conservative sample size. In this study, *p* was set at 0.5 accordingly. By substituting the parameters into the formula, the required sample size was calculated to be 384 individuals. A simple random sampling method was used in this study to ensure equal chance for all customers and to facilitate faster and more efficient sampling.

This questionnaire includes six variables (employee behavior, room facilities, physical evidence, food quality, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions) and comprises 30 items.

The second questionnaire was adopted from the study by Dwyatt et al. (2019), which consists of three items assessing the variable of perceived customer value.

A 5-point Likert scale was used for both instruments, ranging from (1) "Strongly Disagree" to (5) "Strongly Agree." The reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was above 0.70, meeting the standard threshold.

Table 1. Detailed Specifications of the Research Questionnaire

Variable Name	Item Numbers	Number of Items	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Employee Behavior	1–5	5	0.760
Room Facilities	6–10	5	0.791
Physical Evidence	11–15	5	0.703
Food Quality	16–20	5	0.823
Customer Satisfaction	21–25	5	0.845
Behavioral Intentions	26–30	5	0.852
Perceived Customer Value	31–33	3	0.830

After obtaining the necessary approvals, the sample group was selected. Then, the participants completed the measurement instruments. To analyze the data and test the hypotheses, the structural equation modeling (SEM) method was employed. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 22 and SmartPLS version 3 software packages.

3. Findings and Results

To utilize parametric statistical techniques, the distribution of variable values must be normal, which is evaluated using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

According to the table below related to the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for the main variables of the study, it is observed that the significance level obtained for each variable is greater than 0.05. As a result, the null hypothesis is accepted, and the research variables in the sample under study follow a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric methods can be applied to test the hypotheses of this study.

Table 2. Kolmogorov–Smirnov Test Results

Variable	N	Sig. (p-value)
Employee Behavior	384	0.083
Room Facilities	384	0.087
Physical Evidence	384	0.000
Food Quality	384	0.064
Customer Satisfaction	384	0.093
Behavioral Intentions	384	0.079
Perceived Customer Value	384	0.086

According to Table 2 and the results obtained, all research variables except for *Physical Evidence* follow a normal distribution. Therefore, due to the non-normal distribution of this specific variable, the PLS software was used for inferential statistical analysis.

As shown in Table 3, the values obtained for both Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) exceed 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability of the research variables. Thus, the measurement models demonstrate acceptable reliability. These indices assess internal consistency through inter-item correlations or factor loadings. However, since indicator reliability varies, each indicator must be assessed individually. Researchers argue that a latent variable should explain a significant portion of the variance in its indicators—typically at least 50%. Therefore, the absolute value of the standardized outer loading between a construct and its indicators should exceed 0.70.

Table 3. Measurement Model Reliability Indices

Variable	Composite Reliability (CR)	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee Behavior	0.881	0.863
Room Facilities	0.880	0.829
Physical Evidence	0.912	0.879
Food Quality	0.832	0.750
Customer Satisfaction	0.813	0.716
Behavioral Intentions	0.861	0.809
Perceived Customer Value	0.835	0.733

This index assesses the model's ability to predict observable variables from their corresponding latent variables. Positive CV Com values indicate satisfactory quality of the reflective measurement model.

Table 4. CV Com Values

Variable	CV Com
Employee Behavior	0.7785
Room Facilities	0.7397
Physical Evidence	0.7713
Food Quality	0.7841
Customer Satisfaction	0.7110
Behavioral Intentions	0.8464
Perceived Customer Value	0.7221

Also referred to as the structural model quality index, the most well-known indicator for structural model quality is the Stone–Geisser index. Positive values indicate strong predictive capability of the structural model.

Table 5. CV Red Values

Variable	CV Red
Employee Behavior	0.5451
Room Facilities	0.2407
Physical Evidence	0.5127
Food Quality	0.5730
Customer Satisfaction	0.7067
Behavioral Intentions	0.2994
Perceived Customer Value	0.0884

Figure 1 represents the strength of the relationships among the study variables in the standard estimation model.
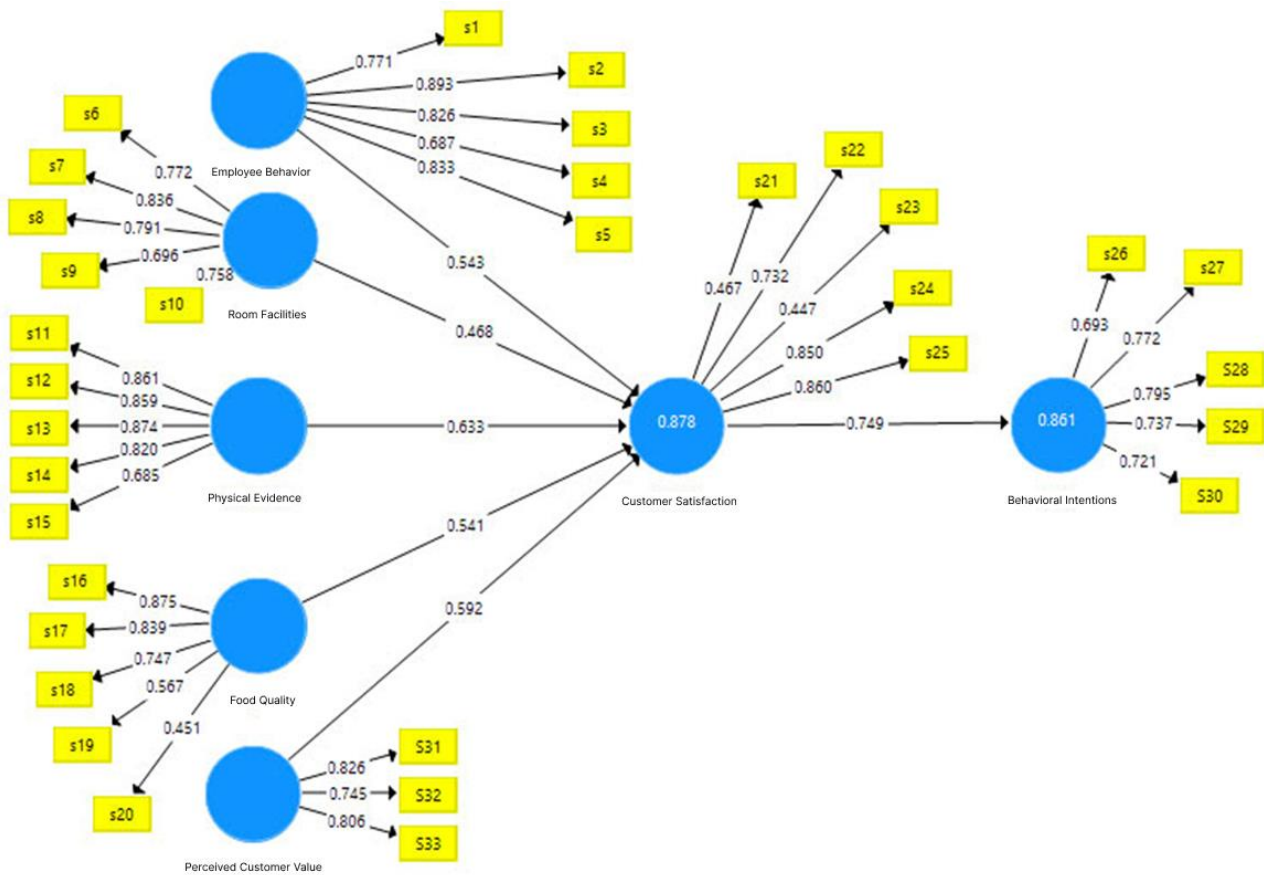
Figure 1. Structural Model (Standardized Estimates)

This mode is used to evaluate the significance of the relationships between variables. Significance is determined by *t* values that fall outside the range of -1.96 to +1.96. Values within this range are considered statistically insignificant.
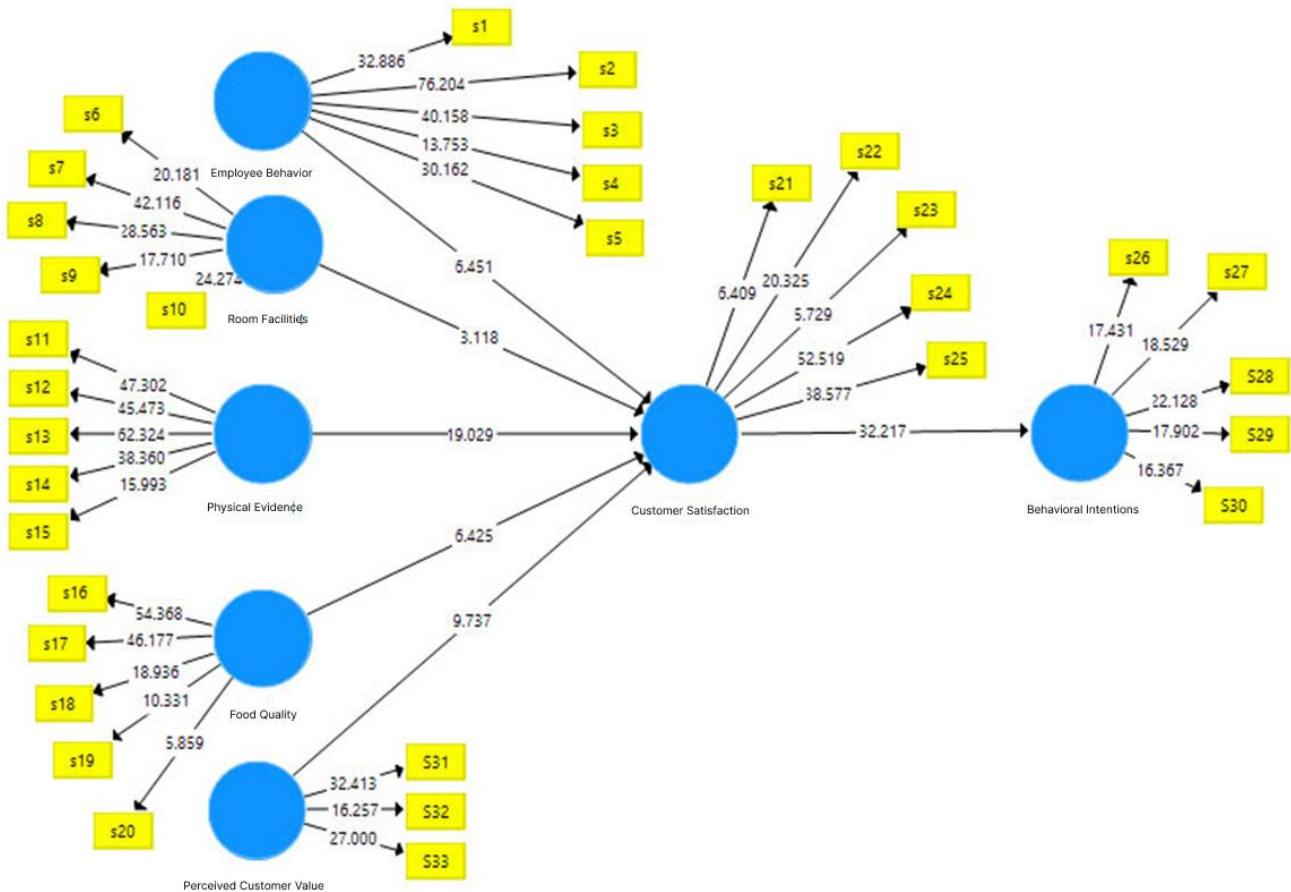
Figure 2. Structural Model (t-Statistics)

This section presents the results of hypothesis testing using structural equation modeling.

1. **Employee behavior has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.** According to the t-statistics model, the *t* value for the relationship between employee behavior and customer satisfaction is 6.451. Since this value is outside the [-1.96, +1.96] range, the hypothesis is supported.

2. **Room facilities have a significant effect on customer satisfaction.** The *t* value for the relationship between room facilities and customer satisfaction is 3.118. Since this value is outside the [-1.96, +1.96] range, the hypothesis is supported.

3. **Physical evidence has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.** The *t* value for the relationship between physical evidence and customer satisfaction is 19.029. As this value is outside the [-1.96, +1.96] range, the hypothesis is supported.

4. **Food quality has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.** The *t* value for the relationship between food quality and customer satisfaction is 6.425. As this value exceeds the critical value range, the hypothesis is confirmed.

5. **Perceived customer value has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.** The *t* value for the relationship between perceived customer value and customer satisfaction is 9.737. Since it is beyond the critical value range, this hypothesis is supported.

6. **Customer satisfaction has a significant effect on behavioral intentions.** The *t* value for the relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions is 32.217. As this value lies outside the [-1.96, +1.96] range, the hypothesis is confirmed.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis revealed that employee behavior has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 54.3%.

In today's dynamic and competitive world, organizations—especially in the tourism industry—must pay close attention to their customers in order to survive and grow. One of the key factors in this regard is employee behavior, which plays a vital role in shaping the experience and satisfaction of customers (tourists). Employee behavior not only represents the organization in interactions with customers but also significantly affects how customers perceive and emotionally respond to the services they receive. This behavior includes a range of interactions, from warm greetings and friendliness to problem-solving and responsiveness to customer needs. Positive behaviors enhance customer experience and satisfaction, while negative behaviors can lead to dissatisfaction and reduced loyalty.

The analysis also showed that room facilities significantly affect customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 46.8%.

Hotels and lodging facilities are a fundamental pillar of the tourism industry. The quality of services and adequacy of amenities in hotel rooms directly influence customer and tourist satisfaction. Room facilities encompass features such as bed comfort, the quality of furnishings and equipment, internet access, cleanliness, and interior design. Satisfaction with these facilities not only increases the likelihood of return visits but also encourages positive word-of-mouth, thereby attracting new customers. Understanding the impact of room facilities can help hotel managers enhance customer satisfaction and strengthen their competitive position in the tourism market.

Findings further indicated that physical evidence significantly affects customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 63.3%.

Physical evidence—including the physical environment, amenities, cleanliness, aesthetics, and staff-customer interactions—plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' overall experience. These tangible aspects form the first impression of service quality and contribute substantially to customer perceptions and emotional responses. Physical evidence encompasses everything from interior decoration and cleanliness to available amenities and facilities.

The results also demonstrated that food quality significantly influences customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 54.1%.

Food quality is one of the most influential factors in customer satisfaction within the tourism industry. As a fundamental human need, food plays a significant role in shaping travel experiences and memories. For many tourists, tasting local and traditional cuisine is a core attraction. Food quality includes elements such as flavor, freshness, hygiene, variety, and presentation—all of which contribute to customer satisfaction. In an increasingly competitive tourism landscape, providing high-quality food has become even more essential. Tourists seek not only to enjoy natural and cultural attractions but also to have a complete, flawless experience—including memorable meals.

Additionally, perceived customer value significantly affects customer satisfaction, with a path coefficient of 59.2%.

Perceived value represents a customer's overall assessment of the benefits and costs associated with a service or product. It plays a critical role in the formation of customer satisfaction. This perceived value can encompass various aspects, including service quality, pricing, overall experience, and emotional responses. Essentially, it reflects the balance between customer expectations and actual experiences.

Customer satisfaction, in turn, was shown to have a significant impact on behavioral intentions, with a path coefficient of 74.9%.

Customer satisfaction—defined as a customer's overall evaluation of their service or product experience—has a direct effect on future behaviors, known as behavioral intentions. These intentions include the likelihood of returning, recommending the service to others, and willingness to pay premium prices for similar services. Satisfied tourists are more likely to revisit destinations, promote them to friends and family, and thereby contribute to the revenue and reputation of tourism providers. Conversely, dissatisfied customers may share their negative experiences, potentially deterring other visitors and harming the destination's reputation.

Behavioral intentions refer to an individual's willingness and planned actions regarding continued engagement with or avoidance of a service or product. Studies indicate that behavioral intentions include desires and post-visit actions, such as revisiting, recommending, and giving feedback about a destination (Hong & Hsu, 2024).

Behavioral intentions reflect the extent to which individuals are willing to make an effort to engage in a specific behavior (Faiz & Mahavarpour, 2022). They are strongly linked to customer retention and loyalty (Salem, 2009). Behavioral intentions demonstrate whether customers will maintain their relationship with the service provider or terminate it. They can be described

as a consumer's willingness to act in specific ways—seeking product information, sharing experiences, making purchases, or ending use (Akhavan Anvari & Raeisi Far, 2024).

The influential variables in this study that significantly affect behavioral intentions include: encouraging customer interaction and listening to feedback, promoting a culture of customer service and mutual respect among employees, creating an environment of connection and belonging, providing facilities that enhance employee comfort and efficiency, developing personal growth programs to improve employee skills and knowledge, and training staff in communication and customer perception skills.

Suggestions include:

- Active listening to customer opinions and criticisms.
- Creating unique and memorable experiences for customers.
- Offering special services to loyal and high-value customers.
- Ensuring staff are capable of accurately guiding customers.
- Making sure employees remain professional and respectful, even in challenging situations.
- Promoting teamwork and collaboration when facing difficult scenarios.

Limitations

- The study population was limited to Iranian and foreign tourists staying in 4- and 5-star hotels in Tehran during 2023, and thus, generalization of the results to other populations should be made cautiously.
- The use of questionnaires poses a limitation, as they capture self-reported attitudes rather than objective behaviors, potentially affecting the validity of the results.

Managerial Recommendations

For employee behavior:

- Provide training in communication and empathy skills.
- Foster a respectful and customer-centric work culture.

For room facilities:

- Install high-end showers, bathtubs, and luxury toiletries.
- Offer private cleaning services.
- Use comfortable, high-quality furniture and beds.
- Provide family-friendly rooms with child-specific amenities.

For physical evidence:

- Apply calming and harmonious color schemes.
- Use unique decorations and wall art.
- Incorporate smart lighting for different moods throughout the day.
- Allow lighting customization based on guest preferences.

For food quality:

- Offer a wide-ranging menu with diverse food groups.
- Cater to dietary needs (e.g., vegetarian, diabetic).
- Employ up-to-date kitchen practices to ensure hygiene and quality.
- Train kitchen staff in the use of modern equipment and technologies.

For perceived customer value:

- Train staff to understand customer perspectives and communicate effectively.
- Encourage active listening and feedback mechanisms.
- Deliver customized, exclusive experiences.
- Provide premium services for long-term or VIP customers.

For overall customer satisfaction:

- Regularly update hotel facilities and services.
- Offer modern technological conveniences.

- Inform customers about special offers and add-on services.
- Introduce tailored packages and promotional discounts.
- Maintain cleanliness and order in common areas like the lobby, restaurant, and entrance.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Investigate the impact of service quality, facilities, cleanliness, and hotel processes on customer satisfaction.
- Study the role of communication and advertising in enhancing perceived customer value.
- Analyze how factors such as price, service quality, and customer relationships influence behavioral intentions.
- Conduct interviews with different groups of hotel customers and staff to gain deeper insight into their experiences and perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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