

Creating Customer Loyalty Through Service Quality for Airbnb Services: The Case of Izmir

Airbnb Hizmetlerinde Hizmet Kalitesi İle Müşteri Sadakati Oluşturulması: İzmir Örneği

Onur İÇÖZ, Aydın Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Türkiye, onur.icoz@adu.edu.tr

Orcid No: 0000-0002-0775-1451

Tuğrul GÜNAY, Kıbrıs Batı Üniversitesi, Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti, t.gunay@cwu.edu.tr

Orcid No: 0000-0001-5649-1775

Abstract: Room sharing platforms such as Airbnb are widely used by visitors all around the world and there are many studies examining the different aspects of these services. However, the relationships among such dimensions in this sector as service quality (SQ), customer satisfaction (CS), trust, and loyalty (CL) have not been studied together yet. This research focuses on investigating the customer loyalty through service quality in Airbnb services. A survey based on the questionnaire as research tool was carried out for this purpose and the data were obtained from the visitors who used Airbnb services during their visits in Izmir province. These data were analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis by using structural equation modeling (SEM). The findings show that there is a positive relationship between customer loyalty and service quality, satisfaction, and trust, representing consistence with the previous findings in the literature. The results show that room sharing platforms will be able to comprehend and handle guest expectations by providing better service quality that will later create customer loyalty.

Keywords: Sharing Economy, Airbnb, Social Exchange Theory, Customer Loyalty

JEL Classification: L83, Z30, Z33

Öz: Airbnb gibi oda paylaşım platformları dünyanın her yerinde ziyaretçiler tarafından yaygın olarak kullanılmaktadır ve bu hizmetlerin farklı yönlerini inceleyen birçok çalışma bulunmaktadır. Ancak bu sektörde hizmet kalitesi (SQ), müşteri memnuniyeti (CS), güven ve sadakat (CL) gibi boyutlar arasındaki ilişkiler henüz birlikte çalışılmamıştır. Bu araştırma, Airbnb hizmetlerindeki hizmet kalitesi aracılığıyla müşteri sadakatini araştırmaya odaklanmaktadır. Bu amaçla bir alan araştırması gerçekleştirilmiş ve araştırma verileri İzmir iline yaptıkları ziyaretlerde Airbnb hizmetlerini kullanan ziyaretçilerden elde edilmiştir. Bu veriler, yapısal eşitlik modellemesi (YEM) kullanılarak doğrulayıcı faktör analizi ile analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, müşteri sadakati ile hizmet kalitesi, müşteri memnuniyeti ve güveni arasında pozitif bir ilişki olduğunu ve literatürdeki önceki bulgularla uyumlu olduğunu göstermektedir. Araştırma sonuçları, aynı zamanda oda paylaşım platformlarının, daha iyi hizmet kalitesi sunumu ile misafir beklentilerinin karşılanarak müşteri sadakatinin sağlanabileceğini de göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Paylaşım Ekonomisi, Airbnb, Sosyal Değişim Teorisi, Müşteri Sadakati

JEL Sınıflandırması: L83, Z30, Z33

1. Introduction

Airbnb is an example of a new form of accommodation within the sharing economy and hospitality networks (Germann, 2011). The sharing economy is also a new trend that is accelerated via online platforms where some segments of the society can share their unused inventory such as facilities and vehicles (Heo, 2016; Richardson, 2015). According to Solnet

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et al. (2010), although hotels have played a significant role in the lodging industry for a long time, however a few new types of accommodation have recently emerged, some of which have special characteristics and different attributes.

Airbnb as online room sharing platform, entered the market in 2008 and now this platform is one of the most preferred and widely used platform in the hospitality industry (Ert et al, 2016). Oskam and Boswijk (2016) state that Airbnb has grown in the past few years and tourists have shown very high interest to this platform.

On the other hand, Shuford (2015) explained that, today Airbnb services are used in more than 34,000 urban communities worldwide. In addition, Price Waterhouse Coopers (2015) reported that, Airbnb had more than 155 million visitors in 2014 all over the world. In Airbnb system, the hotel industry customers perceived this service as a different and new type of experience rather than a pragmatic and traditional lodging approach (Gefen et al. 2008). Germann (2011) also stated that Airbnb is another convenience situation in terms of sharing economy and system layout. However, the existence of Airbnb has put a lot of pressure on the tourism and hospitality industry to ensure that it operates in an extremely competitive and exciting environment.

As seen in many other industries, creating customer loyalty and service quality is one of the most important considerations for accommodation sectors, and especially guest loyalty has an crucial role on long-term survival of the business (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). In this context, Fornell (1992) argued that the quality of comfort and consumer loyalty are two important components in the consumer-based product philosophy that ensuring customer stability. Berezina et al. (2012) states that the main roles of quality of accommodation services and associated customer satisfaction have also been identified as significant antecedents in the decision-making processes of visitors and for the development of customer loyalty. There are small number of publications in the literature about the effects of trust for the sharing economy providers on the customer intentions in the hospitality industry. However, it is well known that, demand for shared less known and privately owned accommodation facilities requires high level of confidence and trust due to their intangible nature as service business. Therefore, it has been identified that there is a need for an investigation about the consumer perceptions as to room sharing services in tourism. For this purpose, the research was devised to collect information from Airbnb users in Izmir. This research also focuses on investigating the possible relationships between customer loyalty and service quality in Airbnb accommodation, customer satisfaction, and trust as potential determinants of customer decision for these services. The research is expected to contribute to

the literature as follows. First, there are very few studies investigating the reasons why tourists choose room and accommodation sharing services (Guttentag, 2015; Tussyadiah, 2016) and this research will contribute to literature as additional information. Secondly, this study specifically examines the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in room sharing sector as distinct from previous studies. Finally, this investigation will provide a practical information to service providers to better market and manage their rental homes through Airbnb platform.

2. Literature Review and Background

In this part of the study, the basic information about the sharing economy in accommodation sector and Airbnb as one the most popular web platform will be briefly explained, and thereafter the basic concepts which were identified from the previous studies as explanatory factors determining customer loyalty for these services is to be discussed.

2.1. Sharing Economy / Airbnb

The sharing economy has emerged as Peer to Peer (P2P) or a cooperative economy (Tussyadiah, 2016) in recent years with the help of technological devices and digitization of information process including internet. The providers in these markets are not small in number and they can obtain many benefits sharing their capacity, which could otherwise be unused due to their perishability characteristic.

According to Guttentag (2015), Airbnb has been remained strong in the sector for a long time, because this platform paves the way for low-cost service including right communication. Oskam and Boswijk (2016) also state that, it's authenticity provides single P2P (peer to peer) communication in the service practice, and the system provides substantial financial advantages for both parties as owners and customers. Airbnb was selected by Fast Company as one of the 50 most innovative companies in the world, and has significantly raised and expanded its sales volume since its inception in 2013, (Carr, 2013).

Given that, the company's estimated market share is \$10 billion, it is obviously seen that it has a larger share in the market than many big players such as hotel chains (Shuford, 2015). There are two main forms of Airbnb accommodation (Ikkala and Lampinen, 2015). The first is described as hospitality away from host situations where the host does not physically share the house (or other properties he/she manages) with the guest. Here, the interaction with the guest is typically limited to Airbnb service by phone calls, e-mail, SMS communication and with short-term messages and the final details of the stay is open to bargain. The second is

that the landlord physically share the apartment and other facilities with the guests on the spot.

2.2. SQ (Service Quality) and SET (Social Exchange Theory)

Since the 1980s, service quality as a thought has been investigated by the authors, however, there is no common concept that has been widely agreed on this issue yet (Silvestri et al., 2017). Social exchange theory, as a related concept, states that the final outcome of exchange is resulted as a social behavior that leads satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Emerson, 1976; Plotnick and Skidmore, 1975) and so the social and economic implications of exchange will affect the feelings of satisfaction. For this reason, the quality of services and other perceptions of elements can be affected by various internal procedures and relational factors. According to Ozment and Morash (1994), the administrative approach is very significant as to these interactions, because of the close encounters between a representative and a client. Sierra and McQuitty (2005) also argue that the emotional response between clients and employees may result in a failure or success.

The attitude approach can capture customer quality perceptions through a well-structured designed survey. However, the literature about service quality proposed the model and so the SERVQUAL scale was developed as a tool to measure service quality by Parasuraman et al. (1988). After reviewing previous studies on services, authors considered three main themes: 1) Service quality was more difficult than consumer quality, 2) Perception of service quality is controlled by consumer expectations; 3) The evaluations of the service delivery process should also be taken into account (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

(Caruana, 2002) used the basic SERVQUAL scale, validity, reliability tests, and past SERVQUAL studies (in the field of health, retail, banking, fast food restaurants, etc.) that measure service quality in various environments. According to Ekinçi (2002), these studies showed the results in measuring the quality of services, noting that the quality of services is multidimensional. Akbaba (2006), on the other hand, says the proposed measurements should not be generalized because of some differences. There is a different structure in hotel conditions and culture. Further research on hospitality and other tourist services (Ahrholdt et al., 2017) have identified the role of quality of services as a key role for customer satisfaction and customer loyalty as a precondition.

The service quality also provides an important advantage in inter-business market environments. Crosby (1990) recognized that a high state of administration is necessary for strong exchange relations. Morgan and Hunt (1994) claim that customers think that the business should be reliable, sensitive and empathic. If so, there can also be a high level of

respectability that will probably create a trust for service provider. From above discussions, the first hypothesis can be devised as;

H₁: Service quality has a significant and positive effect on trust for Airbnb accommodation.

In the literature, there is a general view that “*service quality is simpler, primarily cognitive fiction, and satisfaction is a more complex concept involving a healthy dose of both cognitive and affective components*” (Dabholkar, 1995:101). However, recent studies show that satisfaction is more centralized structure that affects service quality perceptions on behavioral intentions and other dimensions. Hence, second hypothesis can be stated as:

H₂: Service quality has a significant and positively effect on customer satisfaction for Airbnb accommodation.

2.3. Trust

Tan and Sutherland (2004) claimed that a variety of disciplines have been used this concept for a long time (e.g. psychology, marketing), in various contexts, trust and interpersonal contact, concluding that there are different aspects to its description. Bicchieri et al. (2004) explained that trust has the potential to participate in social changes that include there are rewarding and vulnerable. Rousseau et al. (1998) agreed that trust is a mental condition, it should also be examined cognitively or emotionally.

Generally, people tend to be careful and gather new information on every subject. This means that user satisfaction has a weaker impact on trust. In other words, the environment of uncertainty serves as a trigger for people to switch from previous experience to the automated system (Louis and Sutton 1991). So, they will be more careful and gather more information from past experiences to improve their perception of trust. As a conclusion, user trust has an impact on satisfaction. Thus, the third hypothesis can be stated as follows.

H₃: The high level of trust in Airbnb is associated with customer satisfaction.

2.4. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is very important factor as a concept in the field of marketing and business practices, in terms of its potential effects on the profitability and sustainability of business (Oliver, 1997). It is characterized as a procedure for favored items or administrations the possibility of the customer returning to the business (hotel) and the willingness to take purchase action again (Shoemaker and Lewis, 1999). Dick and Basu (1994) also state that customer loyalty is explained in two aspects: behavioral and attributional. According to Han and Back, (2008) it emphasizes that client dependability in the friendliness business includes demeanor and passionate pledge to a specific brand, and therefore it requires more attention to

the attitude. The applicable writing expressed that administration quality is a significant component of client maintenance. Boulding et al. (1993) showed that favorable expectations of service quality increased the probability of customers participating in activities beneficial for the company's strategic well-being. Thus, the fourth research hypothesis can be devised as follows:

H₄: Service quality has a significant and positive effect on customer loyalty.

Trust has two elements: (1) performance trust (2) charity trust (Zeithaml et al., 1996). In the lodging industry, performance trust demonstrates that the consumer believes in the infrastructure of the hotel, the knowledge and skills of the hotel staff and the ability, and success of the hotel to provide the expected information and services to the customers when they come and stay there. Another trust in helpfulness is that the customer relies on the care, attention, honesty and helpfulness of the hotel. Customers believe that the hotel will not only reliably and act competently, but also consider the customer's well-being and interests when making and service decisions. Thus, the fifth research hypothesis can be stated as follows.

H₅: Trust has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

2.5. Customer Satisfaction (CS)

According to (Gefen, 2002), the idea of customer satisfaction is related to purchasing and after using. Nam et al. (2011) notes that the idea of satisfaction is critically important for long-term business achievements. Chitty et al. (2007) see consumer loyalty as a correlation with price and see benefits in the process of buying and using.

A study showed that favorable expectations of service quality increased the probability of customers participating in activities beneficial for the company's strategic well-being further explains this view (Boulding et al., 1993). For example, in the tourism industry, Kim et al. (2009) showed that satisfaction is an important indicator of commitment and loyalty. Thus, the sixth research hypothesis can be written as follows.

H₆: Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Finally, proposed research model representing the relationships between the variables were devised as the following (Figure 1). In the figure, the majority of relationships were displayed as effects, instead of associations, excluding H₃.

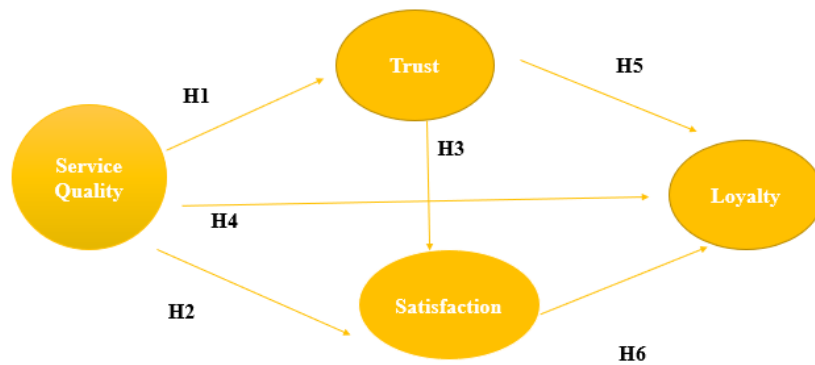


Figure 1. Research Model

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection, Sample and Procedure

In order to collect data, a questionnaire was developed by the authors based on the literature and other previous studies concerning the main topic as explained later. The types of accommodation involved in the survey cover rental apartments. The rented apartments involved in the study were selected by 2 stage sampling method. Initially, the owners were contacted via the messaging platform on Airbnb. According to the criteria, the type of house is a private room, the location is Izmir and the price range is lower than 20 U.S. dollar. Their capacities ranges from 1 to 4 bedrooms per apartment and most have 1 or 2 bedrooms. At another stage, when the services offered in all accommodation units were evaluated, a total of 80 accommodations were included into the research (For example, electrical appliances, furniture and support services). The research was conducted between the dates October 10, 2019 and December 10, 2019 in İzmir, Turkey. Five person were assigned to collect reliable and valid data. The interviewers delivered the questionnaires to the hosts and collected from them afterwards. Out of the distributed 245 questionnaires, 35 questionnaires were removed because of their incompleteness, and 10 were cancelled due to missing values and unengaged responses. Thus, of the distributed questionnaires, 200 responses were deemed fit for further processing. Due to the limited number of fully responded and returned questionnaire, this study was devised as preliminary investigation that will subsequently be developed.

3.2. Measures

All the surveys were prepared based on the traditional steps in the back-translation method. This is important because participants in this study national and international (Ozturk and Karatepe, 2019). Questionnaire items and contents were tested in the pilot study prior to

research process. All the responses on the questionnaire were measured by a 5 item Likert Scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agreed).

Service quality was measured by asking twenty-four questions that was previously used by Akbaba (2006). Responses to these items are recorded on a five-point likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The other questions as to customer loyalty, trust and satisfaction on the research instrument were adapted from other studies (Kingshott, 2006; Salanova et al., 2005), and Cronin et al., 2000).

3.3. Data Analysis

At the first step of the data analysis process, the missing value analysis was directed to manage the missing information. The relating results uncovered that every single missing value pursued an irregular example " $\chi^2 = 108.464, df = 112, Sig. = 0.577$ " (Little, 1988). Reliability of the scale is reported through composite reliability score for each variable (Fornell et al., 2010). Second, confirmatory factor analysis and convergent validity analysis were performed. In addition, the causal relationships between the SQ, CS, trust and CL, and hierarchical regression were tried to foresee the importance of impacts. It likewise clarifies the logical intensity of the proposed hypothetical model. The data were analyzed through confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

The demographic characteristics of participants were shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Demographics of the respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	87	43,5
	Male	113	56,5
	Total	200	100
Age	18-21	62	31,0
	22-25	93	46,5
	26-30	45	22,5
	Total	200	100
Education	Undergraduate	197	98,5
	Master	1	0,5
	PhD	2	1,0
	Total	200	100
Marial Status	Married	193	96,5
	Single	7	3,5
	Total	200	100

According to the Table 1, the great majority of the participants were male, the majority of the tourists are between 22 and 25 years old. Participants with undergraduate education are more than the other education level while 193 participants are married.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) has been carried out, and CFA results in Table 2 below showed that a total of 35 observed variables were loaded onto their respective dimensions, and provided a good fit.

Table 2. Results of factor analysis

Item	Factor Loading
Service Quality (SQ)	
S1. The Airbnb was clean and comfortable	0.687
S2. The Airbnb had a sanitary bath.	0.324
S3. Airbnb had sufficient capacity for the service units.	0.468
S4. The Airbnb had a friendly environment and facilities.	0.572
S5. Airbnb supplied the equipment that worked properly.	0.689
S6. Airbnb is situated in an open environment.	0.478
S7. Airbnb has provided travelers with a safe and secure location.	0.567
S8. The Airbnb had adequate and sufficient materials.	0.785
S9. The Airbnb served adequate and adequate fruits and vegetables.	0.658
S10. Airbnb also provided detailed records.	0.485
S11. The Airbnb provided accurate billing services.	0.652
S12. Available information was supplied by Airbnb.	0.428
S13. The Airbnb resolved guest complaints.	0.294
S14. Airbnb has provided efficiency in the service industry.	0.456
S15. The Airbnb was comfortable for disabled guests.	0.569
S16. The Airbnb had operating hours that was convenient.	0.654
S17. The Airbnb was convenient for working hours.	0.745
S18. The host was always willing to serve guests.	0.651
S19. When needed, the host was always available.	0.546
S20. The host provided the services at the time it promised to do so.	0.429
S21. The host instilled confidence in the clients.	0.743
S22. The host had the skills to answer queries.	0.951
S23. In a polite way, the host treated guests.	0.420
S24. The host acknowledged the guests' unique needs.	0.651
Customer Loyalty (L)	
L1. I consider myself to be loyal to Airbnb accommodation.	0.436
L2. I would rather prefer reading comments on Airbnb.	0.604
L3. I find information about accommodation on the Airbnb website.	0.788
Trust (T)	
T1. Airbnb is trustworthy	0.486
T2. Airbnb gives impression that it keeps promises and commitments	0.506
T3. I believe that Airbnb has my best interests in mind	0.645
T4. I think Airbnb will keep promises it made to me	0.441
T5. I think Airbnb wants to be known as one who keeps promises and commitments	0.698
Customer Satisfaction (CS)	
CS1. I am pleased with my experience of staying in Airbnb accommodations	0.424
CS2. My experience with Airbnb is pleasurable	0.614
CS3. My choice to stay in Airbnb accommodations was a wise one	0.724

Structural equation modeling through path analysis was used to test the model and hypotheses. Model fit well;

$$\chi^2/df = 1,426; GFI=0,643; AGFI=0,753; CFI=0,817; RMSEA=0,047.$$

The results were shown in Table 3 below. According to the results, all hypotheses were found to be significant at different levels.

Table 3. Results of path analysis

Hypotheses	S.E.	C.R.	p	Result
H ₁ : SQ → T	0.320	3.254	0.01	Supported
H ₂ : SQ → CS	0.102	2.676	0.02	Supported
H ₃ : T → CS	0.164	3.437	0.03	Supported
H ₄ : SQ → CL	0.531	2.478	0.01	Supported
H ₅ : T → CL	0.432	4.321	0.02	Supported
H ₆ : CS → CL	0.326	3.245	0.04	Supported

4. Conclusion

With the growing competitiveness of hospitality services, there are also shifts in the choice of accommodation. As a result, Airbnb's success has been greater than other styles of hotels. The elements involved in the research, SQ, CS, trust and CL are crucial to the success of businesses. According to Liat et al. (2014), organizations need to understand these concepts. With increasing competition, managers are continually endeavoring to build up a steadfast client base. This research explores the relationship between the SQ, CS, and CL, and the sharing economy. Other studies in the literature have been examined to confirm this relationship. To summarize the above findings, positive relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty have been determined at different levels in this explanatory study. These important results show that the effects of service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust are significant, and satisfaction plays a role as a determinant of customer loyalty in the context. Overall, the findings of this research could assist the hosts of Airbnb.

4.1. Theoretical Implications

The theory of social exchange has developed and tested a general framework that integrates social identity and perspectives of social change in relation to customer service quality. The academic literature acknowledges the impact of different structures, such as quality of service, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty. These findings have important theoretical implications for research on authenticity in hospitality and tourism, as well as practical implications for the hosting sector. From the point of view of service science, service dominant logic provides theoretical basis for a better understanding of sharing business models and consumer behavior (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

4.2. Managerial Implications

There are some key managerial implications of the current research study for hospitality networking and especially for Airbnb accommodation. These results will help Airbnb hosts better understand how perceptions of service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty could be explored through the research. The perceived service quality of the guest service will help hosts to better understand their guests' wishes. According to Yannopoulou et al. (2013), Airbnb business model adopts an innovative approach to creating the tourism destination experience that there is a link between SQ, CS, CT and CL. The results are important for hospitality, because they explain the behavior of a client who wants to use alternative hospitality services (Lu and Kandampully, 2016). The results of this study could improve the Airbnb platform survey and qualitative indicators that measure satisfaction and, ultimately, loyalty (Stylos et al., 2017).

4.3. Limitations

The study has some limitations. The study is limited to İzmir province in terms of time and cost. Airbnb for tourists is not the only private property lease platform. Other applications used for accommodation were not included in the research. Another limitation is of course the number of participants to the investigation, due to some difficulties to reach them in a timely manner. Therefore, this study is considered as a preliminary investigation, which needs to be developed later.

4.4. Recommendations for Further Research

Future research on the quality of service, customer satisfaction, and loyalty in the hospitality industry could aim to compare to equate the Airbnb accommodation experience of guests with their hotel experience. Future studies could also benefit from these findings by extending the investigation of the emerging research area of Airbnb. Although it is advisable to use the measurement tools provided by Akbaba (2006), Kingshott, (2006) Salanova et al. (2005), and also by Cronin et al. (2000), future studies may be using other evaluation tools such as "LODGQUAL" in the index of quality of placement and other areas. Subsequent studies may include housing spread through other social networking channels and other kind of Airbnb lodging like hotel industry. In addition, future research on the SQ, CS, trust and CL in the tourism sector can be aimed at comparing Airbnb experience with hotel experience. Cross-country comparisons may also be recommended for further studies.

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