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IMPACT OF CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY: A CASE OF SMALL-SCALE HOTELS IN MASVINGO

BY

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DECLARATION

It is hereby declared that this dissertation **titled "Impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty: a case of small-scale hotels in Masvingo."** was done by Happiness Ndawi and is based on his original work in the Department of Management Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe, under the supervision of Dr C.H. Basera. The ideas, suggestions and views of other researchers were adopted, expressed, and acknowledged.

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APPROVAL FORM

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "Impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty. A case of small-scale hotels in Masvingo." has been written under my supervision and is hereby approved for submission for the Master of Commerce Degree in Strategic Management in the Department of Management Studies, Munhumutapa School of Commerce at Great Zimbabwe University in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

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DR. C.H BASERA.

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DEDICATION

To my daughter Shemayah Thando, my husband, Philip Kombe and mother Mrs Ndawi. You have always been my torch bearers for life.

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This platform gives me the opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the Almighty God, the father of universal wisdom, whose wise counsel has guided me this far. I will forever cherish and thank the vision of this great institution (Great Zimbabwe University), Dr C.H. Basera for his immeasurable support and priceless effort extended to me during the time this project was being undertaken.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty in small-scale hotels in Masvingo. The study also sought to evaluate three key factors which are physical environment management, virtual environment management, and service interaction management and their impact to customer loyalty specifically in small-scale hotels in Masvingo. Although a number of prior studies were done in line with the relationship between customer experience management on customer loyalty in the hotel industry, it appears as if not much has been done in the Zimbabwean hotel industry except for the studies by Dube and Chari and a few others whose scopes needed further interrogation. A sample size of 500 respondents was used for this study. The service dominant logic model and the expectancy disconfirmation theories were used in this study. Quantitative research method was used for this study. The research in this study adopts a positivist philosophy, utilizing a deductive research approach and employing a quantitative research methodology. The chosen research strategy involves the use of a self-administered survey to collect data. The stratified sampling design was used. 500 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned. A descriptive case study design was used. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics such as regression, ANOVA, means, and standard deviation and Chi-Square Analysis. The results indicated that the management of the physical environment has a significant influence on customer loyalty, but it has not been fully implemented in the selected hotels. The virtual environment management, including websites, online communication, reservation systems, and social media presence, was found to be below satisfactory levels, negatively affecting customer loyalty. Service interaction management, encompassing friendliness, helpfulness, promptness, and efficiency, also had an impact on customer loyalty, although it was considered the least important factor. This study therefore concluded that small-scale hotels in Masvingo have poor customer experience management, which significantly affects customer loyalty and that multiple factors influence customer loyalty in the context of small-scale hotels in Masvingo, and addressing these factors is vital for retaining guests and improving customer loyalty. In light of this it was therefore recommended that institutions of higher learning and tertiary education institute sound reward systems in order to create job satisfaction.

Key words: *Customer experience management, customer loyalty, Small-scale hotels, physical environment management, virtual environment management, service interaction management*

LIST OF APPENDICES		
APPENDIX	**DESCRIPTION**	**PAGE**
APPENDIX I	Questionnaire	75
APPENDIX 2	Turnitin report	77

Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a prologue for this study. It discusses the general introduction which deliberates on the introduction, background of the study, problem statement, research hypothesis, objectives, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, definition of key terms. It also gives a brief overview on how the entire study is organised.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Managing customer experience has been found to be an essential part of enhancing organisational success (Lundaeva, 2019). According to Clemes *et al*. (2019), the main goal of customer experience management is to increase interactions between companies and their customers. In the services industry, where the success of a service encounter determines its quality, the requirement for customer experience management has increased dramatically (Cajetan, 2018; Zeithaml *et al*., 2018). Similar to this, the tourism and hospitality sectors have been driving efforts to improve the consumer experience (Gillani & Awan, 2019).

Customer experience management has become immensely popular globally and, in the travel, and hospitality sectors. In order to provide customers with the hotel experience, Cajetan (2018) claims that the majority of hotel interactions in the United Kingdom were digital. In India, contemporary hotel technologies have improved the visitor experience, claim Suvarchala & Narasimha (2018). According to Kamaladevi's (2020) study on customer experience management in the German hotel industry, brand, price, promotion, location, advertising, packaging and labelling, service mix, and atmosphere are just a few ways that the retail environment can affect customer experiences and behaviour.

Grewal *et al.* (2019) discovered in their study on customer experience management in the Australian retail sector that firm-controlled variables such promotion, pricing, items, and location had an impact on consumers' experiences and behavior in terms of marketing and financing perception. Through the conceptual design of customer experience features, these components might encourage customers to obtain benefits, which would then result in a satisfying experience and value for money.

In a similar line, Verhoef *et al*. (2020) looked into how to improve visitor satisfaction in the Chinese hotel industry. They discovered that by implementing an experience management strategy that considers the service interface, hotel ambiance, assortment, price, customer experience via alternate channels, hotel brand, cognitive experience, affective experience, social experience, and physical experience, hotels may be able to attract guests more successfully.

Africa's financial services adhered to the same customer experience management principles. Since then, hotels in Africa have improved their customer service to go above and beyond what customers expect (Bick *et al*., 2020). Bick *et al*. (2020) claim that the change was made to increase consumer happiness and loyalty. Omoregie *et al*. (2019) continued by demonstrating how hotel businesses in Ghana, Africa, were enhancing customer loyalty using a comprehensive approach to customer experience management.

Tourism and hospitality have received a lot of attention in Zimbabwe's studies on customer experience management and customer loyalty (Mutsvanga 2019; Kaseke *et al*., 2018). On other areas, like the tourism and hospitality sector, not much has been done. In a similar vein, studies that have come to similar results in other countries are analysed to see if they apply to Zimbabwe. In contrast to other nations, virtually every industry in Zimbabwe has been criticised for not living up to customer expectations (Dube & Chari, 2019; Murwisi, 2018). Customers have moved between hotels in search of a better customer experience due to long wait times at the hotel and the inability to deliver timely services (Murwisi, 2018). Due to this phenomenon and the increasing competition within the tourism and hospitality sector, customers moved from one institution to another (Dube & Chari, 2019). The economic crisis Zimbabwe has been going through since 2017 has also had an impact on how financially willing hotels are to meet customer expectations (Munatsi & Zhuwau, 2019).

More concerning was the high incidence of portfolio purchases and customer turnover in Zimbabwe's tourism and hospitality industry, which was compounded by subpar customer experience management practises. Between 2019 and 2021, there was an average 9% increase in the number of customers switching. However, Munatsi and Zhuwau (2019) report that by 2022, it had increased to 11%, and by 2023, it had frighteningly increased to 21% (Hospitality Association of Zimbabwe, 2023). Since hotel organisations are progressively offering consumers essentially equivalent financial services, no hotel is the sole provider of comprehensive hotel services (Lima, 2019). A major obstacle for hotels hoping to increase their market share through competition is keeping clients. Taking into account the aforementioned, this study used a quantitative methodology to assess how customer

experience management affects customer loyalty through a case study of small Masvingo hotels.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Customer experience management and customer loyalty issues have grown in importance over the past few years and continue to do so for both organisations and researchers (Blumberg *et al*., 2022). Due to staff members' delays in responding to their requests and providing them with services, customers at small-scale hotels in Masvingo frequently complain and submit reports. Small scale hotel is defined as a hotel with no more than 10-bedroom units, each no more than 50 m^2, and with or without private cooking facilities. Abdullah (2022) claims that this serious issue with customer experience management is of major concern to the customers. The rate and order in which customers paid for services would be slowed down by subpar services (Nelson, 2021). The primary cause of the study's shortcomings is the scarcity of empirical information on customer loyalty and customer experience management in Zimbabwean hotels' customer service delivery (Raymond, 2019). It's also noteworthy that virtually no research has been done in Zimbabwe on customer experience management and loyalty. Additionally, not much scholarly research has been done to educate stakeholders about the CEM provided to guests by nearby small-scale hotels.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.3.1 Primary objective

The aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty using of small-scale hotels in Masvingo as the case.

1.3.2 Secondary objectives

The sub research objectives of this study were:

❖ To evaluate the impact of physical environment management on customer loyalty in small scale hotels in Masvingo.

❖ To assess the effect of virtual environment management on customer loyalty in small scale hotels in Masvingo.

❖ To evaluate the influence of service interaction management on customer loyalty in small scale hotels in Masvingo.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
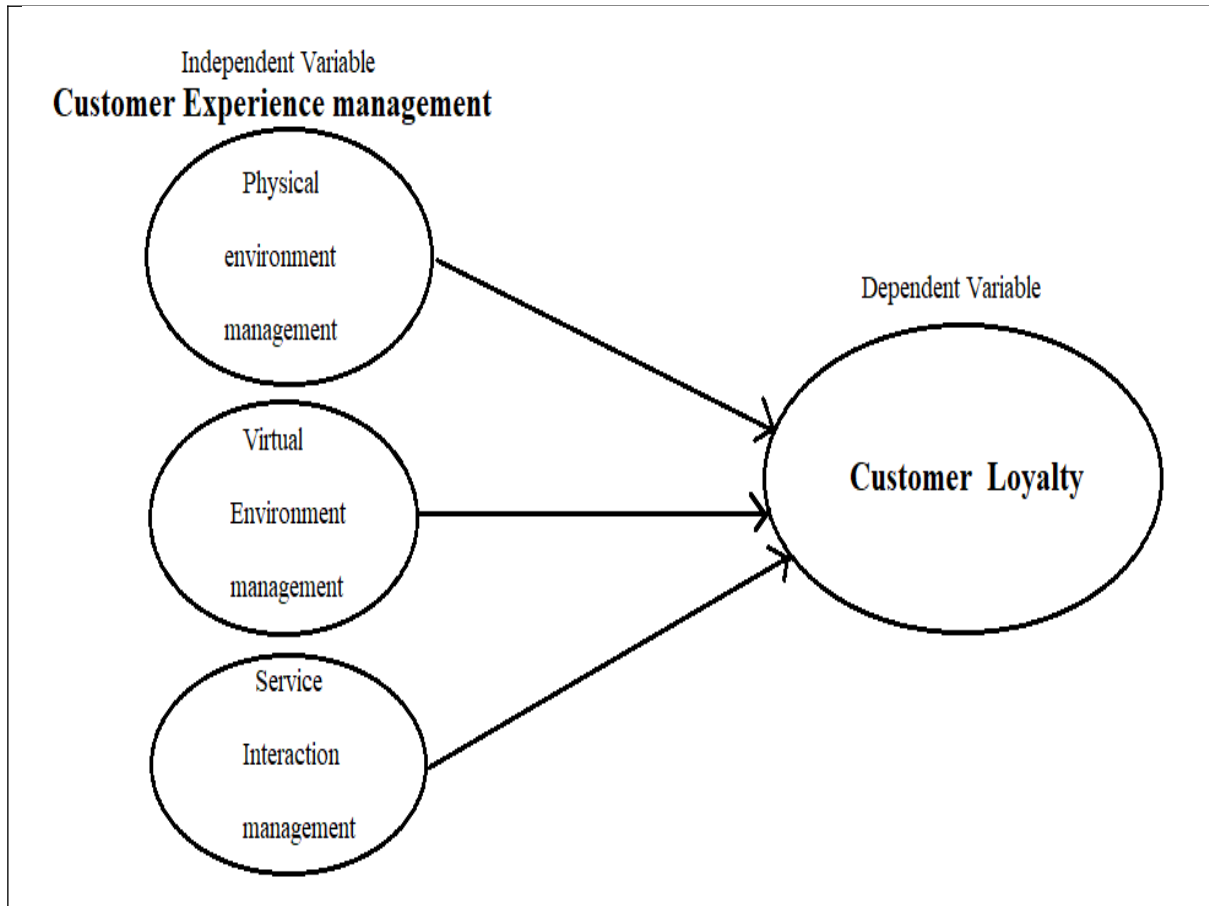
Figure 1. 1 Conceptual framework

Source: Verhoef et al. (2019)

1.4.1 Research hypotheses

In pursuit of this study the following propositions were made subject to confirmation or rejection after empirical results were obtained:

H$_1$: That physical environment management positively impacts on customer loyalty in the hotel industry.

H$_2$: That virtual environment management positively impacts customer loyalty in the hotel industry.

H$_3$: That service interaction management positively impacts customer loyalty in hotel industry.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The benefits of this research will be manifold as highlighted below:

1.5.1 To academia

This study will give academics more opportunities to develop their critical thinking abilities, use their knowledge in real-world situations, and make academic and evaluative judgements. Through customer experience management, tourism in Zimbabwe measures customer loyalty in a variety of dynamic contexts, which is made possible by this research. Future researchers will refer to the study as a source of information.

1.5.2 To the body of knowledge

This research broadens the body of knowledge by introducing fresh viewpoints and creative concepts. Additionally, it fosters judgement and critical thinking. Studying is a process that rewards curiosity. The study can serve as a point of reference and literature review for future scholars who wish to undertake additional research in the same field.

1.5.3 To managerial practice

The study's conclusions will, to the greatest extent possible, help managers in the tourism and hospitality industries, particularly in the hotel sector, implement strategies that sustain and improve customer loyalty through the use of customer experience management; create efficient and consistent standards for relevant stakeholders; and understand the connection between CEM practises and customer loyalty. Additionally, managers will be able to understand the significance of CEM practises in establishing enduring customer loyalty and long-term business partnerships.

1.6 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

A research assumption is a statement that researchers make about the nature of their investigation, which serves as a guiding principle for their study and shapes their research questions and hypotheses (Jameson, 2021). Assumptions can be explicit or implicit, and they may derive from theory, prior research, or personal experience (Creswell, 2014). For this particular study, the researcher anticipated the following conditions to prevail throughout the research period: the participants would fully and willingly cooperate during the study duration, the participants would provide accurate and insightful responses to the research questions, the commercial environment would remain stable throughout the study timeframe, the necessary sample elements would be available to ensure the research's success, and the literature review would offer comprehensive insights into the study, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty.

1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The boundaries that a researcher establishes in a research study, determining what to include and what to omit, are known as delimitations (Nelson, 2022). They aid in streamlining the investigation, making it more feasible and pertinent to the main objective of the study.

1.7.1 Time

The research was conducted between January and November of 2023.

1.7.2 Participant

For this research customers who consume services from selected small-scale hotels in Masvingo and employees of the small-scale hotels participated during the study period.

1.7.3 Conceptual

The foundation of this study was the effect of customer experience management on customer loyalty in a specific set of tiny Masvingo hotels. The effects of service interaction management, virtual environment management, and physical environment management on customer loyalty were specifically examined.

1.7.4 Geographical

The study was carried in Masvingo urban and the surrounding areas of 30-kilometre radius from the city.

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Study limitations are flaws in a research design that could affect the findings and recommendations of the study (Johnson, 2019). It is the duty of researchers to disclose any relevant and truthful limits to the academic community when presenting a study. The study presented a number of obstacles for the researcher, the most important ones of which are listed below:

1.8.1 Financial constraints

Financial challenges were a major hiccup in carrying out this research. Nonetheless, the researcher circumvented this constraint by seeking financial assistance from family members and friends to augment her meagre income.

1.8.2 Time constraints

Since the researcher was a full-time employee, it was difficult to contact the research within the stipulated time. Despite the limited at her the researcher had to dedicate all her time-offs, weekends as well as working late into the nights in order to meet supervisory timelines and submission deadlines*.

1.8.3 Participant apathy

In some instances, the researcher faced resistance from some selected participants. However, in a bid to persuade them to cooperate, the researcher had to first introduce herself and explain the purpose for which the study was being carried out to demystify any doubts.

1.9 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.9.1 According to Kavitha and Haritha (2018), **customer experience management** is the way that customers feel about a company. The cognitive and affective results of a client's interaction or exposure to a business's personnel, procedures, technology, goods, services, and other outputs are referred to as the customer experience (Buttle, 2018). Schmitt (2021) goes on to say that the act of proactively managing a customer's entire engagement with a product or service is referred to as "customer experience".

1.9.2 The degree to which consumers remain faithful to a particular product, service, or brand throughout time is known as **customer loyalty** (Sriram, 2019). It demonstrates how happy clients are with the services they get from a provider of services. According to Zeithaml *et al*. (2018), devoted clients are more likely to recommend the services they are receiving to others who may consider becoming clients.

1.10 CHAPTER EXPOSITION

1.11.1 Chapter One: This chapter provides an introductory overview of the study, covering various important aspects. These include the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research hypotheses, significance of the study, assumptions, delimitations, limitations, and definition of key terms.

1.11.2 Chapter Two: In this chapter, a comprehensive review of related literature is presented. The discussion focuses on the theoretical, conceptual, and empirical foundations that support the study.

1.11.3 Chapter Three: This chapter focuses on the research methodology employed in the study. It delves into the research philosophy, approach, methods, strategy, design, target

population and sampling, data collection, research instruments, data presentation and analysis, as well as ethical considerations.

1.11.4 Chapter Four: In this chapter, the presentation, analysis, and discussion of the study's results are articulated.

1.11.5 Chapter Five: This final chapter concludes the study by providing a summary of the entire research, highlighting the major findings. Additionally, recommendations are made based on the study's conclusions.

1.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the general introduction to this study. Main aspects articulated include; the problem of the study, its importance to the academia, body of knowledge and the managerial practices. The chapter remarks the objectives, hypotheses, assumption made for the study, delimitations, limitations and explanation of key terms.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The tiny hotels in Masvingo are used as a case study in this chapter's review of the research on the effect of customer experience management on customer loyalty. Marshal (2021) defines a literature review as a careful and perceptive discussion centered on the already published literature that establishes a logical framework for the investigation and situates it within the tradition of inquiry and the context of related research. The material evaluated in this section is organized around the several themes developed from the study's objectives. The conceptual framework and theoretical framework are also included in this chapter. The chapter ends by showcasing its summary, which highlights all the themes and ideas it discussed.

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Freeman (2018), the theoretical framework is a structure that identifies and explains the key factors, components, or constructions that govern how the research is organised. Theoretical frameworks are important because they are in charge of comprehending, speculating about, or illuminating the changeable relationships that impact, affect, and forecast events or outcomes. The ideas that support the research variables are thus presented in the theoretical framework. According to Miffin (2000), a theory is a series of hypotheses or guiding principles that are intended to explain a set of phenomena or facts, have undergone extensive testing, and have gained widespread acceptance. These hypotheses or guiding principles can be used or adopted to make predictions about a natural phenomenon or context. As a result, it may also be described to as a belief or principle that serves to direct behaviour or to aid in making decisions or understanding concepts. The theoretical literature in this study focuses more on theories than on real-world applications. Therefore, two theories the "Expectancy Disconfirmation Model" and the "Service-Dominant Logic model" are used in this research work.

2.1.1 Expectancy disconfirmation model

Richard L. Oliver first presented the expectancy disconfirmation model in 1980. According to this paradigm, customers build expectations about a good or service before using it. They

evaluate their real experience to their expectations after using the product or service. They will be satisfied and more likely to remain loyal to the company if the actual experience lives up to or beyond their expectations (Jason, 2020). They'll be disappointed and less likely to be a loyal customer if the encounter doesn't live up to their expectations. According to the model, the degree of disconfirmation between a customer's expectations and their actual experience affects the customer's loyalty.

A popular idea in the fields of marketing and customer experience management is the expectancy disconfirmation model. It implies that a customer's expectations and perception of the actual experience have an impact on their level of pleasure and loyalty. Customers are more likely to be satisfied and brand loyal if their experience is as good as or better than what they expected. However, if the encounter does not live up to their expectations, they'll probably be disappointed and less devoted. Numerous industries, including hospitality, retail, and internet services, have used the idea. Organisations frequently utilise it to gauge customer satisfaction and pinpoint areas where the customer experience could be improved (Parasuraman *et al*., 2022). A number of modifications and additions to Oliver's original model have been made over time, including the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm and the positive disconfirmation model. The expectancy disconfirmation model, which has seen widespread usage in both research and practise, offers an effective framework for comprehending how customer expectations and perceptions affect their satisfaction and loyalty (Verhoef *et al*., 2022).

2.1.2 Service-dominant logic model

The importance of co-creating value with customers is emphasised by the marketing philosophy known as service-dominant logic (SDL). Stephen Vargo and Robert Lusch initially presented the service-dominant logic (SDL) concept in 2021. This idea contends that customers actively contribute to the creation of value rather than only consuming goods and services (Zhong & Moon, 2020). This implies that the customer experience is the outcome of both the organization's efforts and the contributions made by the customer. According to the principle, an organisation can increase customer loyalty by fostering constant communication between the two parties.

A marketing theory called service-dominant logic (SDL) emphasises the part that customers play in the production of value. This idea contends that customers are active contributors to the value creation process rather than passive beneficiaries of the value that businesses create. According to the principle, customers and businesses should work together to jointly generate value, and the end outcome of this constant collaboration is the customer experience. Customer satisfaction, loyalty, and engagement are just a few of the marketing phenomena that SDL has been used to describe (Raymond, 2021). According to the

principle, a company can increase its customer loyalty by continuously collaborating with its customers to jointly produce value. Organisations may generate devoted and engaged customers who are more likely to keep doing business with them in the future by including customers in the value creation process and putting an emphasis on establishing long-term connections (Rodgers, 2022). It has been widely used in both study and practise, and SDL offers a helpful framework for understanding the significance of customer participation in the value creation process.

Understanding the effect of customer experience management on customer loyalty in Masvingo small-scale hotels requires knowledge of the Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) paradigm. Customers actively contribute to the process of creating value, according to SDL (Hussein, 2019). As a result, customers should be involved in the planning and delivery of services at small-scale hotels in Masvingo (Jenkins, 2018). Hotels can create experiences that meet or exceed customer expectations and boost satisfaction and loyalty by co-creating value with their customers. According to Zeithaml *et al*. (2018), SDL emphasises the value of creating lasting relationships between customers and businesses. This refers to concentrating on creating long-lasting relationships with customers in the context of the tiny hotels in Masvingo. Hotels may cultivate devoted customers who are more likely to return in the future by gradually developing trust and rapport with them.

According to SDL, businesses can learn a lot from customer feedback to enhance the customer experience. Small-scale hotels in Masvingo can use visitor feedback to pinpoint areas for development and alter their offerings to better suit visitors' requirements and preferences (Narasimha, 2018). SDL advises businesses to be adaptable and flexible in order to meet evolving customer needs. This refers to small-scale hotels in Masvingo being receptive to customer feedback and adapting their offerings as necessary to remain competitive and satisfy changing customer wants.

2.1.3 Customer experience management

Customer experience, in the words of Kavitha and Haritha (2018), is the perception that customers have of the way a company handles them. The cognitive and affective results of a customer's exposure to or participation with a company's people, processes, technology, products, services, and other outputs are referred to as the customer experience, according to Buttle (2018). Schmitt (2021) defined "customer experience" as the proactive management of a customer's entire engagement with a business or product. According to De-Keyser (2020), a consumer's experiences in terms of cognition, emotions, body, senses, spirituality, and society are indicative of their interactions, whether direct or indirect, with other market participants. The development of the customer experience is thus influenced by consumer and service provider engagement and interaction at touch points (Buttle, 2018).

Customer experience management basically means that providing excellent customer service is essential. According to Hong (2019), customer experience management provides a business with a competitive edge over its rivals. Kavitha and Haritha (2018) assert that customer experience management increases a company's market share and provided an explanation of how it is implemented. Additionally, they assert that a rise in client loyalty leads to higher expenditure and lower switching costs.

Through customer experience management, businesses offer a full package that attracts, retains, and benefits their customers (Clemes *et al*., 2019; Teixeira, 2018). This basically means that guests should have fun while they are there instead of just going about their business (Buttle, 2018). According to Becker and Jaakola (2020), the firm is in responsibility of creating the desired customer experience through the creation of firm-controlled stimuli as well as the observation and reaction to non-controllable stimuli. A complicated experience changes how customers view their interactions with the company (Rooney *et al*., 2020).

2.1.4 Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is the length of time that customers continue to use a particular brand, product, or service (Sriram, 2019). It shows how satisfied customers are with the services they receive from a service provider. Zeithaml *et al*. (2018) claim that committed customers are more likely to tell others who might become customers about the services they are receiving. Loyal customers also want to get their friends and family to utilise their service providers.

Consumers in the travel and hospitality industries that give one brand priority over others are said to be brand loyal. According to Zeithaml *et al*. (2018), clients that demonstrate customer loyalty are more likely to employ a service provider more frequently over the course of the next five years. As Sriram (2019) notes, his examination of the loyalty behaviour dimension takes into account four distinct factors: price sensitivity, buy intents, complaining conduct, and word-of-mouth. He claims that this makes the dimension excessively wide and multifaceted. According to Zhong and Moon (2020), there exists a correlation between customer pleasure and loyalty behaviour. They discovered that although pleasure is a pre-consumption result and contentment and loyalty are post-consumption consequences, they might not always follow from a satisfying shopping experience.

2.1.5 Customer experience management and customer loyalty

Hotels must act quickly to increase customer loyalty in view of the increased competition in the international travel and hospitality industry. According to Imbug *et al*. (2018), customer experience is a predicate of customer loyalty. They reiterate that consumers' cognitive and

emotional health is impacted by the quality of their customer experience, which makes them more apt to favour a product or brand and less likely to switch. Customer interactions with service providers foster a sense of loyalty, claim Becker and Jaakkola (2020). Consequently, a lot of businesses are now placing a strong emphasis on providing their clients with unforgettable experiences and promoting increased client connection (Zhong & Moon, 2020). Since it increases sales and patronage, businesses cannot afford to lose customer loyalty (Aksar *et al*., 2019).

Customer experiences have a big impact on whether or not customers are likely to repeat an experience or recommend it to colleagues or coworkers. Akter (2021) used empirical study to show that incidents that stick in someone's memory are more likely to have an impact on their behaviour in the future. Customer experience and customer loyalty are directly correlated, according to Wijaithammarit and Taechamaneestit (2018) and later Thuan *et al*. (2018). As a result, when customers think they are getting excellent services, they are highly likely to do business with a company repeatedly. Due to the effect of customer experience management on loyalty, many firms have invested in digital technology to meet and exceed customer expectations at every touch point (Wijaithammarit & Taechamaneestit, 2018). Customer loyalty may not necessarily increase significantly after customer experience management is enhanced, according to Ali *et al*. (2019). The relationship between customer experience management and customer loyalty has been moderated in a fair manner. Ali *et al*.'s (2019) thesis was built on the premise that customer experience management influences behavioural intention rather than actual loyalty behaviour. However, how much a person's pledge to act loyally actually manifests itself in action is a totally different issue.

Luturlean and Anggadwita (2020) discovered, in line with Ali et al. (2019), that although most consumers occasionally appreciate rivals' services (with the intention of moving), actual switching activity is not always closely associated with admiration of rivals' services. This is a result of certain clients who are devoted to one another and never change or act unfaithfully. Although Luturlean and Anggadwita (2020) and Ali *et al*. (2019) disagree, the theories of planned behaviour and theory of reasoned action contend that loyalty behaviour is predicted by a behavioural intention to remain loyal (Lima, 2019).

2.2 RESEARCH VARIABLES AND CONSTRUCTS OVERVIEW

2.2.1 Conceptual framework

The researcher's synthesis of the literature on how to study a phenomenon result in a conceptual framework (Dyer, 2020). As a result, its function is to outline the steps that must be taken during the research. The conceptual framework connects the observations of the understudied subjects with the knowledge that already exists about the other researcher's

perspective (Sterling, 2018). In other terms, the conceptual framework is referred to as the researcher's guide to understanding how the variables in the research study are connected. In the research under consideration, it is therefore necessary to determine the dependent and independent variables. The researcher is encouraged to be guided by the conceptual framework in pursuing the investigation. In the following diagram, customer loyalty is the dependent variable, while customer experience management is the independent variable.
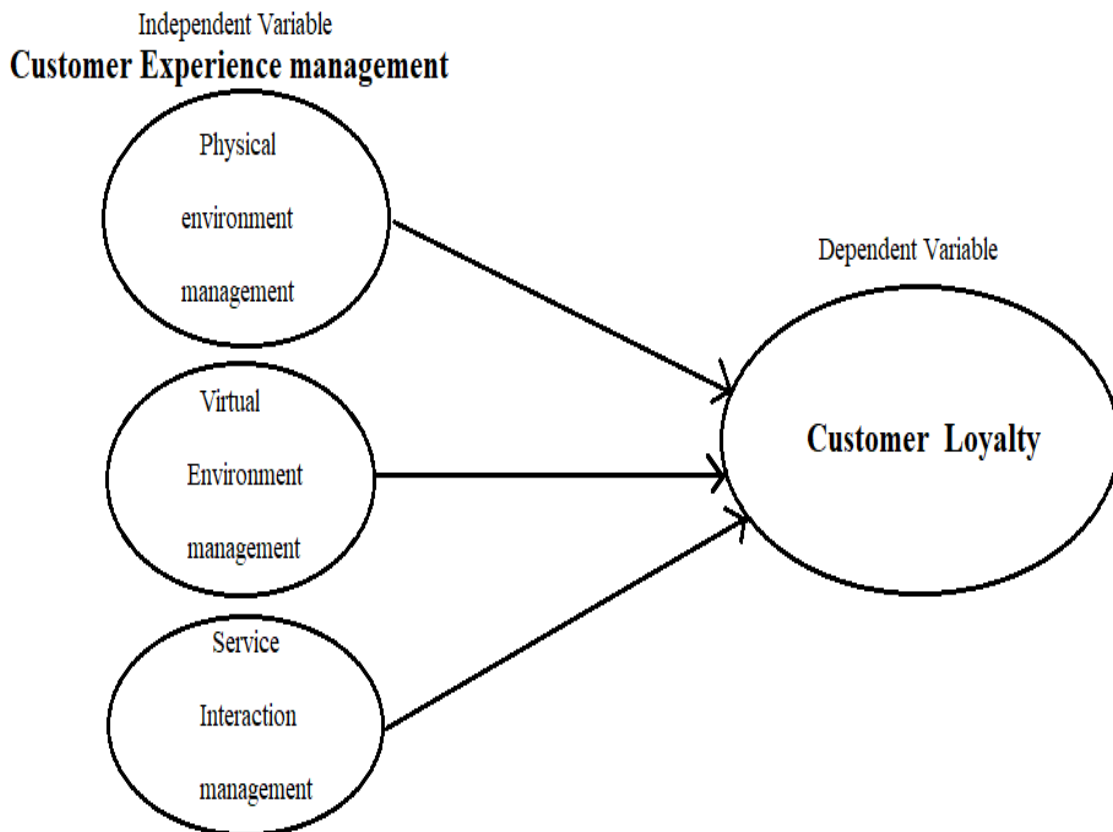
Figure 2.1 Conceptual framework

Source: Verhoef et al. (2009)

The Figure 2.1 above shows that, customer loyalty is the dependent variable, while customer experience management is an independent variable.

2.2.2 Impact of physical environment management on customer loyalty

The physical environment refers to the place where a service is received or provided (Ismail *et al*., 2020). Businesses with excellent physical surroundings will have happier customers who are more inclined to stick around (Verhoef *et al*., 2018). The atmosphere in the parking lot, the music playing, the air conditioning, and the displays within the stores are a few examples of the physical environment (Chahal & Dutta, 2019; Chauhan & Sarabhai, 2019).

The present investigation posits that proficient hotel environment management yields contented patrons, hence potentially influencing recurring patronage.

Customer loyalty can be affected by a number of crucial factors, including the hotel's physical surroundings. The physical surroundings of a hotel can produce a particular atmosphere or mood that might affect how guests perceive their stay (Bitner, 2020). The environment can be affected by a variety of elements, including decor, music, aroma, and lighting. Positivity and increased customer loyalty can result from a welcoming and pleasant environment. These components may add to the hotel's general mood or environment and elicit favourable feelings that may boost customer loyalty and satisfaction (Nelson, 2021). For instance, lighting can have a big impact on how a hotel room or other public area seems. Soft and warm lighting can create a cozy and inviting atmosphere, while bright and harsh lighting can create a clinical and uninviting atmosphere. Similarly, music can also influence the atmosphere of a hotel, with soothing and relaxing music contributing to a calm and peaceful atmosphere and upbeat music contributing to a more energetic and livelier atmosphere (Jason, 2021). Another element that might impact the ambience of a hotel is scent. While harsh or unpleasant odours might have the opposite effect, pleasant and delicate aromas like lavender or vanilla can promote relaxation and calmness. The atmosphere of a hotel can also be influenced by the decor, with items like artwork, furniture, and colour schemes adding to the overall sense of the room (Byron, 2020). Customers' emotional responses to a well-designed and welcoming environment can be positively influenced, which can boost their loyalty to the hotel. Hotels may create an environment that resonates with their guests and elicits pleasant feelings that boost customer satisfaction and loyalty by paying attention to these variables.

Customer loyalty may also be impacted by a hotel room's level of physical comfort. Customer comfort may be impacted by elements including the quality of the bed, pillows, and linens, as well as the room's temperature and noise level (Chebat & Michon, 2019). Possessing comfortable accommodations can boost customer loyalty and happiness. When guests reserve a hotel room, they expect to feel comfortable, and a variety of elements, including the quality of the bedding, pillows, and linens as well as the room's temperature and noise level, can affect guests' comfort. Chebat and Michon (2022) investigated how ambient odours affected mall visitors' feelings, thinking, and spending. According to the study, customers were more inclined to spend more time and money in locations with pleasant ambient scents since they had a beneficial effect on their emotions and behaviour. Despite the fact that this study was done in a shopping mall, it implies that other ambient elements, including aroma, might equally affect a customer's comfort and pleasure in a hotel environment. By matching or exceeding customer expectations, providing pleasant lodgings

15

can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty. Customers are more likely to feel favourably about a hotel and refer it to others when they are comfortable throughout their visit. Additionally, they are more likely to book future visits at the hotel, which boosts customer loyalty and promotes long-term company success.

Another significant aspect that may have an impact on customer loyalty is the cleanliness of the hotel room and its surrounds. A spotless, well-kept hotel can make a good first impression and boost customer satisfaction (Jairos, 2021). Customers want a high standard of cleanliness when they reserve a hotel room, and a spotless hotel may provide a good first impression and boost customer happiness. The significance of cleanliness in the hotel sector and its effect on customer loyalty were investigated by Lundstrom and Olsson in 2021. According to the survey, guests were more inclined to return to hotels they felt were clean and well-maintained and that cleanliness was a key predictor of customer happiness and loyalty. By matching or exceeding customer expectations, providing a clean and well-maintained hotel can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kingstone, 2019). Customers are more likely to feel positively about a hotel and recommend it to others when they experience a clean and comfortable stay. Additionally, they are more likely to book future visits at the hotel, which boosts customer loyalty and promotes long-term company success.

Customer loyalty may also be impacted by the interior design and furnishings of a hotel room. Customers' views of the experience can be influenced by a variety of elements, including the room's layout, colour scheme, and style (Morrison, 2021). A well-designed hotel room can evoke a feeling of elegance and comfort that will win over more repeat business. A well-designed hotel room can evoke a feeling of elegance and comfort that will win over more repeat business. Similarly, Kim and Kim (2020) investigated how hotel room design affected customer loyalty and discovered that it had a sizable effect. They also discovered that guests were more inclined to return to hotels with well-designed rooms that evoked feelings of luxury and comfort. By fostering a memorable and pleasurable stay, hotel room design can affect customer loyalty (Buttle, 2019). Customers are more likely to feel good about the hotel and promote it to others when they have a good experience in a well-designed room. Additionally, they are more likely to book future stays at the hotel, increasing customer loyalty and ensuring the long-term profitability of the company (Mellissa, 2018). Customer loyalty may be impacted by the style and quality of the furniture in addition to the room design. The experience can be enhanced and given a sense of luxury by using high-quality furnishings like cosy chairs, a functional desk, and a chic bed (Jerome, 2018). By focusing on the design and furnishings of the hotel room, hotels can create experiences that meet or exceed customer expectations and foster customer loyalty.

2.2.3 Effect of virtual environment management on customer loyalty

The online platform where consumers engage with a brand is referred to as the virtual environment (Buttle, 2018; Du Plessis & de Vries, 2019). This is the second facet of customer experience management that influences consumers' likelihood to remain loyal to a brand. According to Kajetan (2018) and later Chahal and Dutta (2019), the virtual environment encompasses online booking experience, website experience, and application marketing experience. Customer loyalty increases when these digital channels are managed effectively since they impact the user experience.

Virtual environment management can also have an impact on customer loyalty for small scale hotels. Today's customers frequently explore and book hotels online, and they might get to know a hotel for the first time through its website or social media accounts. In order to leave a good impression and foster more customer loyalty, small scale hotels must successfully manage their online presence. A website that is well-designed and easy to use can make a good first impression and boost customer satisfaction (Class, 2018). Customers want websites that make it simple to book rooms and discover information, and these websites can get more committed customers. Small-scale hotels must have a well-designed website in order to draw and keep customers because more people are using the internet to research and book hotels. According to Buhalis and Law's (2008) research, website functionality and design had a big impact on hotel sector customer happiness and loyalty. Customer satisfaction and loyalty can rise with a user-friendly website that makes it simple for visitors to access information, reserve rooms, and navigate the site. Small hotels can utilise their website to display their property and facilities, offer information about nearby activities, and offer specials and packages to tempt people to make a reservation in addition to its design and functionality. Hotels may boost customer happiness and loyalty as well as income by offering a simple and pleasurable online experience.

Customers frequently use online testimonials and ratings while choosing a hotel. Small hotels can control their online reputation by responding to reviews and taking care of customer complaints in a timely and competent manner (Hilther, 2018). Positive comments and ratings can boost customer loyalty and draw in new customers. By keeping an eye on reviews and giving timely, courteous responses, small hotels may control their internet reputation (Donald, 2019). Hotels may improve customer satisfaction and loyalty by attending to customer issues and offering superior customer service. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) discovered that customer behaviour in the hotel industry was significantly influenced by internet reviews and ratings. According to the research, a one-point boost in a hotel's internet rating (on a scale of five) might lead to a 9% pricing hike and a 26% increase

in reservations. By improving the hotel's reputation and drawing in new guests, favourable reviews and ratings can boost customer loyalty. By offering exceptional customer service and soliciting feedback, small hotels can also entice guests to submit reviews and ratings online. Hotels may boost customer satisfaction and loyalty by aggressively seeking out customer input and utilising it to enhance the guest experience (Olinda, 2020). For small hotels, managing online reviews and ratings is a key component of managing the virtual environment. By responding to reviews promptly and professionally, addressing customer concerns, and encouraging feedback, hotels can create a positive reputation and increase customer loyalty.

Small hotels can utilise social media to interact with customers, announce events and deals, and promote their facilities. A robust social media presence may foster a sense of neighbourhood and boost customer loyalty. Hotels can improve customer loyalty by forging connections with their customers and fostering a sense of community on social media (Ishmael, 2020). Smaller hotels have the chance to interact and build stronger relationships with their customers by using social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Hotels can utilise social media to provide images and videos of their space and facilities, share details about nearby points of interest and events, and promote special deals and offers to draw in customers (Ronald, 2019). Small hotels can utilise social media to interact with customers by swiftly and professionally responding to comments and messages in addition to disseminating news and promotions. Hotels may improve customer happiness and loyalty by delivering outstanding customer service and cultivating relationships with their customers on social media. In the hotel industry, Wang and Fesenmaier (2016) discovered that social media participation increased patronage. According to the study, social media interaction between customers and hotels increased customer loyalty and repeat business. A significant component of managing the virtual environment for small hotels is having a strong social media presence. By creating a sense of community and building relationships with customers through social media, hotels can increase customer loyalty and drive revenue.

To reach new customers and promote repeat business, small hotels might use digital marketing strategies including email campaigns and targeted advertising (Davidson, 2019). Hotels may boost customer loyalty and generate more income by offering personalised and pertinent information. Small-scale hotels can use email campaigns as an effective tool to connect with past and potential customers by offering discounts, promotions, and details about planned events (Nelson, 2022). Hotels may foster a sense of exclusivity and boost customer loyalty by segmenting their email lists and offering personalised content. Another successful digital marketing strategy for small hotels is targeted advertising. Hotels may specifically target potential customers with relevant advertisements and discounts by

leveraging information like search history and location. This may boost conversion potential and promote repeat business. According to Tussyadiah and Wang's study from 2021, customer loyalty in the hotel business was significantly impacted by digital marketing. According to the study, digital marketing strategies utilised by hotels, such as email campaigns and social media, resulted in better levels of customer loyalty and repeat business. For small-scale hotels, digital marketing is a crucial component in managing the virtual environment (Anderson, 2020). Hotels may boost customer loyalty and boost income by utilising strategies like email marketing and targeted advertising to reach out to new customers and offer personalised content.

2.2.4 Influence of service interaction management on customer loyalty

Service contact, according to Buttle (2018) and Parasuraman *et al*. (2022), is the pivotal moment in the human connection between customers and boundary spanners. Reliable and efficient service providers have a higher chance of enhancing customer experiences (Kajetan, 2018; Du Plessis & de Vries, 2019). Chahal and Dutta (2019) define "service interaction" as conversations between a customer and a front-line employee, such as customer assistant officers. Kajetan (2018) defines a service encounter as any conversation between a customer and a service provider over the phone or in a hotel. Outstanding customer service interactions and exceptionally well-managed customer experiences are comparable because they both foster customer loyalty. Service interaction management has a major impact on customer loyalty in small hotels.

A key element of service interaction management is offering top-notch customer service. Small hotels can train their staff to be welcoming, accommodating, and attentive to guests' requirements (James, 2018). Hotels may boost customer happiness and loyalty by offering superior customer service. Customers demand high-quality service, and employees who are affable, accommodating, and attentive to their needs can boost patronage and loyalty. By stressing the value of paying attention to customer demands, responding quickly to customer requests, and going above and beyond to meet or exceed customer expectations, small hotels can train their personnel to deliver exceptional customer service (Champion, 2020). Training for employees may also cover effective and professional ways to manage complaints and challenging circumstances. Small-scale hotels can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty by delivering exceptional customer service, which can lead to pleasant interactions with their customers.

Customer loyalty in the hotel business was found to be significantly impacted by the quality of customer service, according to a study by Liu *et al.* (2021). Small hotels can leverage technology to improve the guest experience in addition to training staff to give first-rate

customer service. Hotels, for instance, can employ mobile apps to let guests check in and out, submit requests, and access details about the hotel and nearby attractions. Hotels can improve customer satisfaction and loyalty by offering convenient and effective service (Silvester, 2020). Excellent customer service is a crucial component of managing service interactions in small hotels. Hotels may foster pleasant encounters with their guests and boost customer loyalty by teaching staff to be welcoming, accommodating, and attentive to customers' requirements, as well as by utilising technology to improve the guest experience.

Customer information can be used by small hotels to customise the guest experience. Hotels can offer individualised recommendations, discounts, and services by learning about their guests' tastes and demands (Jairos, 2020). This may foster a feeling of exclusivity and boost customer retention. Small-scale hotels can use customer data to give their visitors a more customised and individualised experience because personalization is becoming more and more crucial in the hospitality sector (Thomas, 2021). Hotels can obtain important insights into what their customers want and need by gathering and analysing customer data, such as historical booking and purchase history, customer feedback, and preference information. Following that, this data can be utilised to give personalised promotions and special deals, as well as personalised recommendations for events, restaurants, and local attractions. The in-room experience for the guest can also be personalised (Morrison, 2020). For instance, a hotel can use guest information to offer a personalised room layout based on the visitor's preferences for things like room temperature, lighting, and bedding. This can make the guest's experience more personalised and comfortable, which can increase satisfaction and loyalty (Buttler, 2020). Small hotels can stand out from rivals and give their visitors an exceptional and unforgettable experience by utilising customer data to personalise the customer experience. In the end, this may result in a rise in customer retention, repeat business, and favourable word-of-mouth recommendations.

Small hotels can answer customer complaints and handle problems swiftly and competently by using efficient complaint handling methods. Hotels can boost customer satisfaction and loyalty by promptly and effectively resolving customer complaints (Uriah, 2020). A key component of providing excellent customer service in the hospitality sector, particularly for small hotels, is managing complaints effectively. Customers who are unsatisfied or disappointed with their stay may post bad reviews or spread unfavourable rumours, which can be detrimental to the hotel's reputation and potential future business (Kingstone, 2020). Small-scale hotels can address customer concerns quickly and competently by putting in place efficient complaint management procedures, which can assist them in resolving issues before they become significant difficulties. Increased customer happiness, loyalty, and favourable reviews may result from this, which may help draw in new customers and keep

hold of current ones. To minimise bad reviews and preserve customer satisfaction and loyalty, hotels must swiftly and professionally handle any complaints or concerns made by guests (Oliver, 2019). Staff members should pay attention to customer complaints and concerns and try to understand them from their point of view. This can assist staff in determining the issue's underlying cause and locating a solution that satisfies the needs of the customer. Staff members ought to offer an apology and accept responsibility if the hotel is at fault.

By doing this, the hotel can show the customer that it appreciates their business and is dedicated to finding a solution (Jairos, 2022). Small hotels should collaborate with customers to identify a solution that satisfies their requirements. This could be providing a discount on a subsequent stay, a refund, or extra services or amenities to make up for the problem. Small hotels should follow up with customers once a problem has been fixed to make sure they are happy with the solution (Nelson, 2020). This may contribute to increased customer loyalty and trust-building. Small hotels can address customer complaints and handle problems swiftly and competently by employing efficient complaint management methods. This can increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, and help to mitigate negative reviews or feedback.

To make sure that staff members are informed about the hotel, the area's attractions, and guests' demands, small hotels might offer staff training. Hotels can boost customer happiness and loyalty by giving personnel the resources and training they need to provide exceptional service. In small scale hotels, offering staff training is a crucial part of managing service interactions (Yul, 2022). Better service, more customer happiness, and eventually greater customer loyalty can all be achieved by staff who are informed about the location, nearby attractions, and customer demands. The hotel's facilities, room kinds, and unique features should be known to the staff. This can make it easier for personnel to recommend products and respond to customer inquiries. The staff should be educated about the restaurants, sights, and events in the area. This can make it easier for workers to give customers recommendations and improve their overall experience (Buttler, 2021). Employees should receive training on how to deliver exceptional customer service, including effective communication, handling of challenging circumstances, and resolving of customer concerns. Any hotel technology, including reservation software, customer relationship management tools, and communication systems, should be trained to staff members. Small hotels may boost customer satisfaction and loyalty by giving staff the resources and training they need to provide exceptional service. Su and Reynolds (2021) found that in the hotel business, staff development had a big impact on customer loyalty. For small hotels, staff training is a crucial component of service interaction management. Hotels may improve the

guest experience, boost customer happiness and loyalty, and establish a good reputation by training staff in customer service and technology, as well as knowledge about the facility and nearby attractions. According to Su and Reynolds (2021), service interaction management significantly affected customer loyalty in the hotel sector. According to the survey, customer loyalty and repeat business were higher at hotels that offered excellent customer service, tailored experiences, and efficient complaint resolution.

2.3 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

In the small-scale hotel sector, there is mounting empirical data pointing to a robust correlation between customer experience management and customer loyalty. Here are some instances of research that looked into this connection:

Su and Reynolds (2021) found that good customer experience management greatly boosted customer loyalty in a survey of 370 small-scale hotels in China. The poll indicated that hotels that provided exceptional customer service, personalised experiences, and prompt resolution of complaints had higher levels of customer loyalty and repeat business. The poll indicated that hotels that provided exceptional customer service, personalised experiences, and prompt resolution of complaints had higher levels of customer loyalty and repeat business. For the study, 370 small-scale hotels in China were surveyed. The data was then analysed using the structural equation modelling method. The results showed that the association between customer experience management and customer loyalty was mediated by customer satisfaction. According to the poll, hotels that provided personalised services and unique experiences had greater levels of customer loyalty than those that did not. Excellent complaint handling is crucial for building customer loyalty, as evidenced by the fact that satisfied customers are more likely to return to the hotel. As per the poll, customer experience management plays a crucial role in cultivating client loyalty in small hotels. Small-scale hotels can achieve financial success and growth by providing personalised experiences, excellent customer service, and effective complaint handling. These factors will increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

After examining 302 small-scale hotels in South Korea, Kim and Lee (2019) shown that customer experience management significantly improves customer happiness and loyalty. The study found that higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty at hotels were associated with personalised services, effective complaint resolution, and high levels of personalization. 302 small-scale hotels in South Korea were the subject of the study, and structural equation modelling was the data analysis technique used. The results showed that the relationship between customer experience management and customer satisfaction and

loyalty was mediated by perceived value. Additionally, the study found that hotels with customised experiences and individualised services had higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty than those without. This further illustrated the importance of good complaint handling in building customer loyalty. Satisfied guests were more inclined to recommend the hotel to others and return for more visits. The study claims that in small hotels, customer experience management plays a big part in building patron satisfaction and loyalty. Small hotels that provide individualised services, effective complaint resolution, and a high degree of personalization may increase client satisfaction and loyalty as well as eventually promote growth and profitability.

Zhang and Chen found in their 2018 study of 385 Chinese small-scale hotels that efficient customer experience management greatly boosted patron loyalty. The study found that high levels of personalization, prompt complaint handling, and individualised services increased guest loyalty and repeat business at hotels. For the study, 385 small hotels in China were surveyed. The data was analysed using the structural equation modelling method. The results showed that the association between customer experience management and customer loyalty was mediated by customer satisfaction. According to the poll, hotels that provided personalised services and unique experiences had greater levels of customer loyalty than those that did not. Excellent complaint handling is crucial for building customer loyalty, as evidenced by the fact that satisfied customers are more likely to return to the hotel. As per the poll, customer experience management plays a crucial role in cultivating client loyalty in small hotels. Small hotels that provide individualised services, effective complaint resolution, and a high degree of personalization may increase client satisfaction and loyalty as well as eventually promote growth and profitability.

According to this research, in the small-scale hotel sector, customer experience management plays a significant role in fostering client loyalty. Small-scale hotels may boost customer satisfaction and loyalty, which will ultimately spur income and growth, by offering exceptional customer service, tailored experiences, and efficient complaint management.

2.4 RESEARCH GAP

The dearth of empirical data on customer experience management and customer loyalty in the delivery of customer services by small scale hotels in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, constitutes the research gap in this context. There is a serious issue with customer service delivery at small scale hotels in Masvingo, which has not been fully addressed in previous studies, despite the concerns expressed by customers and researchers about the significance of customer experience management and customer loyalty. The main reason for this study's problem is the dearth of empirical data on customer loyalty and customer experience

management in the provision of customer services by Zimbabwean hotels. Another notable study gap is the dearth of literature that focuses on informing stakeholders about the customer experience management offered to their visitors by adjacent small-scale hotels. By presenting empirical data on the effect of customer experience management on customer loyalty and identifying the variables that affect customer loyalty in small scale hotels in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, the study seeks to fill this gap.

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

A case study of small-scale hotels in Masvingo was used to analyse the impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty in the chapter, which was based on the debate from above. A literature review is an in-depth analysis of previously published material that focuses on creating a logical framework for the study, situating it within the tradition of inquiry, and examining it in light of comparable works. The various themes developed from the study objectives formed the basis of the material reviewed in this chapter. The theoretical framework and conceptual framework were also presented in the chapter. The research approach used to conduct this study is covered in detail in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the research approach employed in this study. According to Beullens and Loosveldt (2021), research methodology encompasses the identification of best practices, tools, and methodologies, serving as a systematic approach to problem-solving in research. Moreover, this chapter specifically addresses the research methodology, research philosophy, and research design implemented in the study.

3.1 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

According to Galliers (2020), research philosophy is a stance on how phenomenon data should be gathered, examined, and applied. The two subcategories of research philosophy are positive philosophy and interpretivist philosophy. This study adopts the positivist research ethic since it places a strong emphasis on data and statistics (quantitative research). According to Bryman and Bell (2019), positivism is a philosophical school of thought that places a strong emphasis on the objective observation, measurement, and verification of phenomena through empirical data. Positive thinking, according to Bradburn (2016), is based on closed or planned inquiries. The positivist philosophy ensures that the researcher is independent of the study and that human interests are not taken into account. The positivist philosophy holds that the researcher's attention should be directed towards the facts (Crowther & Lancaster, 2018). By definition, positivism is factual. Because the examination is based on data addressing the impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty using the case of small-scale hotels in Masvingo, this fits well with the research under consideration.

3.2 RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Saunders *et al*. (2019), there are three typical research methodologies: inductive, deductive, and abductive research. The type of the research problem and the research question will determine the research approach to use. The positivist philosophy served as the primary inspiration for this study's logical research methodology. A type of research methodology known as deductive analysis is often used in scientific investigation (Sheppard, 2021). A deductive research strategy involves hypothesis testing to examine a well-known theory or phenomenon and determine whether it holds true in a specific circumstance. The first phase is to identify a social theory that serves as the study's driving force, and then examine its implications using data. This makes it possible to move from a broad level to a narrow level. As a result, the hypothesis can be tested using a rational research strategy.

The positivist ideology places a strong emphasis on using empirical data and logical reasoning to test hypotheses and draw population-level conclusions (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The positivist ideology, which emphasises objective observation and the use of quantitative data analysis to gain knowledge, is congruent with the selection of a deductive research approach in this work.

3.3 RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods are the specific techniques employed in data collection and analysis. The qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches are the three basic types of research techniques. For this investigation, the quantitative research methodology was used. The quantitative research methodology is known for its logical approach to analysis (Rovai, 2021). Quantitative scholars believe that the planet is autonomous (Getwin, 2021). In quantitative research, observations are made and hypotheses are assessed and replicated in accordance with the correlations between the variables in these more focused subgroups (Creswell, 2018). In order to determine the effect of customer experience management on customer loyalty using the case of small-scale hotels in Masvingo, it was decided to use a mathematically based method for data collecting and analysis.

3.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY

A self-administered survey was the method of collection used in this inquiry. A self-administered survey entails distributing a questionnaire to participants for them to finish independently, either in print or online (Dillman *et al*., 2014). This approach can be helpful for gathering information from a sizable population and it enables survey respondents to work at their own pace without being influenced by an interviewer (Dillman *et al*., 2014). For a number of reasons, the self-administered survey approach was chosen. It is perfect for gathering data from a broad population, such as the visitors and staff of small-scale hotels,

because it is a cost-effective method that can be quickly distributed to many participants (Dillman *et al*., 2014). Second, because participants are more likely to give honest and correct answers when they are not influenced by an interviewer, self-administered surveys can help to eliminate the response bias that may be present in face-to-face surveys (Dillman *et al*., 2014).

Self-administered surveys do have certain restrictions, though. They might be less successful in assuring high response rates since some respondents might not finish the survey or might give erroneous or partial information (Dillman *et al*., 2014). Self-administered surveys may also be less effective at gathering complex or extensive information since participants might need more explanation or direction on some items (Dillman *et al*., 2014).

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the strategy or methodology a researcher uses to answer research questions or hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). It involves making decisions about the type of research methodology to use, the sample strategy, data collection techniques, and data analysis protocols, among other things (Bhattacherjee, 2021). The research design, an essential step in the research process, affects the reliability and efficacy of the data collected as well as the conclusions drawn from the investigation. A descriptive case study research design was employed in this investigation. This paper employed the descriptive case study research approach, which comprises a thorough empirical evaluation of the selected individual, group, object, or environment (Bhattacherjee, 2021). This study is a good fit for the descriptive case study approach because it allows for a detailed examination of a particular occurrence in its natural environment (Yin, 2018). The subjects of this study are customer loyalty and customer experience management, two intricate and diverse phenomena. An in-depth analysis is required to completely understand the topic. The case study technique provides extensive data that may be used to offer insights and solutions for customer experience management and customer loyalty, as well as an in-depth evaluation of these issues within a specific context.

The case study approach is also appropriate for descriptive and exploratory research, which tries to thoroughly examine and characterise a phenomenon. It is especially helpful when the research issue is centred on "how" and "why" inquiries (Yin, 2018). Understanding the variables that affect customer experience management and customer loyalty and how they are related was probably the main goal of the research questions in this situation.

3.6 TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

According to Blumberg et al. (2020), the term "population" refers to the entire set of components from which the researcher hopes to derive particular conclusions. In contrast, Bhattacherjee (2021) sees the sampling frame as an accessible portion of the target population that can be used to generate a sample. All workers and patrons of the chosen small-scale hotels make up the study's population. Following sample analysis, the researcher projected the study's findings to the target population (Cooper & Schindler, 2020). The target population is the entire set of people, events, or fascinating things that the researcher wants to investigate (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

3.6.1 Sampling method

Sampling is the process of selecting samples from the target population while making sure the elements chosen are representative of the entire population (Neuman, 2019). Because the study was quantitative in nature, the researcher used stratified random sampling, a probabilistic sampling approach. When working with a population that is heterogeneous, stratified sampling is typically used (Bryman & Bell, 2021). Thus, it was necessary for the researcher to combine similar materials. In order to identify groups of people that share similar characteristics, the researcher separated the population into several sectors (Cooper & Schindler, 2019). Then, a random sample was taken from among the several sectors (Saunders *et al*., 2019). This ensured that the chances of nomination were equal for all. As a result, the final sample that emerged from this was typical of the entire population. According to the proportionate sampling method used in the study (Saunders *et al*., 2019), the sample size for each stratum represents its contribution to the total population.

3.6.2 Sample size

Cooper and Schindler (2020) define a sample as a tiny subset of the population's members that is representative of the population overall. This suggests that in order to facilitate statistical analysis and, ultimately, the extrapolation of study findings to the broader population, a substantial sample size is necessary (Saunders *et al*., 2019). A survey in the form of a questionnaire was distributed to all 100 employees. Clients were requested to reply to a follow-up survey regarding how satisfied they were with the IT system that was used to handle their claims. Out of 52,768 total respondents, 400 customers gave their permission to participate in this poll. The sample size therefore was 500. To create the research sample, the researcher followed Saunders' formula, which is as follows:

$s = X_2 \, NP \, (1 - P) \div d^2 \, (N - 1) + X^2 \, P \, (1 - P)$.

s = required sample size.

X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (3.841).

N = the population size.

P = the population proportion (assumed to be .50 since this would provide the maximum sample size).

d = the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05).

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

3.7.1 Sources of data

According to Bell *et al*. (2018), secondary data includes a methodical review of pertinent literature from reputable journal articles, books, the internet, and other pertinent sources. Questionnaires will be used to collect primary data. The only data gathered for this study was primary data. This is so that the researcher could collect information that was unique to the setting and customers of small motels in Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

3.7.2 Research instruments

This section presents the research instrument and how it was used to collect data.

3.7.2.1 Questionnaire

In this study, the researcher used a questionnaire. A questionnaire is described as a formalised plan to gather and record specific and pertinent information with tolerable accuracy and completeness by Brian *et al*. (2001). According to Malhotra (2020), a questionnaire is a structured approach for data collecting that entails a sequence of written or verbal questions that the respondent responds to. It is a research tool made up of a number of questions and other prompts designed to collect data from respondents. According to Maholtra *et al*. (2008), a questionnaire makes it possible to collect quantitative data in a systematic manner, ensuring that the results are internally consistent and coherent for analysis. According to Carter and Williamson (2022), questionnaires are more objective than interviews because they enable replies to be compiled in a standardised manner.

Gilbert (2022) stated that although a questionnaire can take a lot of effort to design, implement, and assess, it can be a reasonably quick way to get information.

According to Oppenheim (2021), using a questionnaire may allow for the collection of data from a significant section of a group. Ackroyd and Hughes (2021) further support the idea that a researcher or a software programme may rapidly and readily quantify the answers of the questionnaires. According to the same authors, questionnaire evaluations can be conducted more "scientifically" and impartially than other kinds of study. Not to mention, positivists believe that existing theories may be tested or new ones developed using quantitative evidence. Because of this, the researcher chose closed-ended, structured questions that specified the range of acceptable responses in addition to the format for those responses. Consequently, only structured questions were used in the questionnaire design for the study. Every inquiry contains a prepared structure for responses as well as a predetermined set of possible solutions (Malhotra & Birks, 2020). The questions on the administered questionnaire were taken from those in earlier investigations. The researcher used a five-point Likert-scale for all responses with (0=strongly disagree; 1=disagree; 2=not sure; 3=agree and 4=strongly agree).

3.7.3 Validity and reliability of the instrument

3.7.3.1 Validity

Creswell (2020) defines validity as the extent to which a data collection tool accurately and correctly measures the things it was designed to capture. Cooper and Schindler (2020) define content validity as a systematic, individualised assessment of how well the content of a scale accomplishes the goals for which it is intended. The current study guaranteed content validity by making sure that customer loyalty and customer experience management in small-scale hotels in Masvingo were being measured. Finally, to guarantee construct validity, the researcher selected a collection of evaluation questions that had been connected to customer loyalty in a previous study. Consequently, the research instrument was adopted by the study.

3.7.3.2 Reliability

In order to determine whether we are measuring what is intended to be assessed and the effectiveness of the measurement, the research objectives and the problem statement were compared to the study's findings. The degree to which study results may be replicated is the subject of reliability (Bell *et al*., 2018). Cronbach's Alpha test was used to assess the questionnaire's reliability. According to Saunders *et al*. (2019), the most popular

dependability index is Cronbach's alpha. Cooper and Schandler (2020) state that sufficient dependability is indicated by alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 1. "Reliabilities that are less than 0.6 are rated poor, those in the range of 0.7 are acceptable, and those over 0.8 are considered really well," Sekeran & Bougie (2019) state. To improve reliability, almost 80% of the questionnaire's items were modified from scales that had been utilised in the prior study.

3.8 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The researcher went into the field to gather data during the data collection phase. Participants in this study were given questionnaires to fill out at their convenience. The researcher followed up by giving participants multiple calls to remind them to finish the survey (Saunders *et al*., 2019). In 2023, data collection will occur between June and July. To ensure a smooth conversation and greater understanding, the interviews were held in quiet, private areas at the respondents' places of employment. The researcher took notes throughout the interview, which also demonstrated to the participant that their opinions were valued.

3.9 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

According to Maseko and Munyani (2020), data analysis transforms unprocessed data into summaries and trend patterns. Research by Howard and Sharp (2022) shows that analysis is essential for proving that a study has sufficient value and the capacity to change people's opinions and understanding. To make the data in this study computer-readable, it was coded. To make sure that responses were entered accurately, the codes were then transmitted to excel and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The researcher reviewed each questionnaire for errors, readability, and consistency in categories. In order to maintain the highest possible level of response quality, questionnaires that were not finalised in accordance with those requirements were rejected. Additionally, data was imported into SPSS for hypothesis testing and descriptive analysis. Data presentation will be done using tables and a few graphics.

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Saunders *et al*. (2019), ethics are rules or guidelines for conduct that distinguish between right and wrong. Bell *et al*. (2018) state that the next section discusses the ethical guidelines that were adhered to when conducting this experiment. These guidelines were strictly followed during the conduct of this study.

3.10.1 Informed consent

It was made clear to all willing study participants in advance that there would probably be no negative effects. Participants in the study were given the freedom to share or not share their personal tales in any way they desired, even though there was no risk. Each participant was asked to fill out a consent form declaring that they were willing to take part in the study, at the researcher's request.

3.10.2 Anonymity

Saunders *et al*. (2019) asserts that a basic ethical consideration in research is the anonymity of study participants. The researcher assured each participant that every effort would be made to ensure that the data they would have provided would not be traceable in the final report, and as a result, no personally identifying information was acquired for this study.

3.10.3 Confidentiality

Informants voluntarily offer data for research with the knowledge that it will be handled in the strictest of confidence (Sekeran & Bougie, 2019). As a result, a non-disclosure agreement existed between the researcher and the study participants. The impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty was investigated using information from a case study of small hotels in Masvingo. The researcher informed the respondents that all surveys would be kept safe.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The methodology that directed data gathering and analysis was covered in chapter. In this study, the research philosophy, methodology, technique, design, and survey strategy were discussed along with their reasons. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the information. The chapter also discussed the steps used to guarantee data quality. The researcher used quantitative approaches to data analysis because this investigation was quantitative. The ethical concerns and actions taken to improve the observance of moral obligations served as the chapter's last component. The presentation, analysis, and discussion of the results are covered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The data that was gathered using the prescribed methodology is presented and assessed in this chapter. The findings were subjected to thematic analysis, aligning with the study's objectives. To enhance comprehensibility and interpretability, both descriptive and inferential analyses were applied to examine the responses obtained from the selected respondents during the data collection process. The results were presented using tables, pie charts, and bar graphs.

4.1 RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Reliability analysis is used to evaluate the internal consistency of variables in a research instrument in order to ascertain the instrument's overall dependability (George & Mallery, 2020). Most people agree that the best method for performing reliability analysis is Cronbach's Alpha. The result is a number between 0 and 1. For instrument reliability, Bell and Bryman (2020) state that a minimum threshold of 0.7 is deemed adequate. The Cronbach's Alpha statistic was calculated for each of the 18 variables in this study in order to determine how reliable the research instrument used was. The table below displays the findings.

Table 4. 1 **Reliability statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
0.9952	18

A value of 0.9952 was obtained upon computing the Cronbach's Alpha for each of the eighteen compounds. This result shows a high degree of internal consistency among the scale's items, above the 0.7 threshold. As a result, it can be said that the study's research instrument is trustworthy.

4.2 RESPONSE RATE

In this study, 500 questionnaires were distributed in total. One hundred of these questionnaires were given to employees of particular small-scale hotels in Masvingo, and each of the one hundred was returned. Furthermore, 400 surveys were sent out to clients who had received care at the chosen small-scale Masvingo hotels, and each of the 400 questionnaires was also returned. Consequently, 500 questionnaires were returned in all, and the results are shown below:

Table 4. 2 **Response rate**

	Administered	Returned	Response Rate
Customers for the selected small-scale hotels in Masvingo	400	400	100%
Masvingo small-scale hotels staff	100	100	100%
Total	**500**	**500**	**100%**

According to Collins (2020), the average response rate in this regard was 100%, which is a respectable and acceptable response rate for medium-sized samples of 100–500 respondents.

4.3 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The demographic information collected from the participants in this research study consisted of gender and age.

4.3.1 Gender

The distribution of genders within the research sample is shown in the pie chart below.
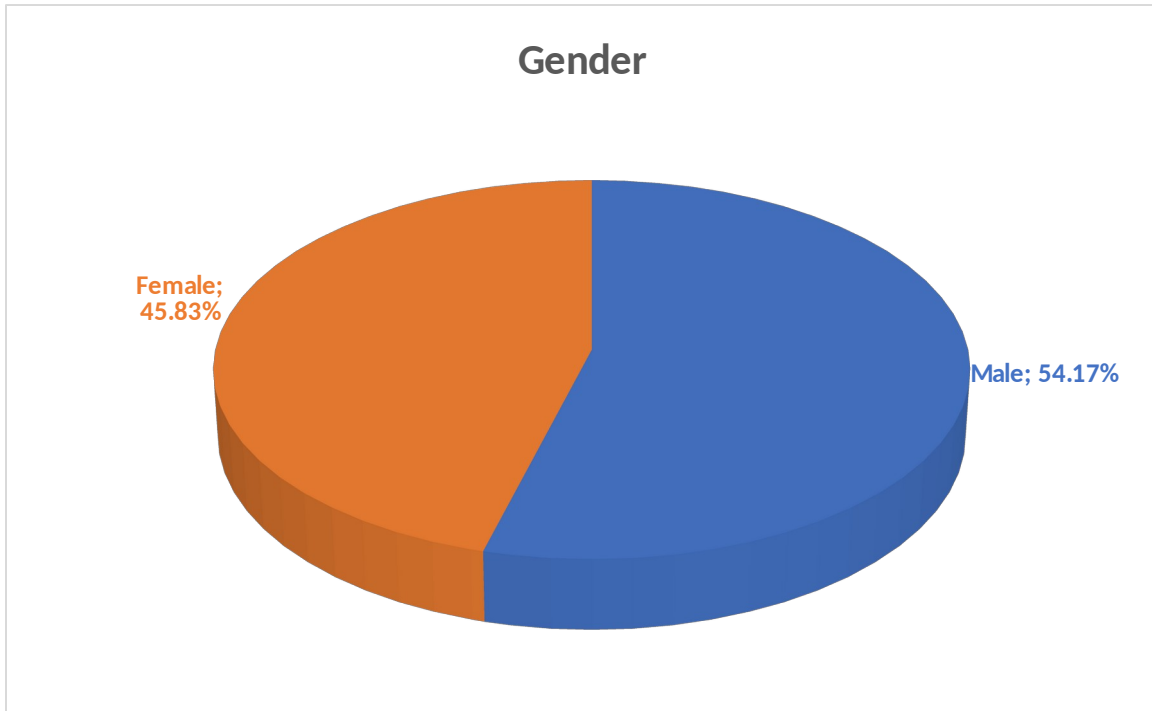
Figure 4.2: Distribution based on gender.

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

It is clear from the pie chart above that men made up 54.17% of the sample, or the majority of responders. On the other hand, 45.83% of the responders were female. Stratified sampling was used to provide a more equitable distribution of questionnaires depending on gender, and this distribution was the result.

4.3.2: Ages of Respondents The corresponding age distributions of the respondents are shown in the graph below.
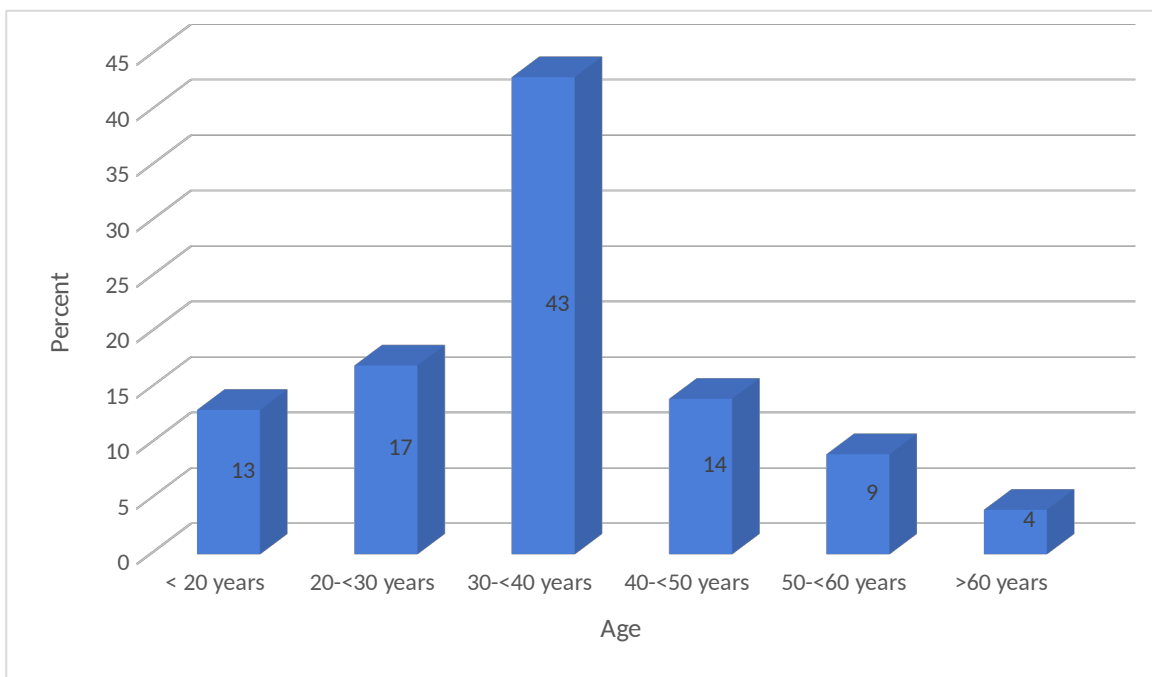
Figure 4.3: Distribution based on age.

In terms of age, the distribution of responders seen above appears to be somewhat normal. The skewness value, which is near to 0.00 at 0.0353, lends more credence to this idea. Nonetheless, 43% of responders, or the majority, are in the 30- to 40-year-old age range. With 17% of respondents, the 20–30 age group is the next most popular age group, followed by the 40–49 age group with 14% in the 40-50 range group. The following age group was less than 20 years which had 13%, followed by 9% for age group 50-60. The age group with the least percentage was greater than 60 years which had only 4%. Thus, it can be inferred that middle-aged individuals make up the bulk of patrons at the chosen small-scale hotels in Masvingo.

4.4 IMPACT OF PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY

The number one objective pursues to discover the impact of physical environment management on customer loyalty. Consequently, the reports on the outcomes concerning the physical environment of selected hotels, including factors such as the atmosphere, comfort, cleanliness, design, lighting, music, scent, décor, temperature, customer satisfaction, cleanliness, well-maintained surroundings, thoughtful design and high-quality furnishings. Considerably, the physical evidence by the selected small-scale hotels, below are the results that were gathered from the participants in this regard.
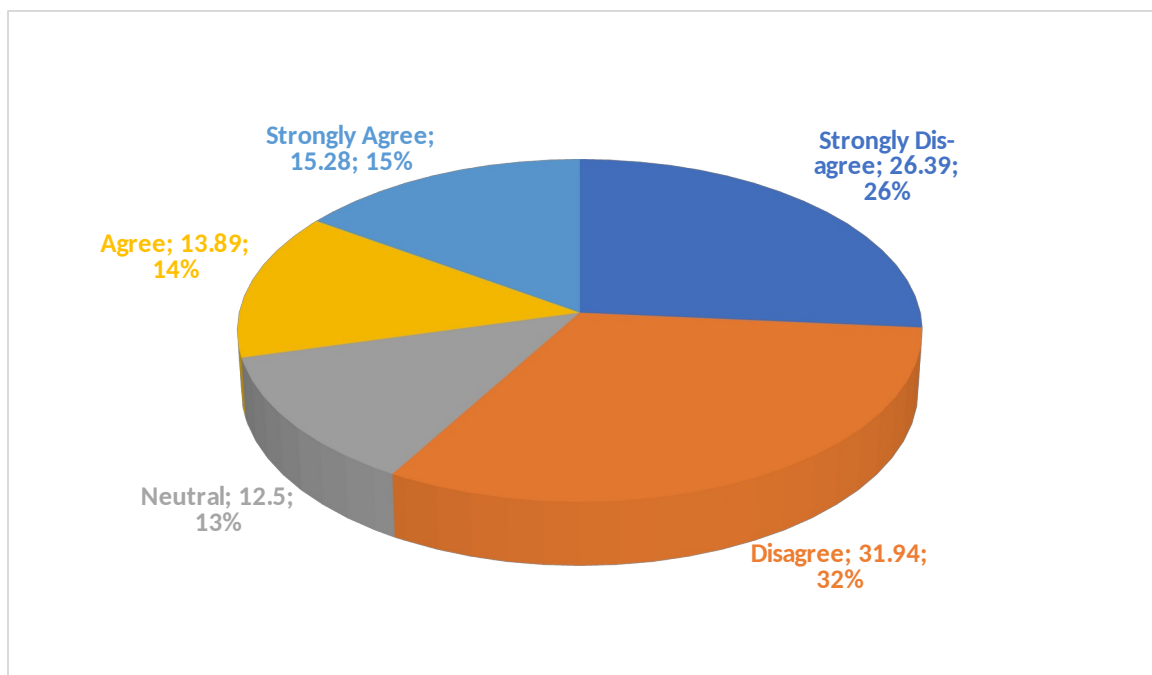
Figure 4. 4 Physical environment management on customer loyalty

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

The pie chart above reflects that 26.39% and 31.94% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively the notion that the physical evidence management by the selected small-scale hotels is commonly poor. However, only 12.5% of the respondents were

not sure about this, thus they were neutral. These results indicates that the physical evidence management by the selected small-scale hotels is commonly poor as supported by the 15.28% of the respondents who strongly agreed that the physical evidence management by the selected small-scale hotels is good, with another 13.89% agreeing that the physical evidence is better. Consequently, although it is generally approved among different scholars on the influence of physical evidence management on customer loyalty, it appears that at the selected small-scale hotels, the worth of physical evidence management has not yet been entirely incorporated at these selected small-scale hotels. This result is consistent with regard to O'Neil (2018) who claimed that limited resources, budget constraints, and lack of expertise often hinder small-scale hotels from providing a consistent and high-quality physical environment. Consequently, the researcher approves the hypothesis that physical environment management positively impacts on consumer loyalty in the hotel industry. Customers will have a better overall experience and be more likely to remain loyal businesses with superior physical environments (Verhoef *et al.,* 2018).

4.5 EFFECT OF VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY

The subsequent objective pursues to realize the effect of virtual environment management on customer loyalty. As a result, in this situation, the reports on the conclusions involving the respondents' perceptions of the small-scale hotels' capacity to have a hotel website which is user-friendly, clear and timely hotel online communication, easy-to-use online booking system, and informative and engaging hotel social media presence were measured. Regarding the view of virtual environment management on customer loyalty by the selected small-scale hotels, below are the outcomes that were obtained from the respondents.
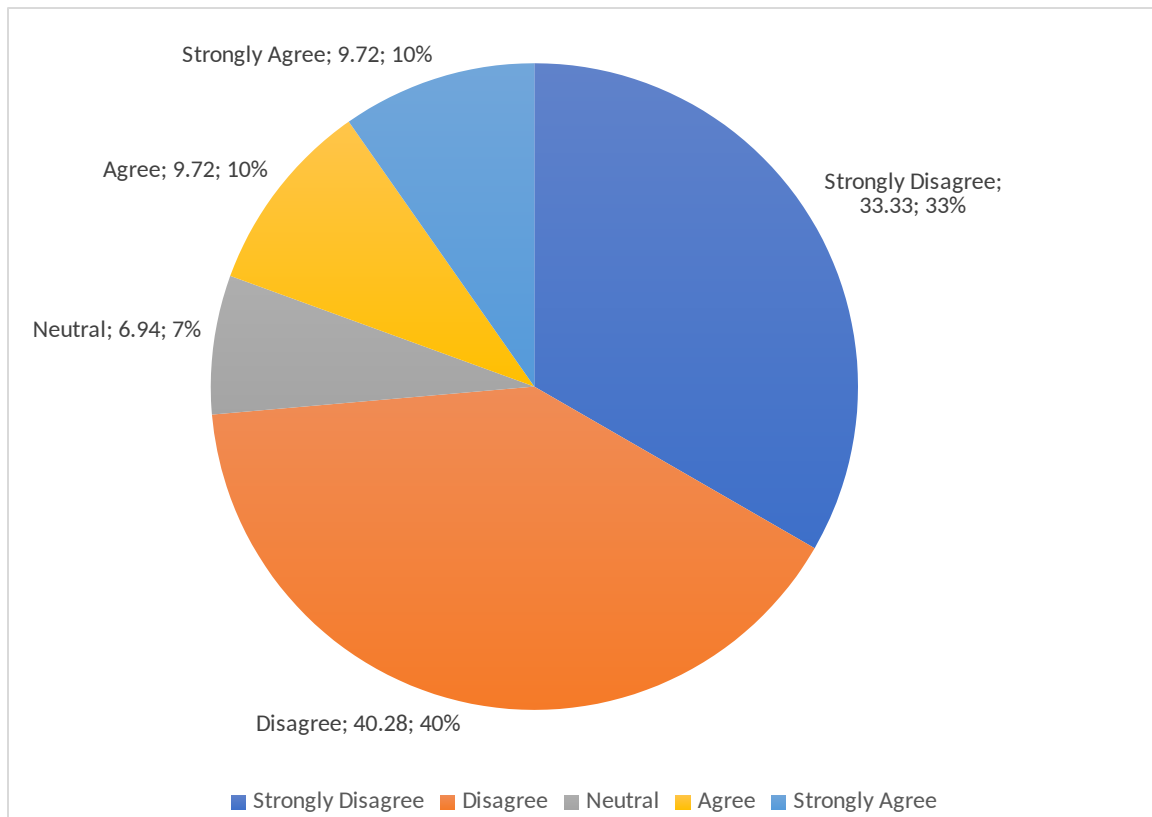
Figure 4. 5 Virtual environment management on customer loyalty

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

A total of 33.33% of the respondents strongly disagreed regarding the impact of virtual environment management on customer loyalty at the selected small-scale hotels. Additionally, 40.28% of the respondents disagreed on the effect of virtual environment management in relation to customer loyalty. Furthermore, 6.94% of the respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the user-friendliness, clarity, timeliness of online communication, ease of use of the online booking system, and the informativeness and engagement of the hotel's social media presence. On the other hand, 9.72% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 9.72% agreed with these factors. Based on these statistics, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents were dissatisfied with the virtual environment management provided by the selected small-scale hotels. Most customers perceived the websites, online communication, online booking system, and social media presence of these hotels to be significantly deficient. The results are unswerving with other different researchers' conclusions that a positive relationship exists between virtual environment management and customer loyalty as alluded by Siddiqi (2021). Johnson (2022) conducted extensive research on the impact of technology on customer experiences in the hospitality industry, her studies highlighted the challenges faced by small-scale hotels in effectively managing their virtual environments, including websites, online communication, booking systems, and social media presence. Johnson argues that small-scale hotels often

lack the resources, knowledge, and expertise to establish and maintain a strong online presence, resulting in poor user experiences and customer dissatisfaction. Hence, the researcher approves the hypothesis that virtual environment management positively impacts consumer loyalty in the hotel industry.

4.6 INFLUENCE OF SERVICE INTERACTION MANAGEMENT ON CONSUMER LOYALTY

The third objective hunts to discover service interaction management on consumer loyalty. In respect to that, the reports on the results regarding the respondents' perception on the service providers' capacity to be friendly and courteous, providing helpful information and recommendations, provide room service which is prompt and satisfactory and provision of check-in process which is smooth and efficient were assessed in this part. With reference to the judgment of the influence of service interaction management on customer loyalty, below are the outcomes that were obtained from the respondents in this case.
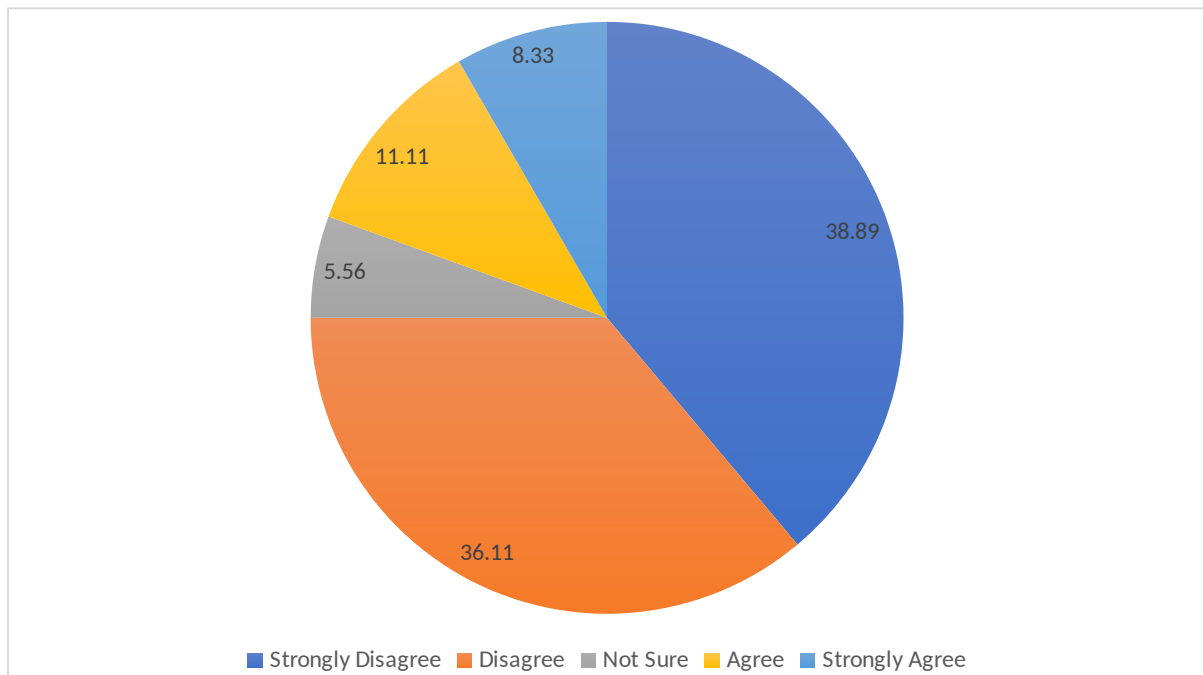
Figure 4. 6 Service interaction management on consumer loyalty

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

From the chart presented above, majority of the respondents, 38.89% strongly disagreed that the small-scale hotels have no service interaction management, whereas a further 36.11% of the respondents disagreed on that service interaction management is there. The 5.56% of the respondents were not sure, hence neutral as to whether the providers are friendly and courteous, provide helpful information and recommendations, provide room service which is prompt and satisfactory and provide check-in processes which are smooth and efficient. Furthermore, 8.33% and 11.11% of the population strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that service interaction management is positive.

From the statistics above, the majority of the respondents are not satisfied with the service interaction management dimension hotel services for most of the selected small-scale hotels. The majority of the selected small-scale hotels customers follows that the small-scale hotels are not friendly and courteous, does not provide helpful information and recommendations, fail to provide room service which is prompt and satisfactory and provide check-in processes which are not smooth and efficient. Thompson (2020) supports the notion that service interaction management in small-scale hotels may be inadequate. Her research has focused on the importance of effective service interactions in shaping customer experiences and loyalty. Thompson's studies have highlighted the challenges faced by small-scale hotels in providing friendly and courteous service, offering helpful information and recommendations, ensuring prompt and satisfactory room service, and maintaining smooth and efficient check-in processes. She argues that small-scale hotels often struggle with limited resources, training, and staff availability, which can negatively impact service interaction management. In this scenario, a positive relationship exists between service interaction management and customer loyalty which then makes the researcher to also approve the hypothesis that service interaction management positively impacts consumer loyalty in hotel industry.

4.7 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

This study's main goal was to investigate the connection between customer loyalty and customer experience management. Because of this, the study's findings were concentrated on a few inferences made from the opinions of the public. The conclusions pertain to the following: the degree of customer satisfaction with the customer service received, the probability of customers visiting the chosen small-scale hotels again, the degree to which the chosen small-scale hotels fulfilled their expectations, and the inclination of customers to select the chosen small-scale hotels over rival establishments. The present study's respondents provided the following information in order to evaluate the effect of customer experience management on customer loyalty.
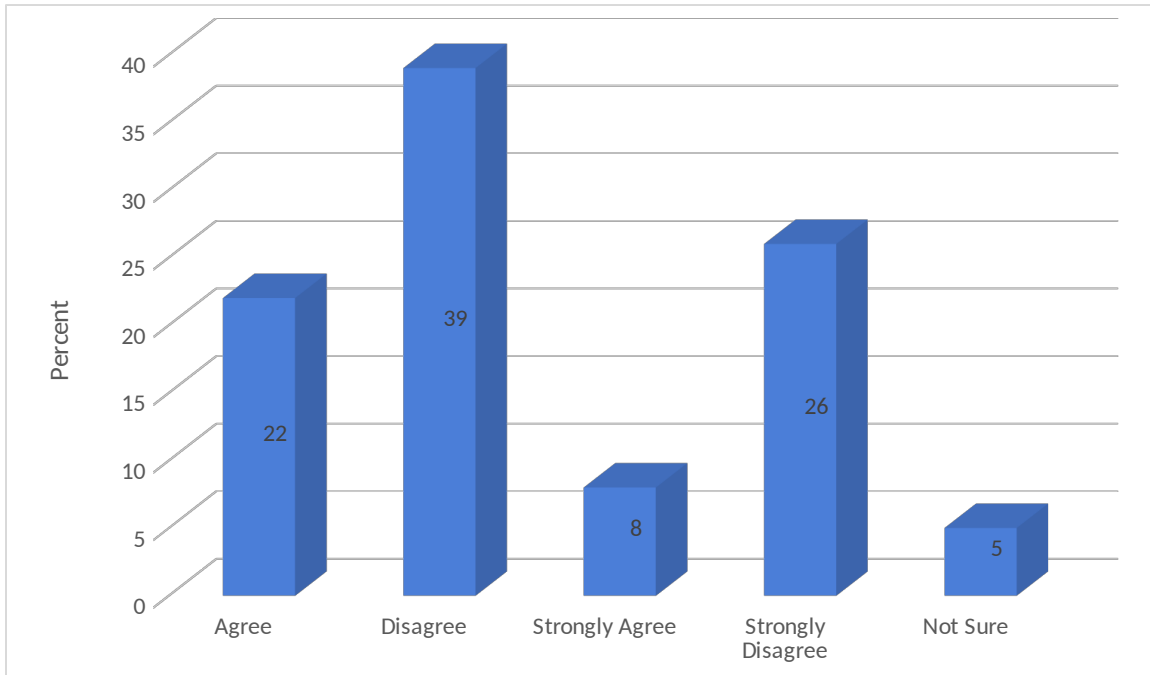
Figure 4. 7 Customer experience management on customer loyalty

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

The presented graph indicates that 26% of the population strongly disagreed and 39% disagreed regarding the overall poor customer loyalty at the selected small-scale hotels. This suggests that the service providers are unable to generate willingness among customers to recommend the hotels to friends and family, provide satisfactory customer service, encourage customers to return in the future, meet customer expectations, and outperform competitors. Only 5% of the respondents held a neutral stance. The results reveal that customer loyalty for the selected small-scale hotels is generally poor. This is evident from the 8% of respondents who strongly agreed that customer loyalty is generally good, and another 22% who agreed that it is better.

These findings align with Davis (2020), who supports the idea that customer loyalty in selected small-scale hotels may be generally poor and emphasizes the importance of effective customer experience management. In Davis's research on customer loyalty and satisfaction in the hospitality industry, he highlights the significance of customer experience management in shaping loyalty and the challenges faced by small-scale hotels in effectively managing customer experiences. Davis (2020) argues that small-scale hotels often struggle with understanding and meeting customer expectations, providing satisfactory customer service, and creating memorable experiences that foster loyalty.

The following figure presents the analysis of customer experience management and customer loyalty.

4.8 ONE-WAY ANOVA TESTON CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

4.8.1 Hypothesis

H_1: Customer loyalty is dependent on customer experience management.

H_0: Customer loyalty is not dependent on customer experience management.

H_1: That physical environment management positively impacts on consumer loyalty in the hotel industry.

H_2: That virtual environment management positively impacts consumer loyalty in the hotel industry.

H_3: That service interaction management positively impacts consumer loyalty in hotel industry.

Significance Level: 95% Confidence Level, equivalent to a significance level of 0.05.

Rejection Criteria: Accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) if the p-value is less than 0.05; Reject the null hypothesis (H0) if the p-value is less than 0.05.

Decision: The conclusions are presented in the table below. The p-values for all the hypotheses were found to be below 0.05. Therefore, the null hypotheses are rejected, and it can be concluded at a 95% confidence level that all three extracted factors have a significant influence on customer loyalty at the selected small-scale hotels, in relation to the hotels' customer experience management.

Section 4.8.2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Table 4.3: Results of ANOVA Analysis

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Service interaction management	Between Groups	139.551	4	34.888	114.377	0.000
	Within Groups	20.438	67	.306		
	Total	159.987	71			
Physical environment management	Between Groups	126.017	4	31.505	266.196	0.000
	Within Groups	7.931	67	.119		
	Total	133.945	71			
Virtual environment management	Between Groups	147.501	4	36.626	215.726	0.000
	Within Groups	12.376	67	.171		
	Total	158.876	71			

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

The F-ratios from the table indicate that the larger the magnitude, the greater the degree of influence on customer experience management at the selected small-scale hotels, as supported by Bryman and Bell (2020). Physical environment management had the highest F-ratio magnitude, with a statistic of 266.196. This suggests that the service provided by the hotels was unsatisfactory, as customers found the hotels unclean, poorly maintained, with unappealing décor, unpleasant ambiance, inadequate lighting, and uncomfortable temperatures. The second highest F-ratio was observed for virtual environment management, with a value of 215.726. This indicates that virtual environment management is the second most critical factor being neglected by the selected small-scale hotels and has the most negative impact on customer loyalty. On the other hand, service interaction management was found to be the least influential factor affecting customer loyalty. In summary, all four factors (Ang, 2022) were confirmed to have an influence on customer loyalty in the context of this research. Therefore, the factors affecting customer loyalty at the selected small-scale hotels, in order of significance, were:

1. Physical environment management
2. Virtual environment management
4. Service interaction management

Thus, based on the ANOVA analysis and the impact strengths ranking, it is evident once more that customer experience management had an impact on all the dimensions.

4.9 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

This study aimed to investigate the potential relationship between customer loyalty and customer experience management. To analyze this association statistically, considering the categorical nature of the two constructs, the non-parametric Pearson's goodness-of-fit Chi-Square analysis was deemed suitable (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The contingency table, which cross-tabulates both constructs, is presented below.

As depicted in the table above, it can be observed that the majority of the respondents leaned towards disagreement for both constructs being analyzed. This suggests a potential linear relationship between the two constructs. However, to inferentially examine this relationship, the following steps were undertaken:

Test: Two-tailed Pearson's Chi-Square Test

Hypothesis:

H_1: Customer loyalty is dependent on customer experience management.

H_0: Customer loyalty is not dependent on customer experience management.

Significance level: 95% Confidence Interval, 0.05 level of significance;

Rejection Criteria: Accept H_1 if; Reject H_0 if

The analysis was done and results are as indicated below.

Table 4.4 Findings from the Chi-Square analysis.

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	245.487	16.0	0.000
Likelihood ratio	164.114	16.0	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	68.173	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	500		

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

a. 21 cells (84.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.18.

Decision made: The above analysis was conducted at a 95% confidence level, with 16 degrees of freedom. The calculated chi-square statistic was 245.487, and the corresponding p-value was 0.000, which is below the recommended maximum of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is concluded, with the alternative hypothesis, that there is sufficient evidence at the 95% confidence interval to suggest a significant relationship between customer experience management and customer loyalty. Therefore, customer loyalty is truly dependent on the level of customer experience management. To further explore the magnitude and direction of the observed relationship between the two constructs, considering their ordinal nature, the Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient was deemed the most appropriate test. The results are presented in Table 4.5 below.

Table 4.5: Results of the Spearman's Rho correlation analysis.

		Asymp. Std	Approx. T^0	Approx.Sig
Internal by Pearson's R	0.934	0.66	7.175	0.000^0
Ordinal by Spearman Correlation	0.928	0.064	6.322	0.000^0
N of valid cases	500			

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Utilizing the asymptotic standard error while assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on the normal approximation.

Taking into account the aforementioned analysis, the Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient was calculated to be 0.928. Considering the potential range of the three factors, it is evident that there is an extremely strong positive relationship between customer loyalty and customer experience management. In summary, as supported by Newbold (2022), higher levels of customer loyalty are associated with better customer experience management.

Regression model

The regression model analysis summarized in Table 4.6 reveals a highly significant correlation coefficient of 0.996, indicating a strong positive linear relationship between the five customer experience management factors (Virtual environment management, Physical environment management, Service interaction management, and two latent factors) and customer loyalty. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.990 suggests that these factors collectively account for 98.8% of the variation in customer loyalty, with the remaining 1.2% attributed to unexplained latent factors. The regression coefficients and their corresponding p-values confirm the significance of all the customer experience management factors and the constant, further highlighting their importance in impacting customer loyalty. Overall, the findings support the notion that customer experience management plays a crucial role in shaping customer loyalty, with the regression model offering valuable insights into the specific contributions of the factors under investigation.

Table 4.6: Summary of the regression model.

			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.996[a]	.990	.986	.163

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

a. Predictors: (Constant), Virtual environment management, Physical environment management, and Service interaction management.

The analysis conducted above reveals a remarkably high regression correlation coefficient of 0.996, representing the combined effects of the five factors influencing customer experience management on customer loyalty. This correlation coefficient substantiates the strong positive linear relationship established in the earlier correlation analyses between customer experience management and customer loyalty. Furthermore, the R^2 statistic was determined to be 0.990, indicating that these three factors collectively account for 98.8% of the variation in customer loyalty. This implies that there are latent factors beyond customer experience management that contribute to the remaining unexplained 1.2%. However, apart from these latent factors, customer experience management can explain 98.8% of customer loyalty.

The respective regression Beta (B) coefficients, as shown in the table below, identify the corresponding contributions of all factors affecting customer experience management. The analysis reveals that the p-values associated with each factor are all below 0.05, indicating the significance of all customer experience management factors, including the constant, in influencing customer loyalty. The constant represents the cumulative impact of latent unexplained factors not considered in this study.

Table 4.7: Coefficients resulting from the multiple regression analysis.

	Unstandardized B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
1 (Constant	.490	.321		.549	.587
Service interaction management	.489	.097	.722	6.950	.025
Physical environment management	.816	.090	.553	3.563	.018
Virtual environment management	.763	.084	.493	2.592	.000

Source: Fieldwork (2023)

a. Dependent Variable: customer loyalty

Physical environment management had the highest coefficient (0.816). Virtual environment management (coefficient: 0.763) and service interaction management (beta coefficient: 0.489) came next.

This implies that the relative influence of the customer experience management factors on customer loyalty, in descending order of impact measured by the magnitude of the beta coefficients, is as follows:

Physical environment management

Virtual environment management

Service interaction management

For the selected small-scale hotels, this suggests that to significantly enhance customer loyalty, it is crucial to prioritize improvements in physical environment management. Additionally, emphasis should be placed on virtual environment management, followed by

substantial investments in enhancing service interaction management, especially during the pandemic, to satisfy customers and prevent dissatisfaction, thereby retaining them.

Table 4 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis, displaying the coefficients for the independent variables in the model. The unstandardized coefficients (B) indicate the estimated change in the dependent variable associated with a one-unit change in each independent variable. The standard error column provides an estimate of the standard deviation of the regression coefficients. The standardized coefficients (Beta) represent the standardized effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable. The T-values reflect the statistical significance of the coefficients, with higher absolute values indicating stronger relationships. The significance level (p-value) indicates the probability of obtaining the observed coefficients by chance, with values below 0.05 considered statistically significant. The data source is mentioned as "Fieldwork (2023)." In summary, the table summarizes the results of the regression analysis, facilitating the interpretation of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables and assessing their statistical significance.

4.11 Chapter summary

The research results were given in this chapter, along with the appropriate analyses and a thematic presentation that addressed the study's goals. The next chapter summarizes this research and makes conclusions based on the findings and recommends on what small scale hotels ought to do to improve on customer loyalty.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to examine the impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty in the hotel industry of Zimbabwe. The previous chapter provided an overview of the data presentation, analysis, and discussion of research results conducted in line with the study's objectives. This chapter focuses on presenting the primary findings of the study and drawing conclusions based on the analysis. Additionally, the chapter provides recommendations based on the study's findings. It concludes by highlighting the key limitations of the study and suggesting areas for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY

This section presents the major findings of the study as critically analyzed in the previous Chapter Four. To ensure that no section is overlooked, the summary will be presented objective by objective. In the first objective focused on physical environment management, the study found that a significant percentage of respondents (26.39%) strongly disagreed and 31.94% disagreed with the notion that the hotels had effective physical evidence management. Only 12.5% of respondents were neutral, while 15.28% strongly agreed and 13.89% agreed that the physical evidence management was good or better. For the second objective concerning virtual environment management, the majority of respondents were not satisfied with the virtual environment management provided by the hotels. Specifically, 33.33% strongly disagreed and 40.28% disagreed with the idea that virtual environment management contributes to customer loyalty. In contrast, only 9.72% strongly agreed and 9.72% agreed with this notion. Regarding the third objective on service interaction management, a majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the service interaction dimension of hotel services. Specifically, 38.89% strongly disagreed and 36.11% disagreed that the hotels had effective service interaction management. In contrast, only 8.33% strongly agreed and 11.11% agreed with this notion. These findings indicate that there is room for improvement in all three areas. The results of the ANOVA analysis revealed that physical environment management had the highest impact on customer loyalty, followed by virtual environment management and service interaction management. The chi-square analysis confirmed a significant relationship between customer experience management and customer loyalty, with the rejection of the null hypothesis. The Spearman's Rho correlation analysis indicated a strong positive relationship between customer loyalty and customer experience management. The regression model further supported these findings, showing a strong positive linear relationship between the customer experience management factors

and customer loyalty, with high explanatory power. The physical environment management in the selected small-scale hotels was perceived as commonly poor, and the virtual environment management and service interaction management were not satisfactory. These results align with previous research highlighting resource limitations and challenges faced by small-scale hotels. The study confirms the hypothesis that physical environment management, virtual environment management, and service interaction management positively impact customer loyalty in the hotel industry. To enhance customer loyalty, it is essential for small-scale hotels to invest in improving their physical environment, virtual environment, and service interactions, despite the resource constraints they may face.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

This section presents research conclusions, objective by objective as discussed below:

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

5.2. 1 Impact of physical environment management on customer loyalty

This study has clearly shown how customer loyalty is impacted by physical environment management. The majority of those surveyed disagreed vehemently with the existence of a physical environment management element in the process by which the service provider delivers the service to customers. The results show that, despite widespread agreement among academics regarding the impact of physical evidence management on customer loyalty, the value of physical evidence management has not yet been fully incorporated at the selected small-scale hotels, which is why the results were unfavourable. The examination of variances reveals that managing the physical environment is the most important factor in retaining customers. The results of the multiple regression analysis also indicated that customer loyalty is significantly impacted by physical environment management. Therefore, it is clear that physical environment management affects customer loyalty.

5.2.2 Virtual environment management on customer loyalty

The study also aims to determine the impact of virtual environment management on customer loyalty. According to the findings, most respondents were not happy with how the selected small-scale hotels handled their virtual surroundings when offering hotel services. Most guests at the selected small hotels felt that the websites, online communication, online reservation system, and social media presence were significantly below par. The majority of respondents revealed that there is no effective management of the virtual environment with regard to customer loyalty. Virtual environment management is the second most important and crucial component in relation to customer loyalty, according to analysis of variances.

Virtual environment management has the second-highest impact on customer loyalty, according to multiple regression analysis. Thus, the impact of virtual environment management on customer loyalty may be supported and justified.

5.2.3 Influence of service interaction management on customer loyalty

It was determined that respondents' perceptions of the service providers' ability to be friendly and courteous, to offer helpful information and recommendations, to provide prompt and satisfactory room service, and to provide a simple and efficient check-in process were unfavourable. The majority of respondents revealed that customer loyalty is not increased by the service provider's service interaction management. The analysis of variations also reveals that the least important element in regard to customer loyalty is service interaction management. Multiple regression analysis also indicates that the third most important factor affecting customer loyalty is service interaction management. It is clear from this that service interaction management affects customer loyalty.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides recommendations based on the research findings and conclusions discussed above. The recommendations will be presented as follows:

- To enhance customer loyalty, hotels should invest in improving their websites, online communication channels, reservation systems, and social media presence. Ensuring that these platforms are user-friendly, informative, and engaging can positively influence customer perception and loyalty.
- Small hotels should put an emphasis on educating its staff to be friendly, polite, and competent. Customer loyalty must be increased by offering quick and pleasant room service as well as a quick check-in process. Small hotels in Masvingo should take a comprehensive approach to customer experience management if they want to increase customer loyalty. This entails comprehending the needs and preferences of the customer, adjusting service delivery as necessary, and continuously assessing and enhancing the overall customer experience. Hotels may encourage loyalty and set themselves apart from rivals by continually exceeding customer expectations.
- Small-scale hotels should routinely gather customer feedback to gauge customer satisfaction and pinpoint areas for improvement. Online reviews, interviews, and surveys can all be used to accomplish this. Hotels can show their dedication to customer pleasure and loyalty by actively listening to customer comments and resolving their concerns Small-scale hotels must foster a customer-focused culture throughout their entire business. This entails equipping staff with the knowledge and tools they need to provide excellent service, as well as training them to prioritise

customer pleasure. Instilling a customer-focused mindset can help hotels give their visitors an enjoyable and memorable experience, which will boost customer loyalty.

- Working together with industry professionals, consultants, or hospitality associations can help small hotels in Masvingo learn insights and best practises for boosting customer loyalty. These professionals can offer advice on practical tactics, educational initiatives, and technological advancements that can improve customer satisfaction and foster loyalty. Small-scale hotels might make an effort to personalise the guest experience by learning about each visitor's preferences and adjusting their services accordingly. This may entail extending personalised greetings, remembering visitor preferences, and delivering customised facilities or recommendations. Hotels can encourage a sense of loyalty and establish a satisfying emotional connection by making visitors feel cherished and understood.

- Creating a loyalty programme can reward repeat business and promote customer loyalty. Small-scale hotels may reward loyalty programme participants with exclusive deals, VIP treatment, or discounts on future stays. In addition to rewarding devoted customers, this fosters a feeling of exclusivity and belonging, which increases fidelity. Promoting comments and reviews from visitors both during their stay and after they leave can show a dedication to ongoing improvement. Any complaints or issues brought up by visitors should be addressed right away, and hotels should take proactive measures to resolve them. Hotels may increase customer loyalty and develop trust by being responsive and eager to listen. Small-scale hotels can foster a sense of community among its visitors by planning social gatherings, local excursions, or other events that encourage conversation and camaraderie. This could produce a distinctive and unforgettable experience that entices visitors to stay again and cultivates a sense of loyalty towards the hotel and its neighbourhood. Delivering outstanding customer service depends heavily on having staff who are both well-trained and empowered. Small-scale hotels should make investments in thorough training programmes that give their workers the abilities and information needed to deliver individualised and attentive service. Empowering employees to make decisions and deal with problems on their own can also improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

- Small hotels can use technological solutions to improve customer satisfaction and optimise operations. This can be done by putting in place an easy-to-use online reservation system, offering mobile check-in choices, or using systems for managing guest relationships to track preferences and tailor communications. Hotels can increase productivity, convenience, and general customer happiness by integrating technology. The whole visitor experience can be improved by collaborating with

regional companies like restaurants, tour operators, or cultural institutions. Small-scale hotels might make suggestions and arrange alliances that give visitors exclusive access to events, special deals, or one-of-a-kind experiences in the neighbourhood. Hotels can improve visitor happiness and loyalty by providing a comprehensive and engaging experience.

- Expectations and tastes of customers can change over time. Small-scale hotels must constantly keep an eye on market developments, collect customer feedback, and modify their products as necessary. Hotels can maintain a competitive edge and encourage long-term customer loyalty by remaining aware of changing customer wants and proactively altering tactics and services.

5.4 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research herewith is introductory research to discover and find out about customer experience management in nominated small-scale hotels in Masvingo. Future studies may:

Ascertain whether the findings and conclusions on customer loyalty and customer experience management are similar across various contexts, compare small hotels in Masvingo with other areas of Zimbabwe or outside of Zimbabwe. This would give a broader view on the variables impacting customer loyalty and aid in understanding the generalizability of the results. Add qualitative research techniques, such as focus groups or interviews, to the quantitative data analysis to acquire a deeper understanding of the particular components of managing the physical environment, the virtual environment, and the service contact management that affect customer loyalty. A more complex insight of customer opinions and experiences can be obtained through qualitative research.

They may also monitor changes in customer loyalty and customer experience management strategies over time in small hotels in Masvingo, conduct a longitudinal study. This would make it possible to spot trends and patterns as well as gauge how well customer loyalty-improving activities are working. A more thorough understanding of the interactions between customer loyalty and customer experience management can be gained through longitudinal study.

Discover successful ideas and strategies that small hotels in Masvingo may use to increase customer loyalty by looking at best practises and benchmarking studies from the local and global hospitality industries. Based on tried-and-true techniques employed by top hotels, this research can offer useful recommendations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire

DEAR PARTICIPANT

My name is Happiness Ndawi; I am a final year student at Great Zimbabwe University doing Master of Commerce Degree in Strategic Management. As a partial fulfillment of the degree programme I am undertaking a research on: Impact of customer experience management on customer loyalty: a case of small-scale hotels in Masvingo. Your response to the following questions is greatly appreciated and will be treated with much confidence. May you kindly take few minutes to answer the following questions by ticking the relevant box?

■■■

1. Gender

Male	
Female	

2. Age

<20 Years	
20 - < 30 Years	
30 - < 40 Years	
40- < 50 Years	
50 - < 60 Years	
>60 Years	

3. Type of Respondent

Staff	

For each of the following Statements, place a tick in the box that corresponds to how you feel:

1		The hotel was clean and well-maintained.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2		The hotel had an appealing decor.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3		The hotel had a pleasant ambiance.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4		The temperature in the hotel was comfortable	SA	A	N	D	SD
5		The lighting in the hotel was satisfactory.	SA	A	N	D	SD
6		The hotel website was user-friendly.	SA	A	N	D	SD
7		The hotel's online communication was clear and timely.	SA	A	N	D	SD
8		The online booking system was easy to use.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9		The hotel's social media presence was informative and engaging.	SA	A	N	D	SD
10		The staff was friendly and courteous.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11		The concierge provided helpful information and recommendations.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12		The room service was prompt and satisfactory	SA	A	N	D	SD
13		The check-in process was smooth and efficient.	SA	A	N	D	SD

14	I will recommend this small-scale hotel to my friends and family	SA	A	N	D	SD
15	I am satisfied with the level of customer service provided by this small-scale hotel	SA	A	N	D	SD
16	I will return to this small-scale hotel in the future	SA	A	N	D	SD
17	This small-scale hotel met my expectations	SA	A	N	D	SD
18	I will choose this small-scale hotel over its competitors	SA	A	N	D	SD

KEY

SD - Strongly Disagree;

D - Disagree;

N - Not Sure;

A - Agree;

SA - Strongly Agree

THANK YOU

Appendix 2: Turn it in report

dissertation

ORIGINALITY REPORT

19% SIMILARITY INDEX

14% INTERNET SOURCES

7% PUBLICATIONS

11% STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Submitted to Midlands State University
Student Paper
5%

2. www.emerald.com
Internet Source
3%

3. Submitted to Bindura University of Science Education
Student Paper
1%

4. erepository.uonbi.ac.ke
Internet Source
1%

5. Submitted to Kenyatta University
Student Paper
1%

6. Submitted to University of Pretoria
Student Paper
<1%

7. Submitted to University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
Student Paper
<1%

8. repository.udom.ac.tz
Internet Source
<1%

9. www.ipedr.com