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Vo Thi Thu Hong, Gamal Sayed Ahmed Khalifa, Md. Sazzad Hossain, Nguyen Vu Hieu Trung, Safaa Abdelaleem Mohammad El-Aidie, Mahmoud M. Hewedi, Elhussein M.S. Ali

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### **Vo Thi Thu Hong**

The Saigon International University,  
18 Tổng Hữu Dinh Street, Thảo Điền Ward,  
The Duc District, Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam  
Email: vothithuhong@siu.edu.vn

### **Gamal Sayed Ahmed Khalifa\***

Faculty of Business,  
Higher Colleges of Technology,  
Al-Ain, Abu, Dhabi, UAE  
and  
Faculty of Tourism and Hotels,  
Fayoum University,  
Fayoum Governorate 2933136, Egypt  
Email: gkhalifa@hct.ac.ae  
Email: gsk00@fayoum.edu.eg  
\*Corresponding author

### **Md. Sazzad Hossain**

College of Tourism and Hospitality Management,  
International University of Business  
Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT),  
4 Embankment Drive Road, Off Dhaka-Ashulia Road,  
Sector-10, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka 1230, Bangladesh  
Email: mdshamim.3630@gmail.com

### **Nguyen Vu Hieu Trung**

Marina Bay Sands,  
10 Bayfront Ave, 018956, Singapore  
Email: hieutrong0704@gmail.com

### **Safaa Abdelaleem Mohammad El-Aidie**

Agriculture Research Center,  
9 Cairo University Rd, Oula, Giza District,  
Giza Governorate 3725005, Egypt  
Email: safaaelaidie@arc.sci.eg

## Mahmoud M. Hewedi and Elhussein M.S. Ali

Faculty of Tourism and Hotels,  
Fayoum University, Egypt  
Email: mmh06@fayoum.edu.eg  
Email: hms04@fayoum.edu.eg

**Abstract:** The present study's purpose is to examine the relationships between customer-employee interaction (CEI), optimal distinctiveness (OD), perceived fairness (PF), functional quality (FQ), and customer engagement behaviour (CEB) in the hotel industry in Vietnam. This present study applied a quantitative design and surveyed questionnaires to the hotel. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed and 389 questionnaires were received as valid responses from the hotel customers. The partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used for hypothesis testing as a unique tool for analysis. The results of the study identified that CEI, PF, and OD significantly impact FQ and CEB, and finally, FQ significantly impacts CEB. The salient research outcomes may help the hotel industry to identify the role of CEB as an organisational goal and a success factor. The role of customer engagement represents a new understanding and an insight into the hotel and customer relationships.

**Keywords:** customer-employee interaction; CEI; optimal distinctiveness; perceived fairness; functional quality; customer engagement behaviour; CEB; Vietnam.

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**Biographical notes:** Vo Thi Thu Hong is a Lecturer at The Saigon International University, Vietnam, In 1996, she received her PhD in Economics and Planning from the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. She was the Vice Dean of the Garment Faculty at Hong Bang University, Vice Dean Finance and Accountancy Faculty, at Gia định University, and Vice Dean – Economics Faculty, at Bà Rịa-Vũng Tàu University. Her research interests include economic, finance, HR and organisation behaviour.

Gamal Sayed Ahmed Khalifa possesses the position of an Associate Professor at the Fayoum University, Egypt, Lincoln University College, Malaysia, City University, Malaysia, and recently he joined Faculty of Business, at Higher Colleges of Technology, Al-Ain, Abu Dhabi, UAE. He serves in the academic sector since more than 18 years. His research interests include marketing, tourism management, hospitality management, leadership, HR and sustainability. ORCID No.: 0000-0003-1665-9291.

Md. Sazzad Hossain is a Research Fellow in the Taylor's University, Malaysia. His research interests include organisational learning, leadership, organisation performance and innovation.

Nguyen Vu Hieu Trung is a PhD holder from the Lincoln University College, Malaysia. His research interests include hospitality management, customer engagement, HR, and spinnability.

Safaa Abdelaleem Mohammad El-Aidie is an Associate Professor in the Agricultural Research Centre, Egypt. Her research interests include agricultural management, training, innovation and sustainable food technology.

Mahmoud M. Hewedi is an Emeritus Professor of Hospitality and Former Dean of the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University, Research Consultancy Training and Teaching. His research interests include hospitality management, food and beverage, tourism education and quality of education.

Elhussein M.S. Ali is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University, Egypt. His research interests include risk management, HR, food management and hospitality management.

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## 1 Introduction

The hotel becomes a reputable establishment in the hospitality sector as a result of the difference in service offerings (O'Neill and Mattila, 2010). For example, customers are often changing hotels to take advantage of modern technology, services and amenities (Abou-Shouk and Khalifa, 2017). If hotels want to get additional market benefits for the competitive market, they must change the new marketing approach from the old notion (Donaldson and O'toole, 2007; Khalifa, 2020b, 2020a).

A core paradox at the hotel industry interface is customer engagement behaviour (CEB). Although there is little emphasis on CEB as the co-created interest and interactive nature, marketing theory is widely accepted (Do et al., 2020). In recent years, CEB has been focused on management literature (Alvarez-Milán et al., 2018; Romero, 2017) and attention is being paid since engaged consumers are cheaper, prevent change, participate actively in development of new goods and services and advocate for hotel (Roy et al., 2018).

Unlike the dominant role played by CEB in hotels, recent researchers pay limited attention to the function and measurement (Rather and Sharma, 2017). Thus, it is seen as an effective retention and acquisition strategy for creating and sustaining competitive advantages of the hotel (Hossain et al., 2020a; Khalifa, 2019). A question may arise: why CEB is needed in the hotel industry? The hotel industry is a customer-oriented service sector, where mostly intangible products are being sold such as room accommodation, food and recreation (Elshaer, 2019). Thus, hotels have more transactions with customer comparatively with any other sector. The hotel functions always handle all those transactions with customers' needs and provide products and services (Khalifa et al., 2021b; Molz, 2012; Elshaer et al., 2022).

Consequently, the study explores the necessity of functional quality (FQ) on hotels, which remains to date nebulous from the concept of service quality (SQ). Early, Grönroos (1998) separated SQ in the service industry into technical and FQ. It focuses on how to consider the problems as customer-employee behaviour as well as the speed of service. Several authors have suggested that FQ as the SQ evaluation should include an attribute (Khalifa, 2015; Khalifa and Fawzy, 2017). Undeniably, Khan and Khan (2014) have argued that predicting customer behaviour is a misspecification of FQ that has low validity, but it can be the reason of customer engagement. However, preliminary studies have examined the FQ that was driven by the service's co-creation.

The interaction always believe in the constitution, such as closed interactions between clients and suppliers, yet concepts of the consumer and employee relation are in recurrent encounter (Alkathiri et al., 2019; Dagnoush and Khalifa, 2021a, 2021b; Gremler et al., 2001). This is particularly true if judging a customer's service experience is positively impacted by the customer and service provider (Rihova et al., 2018). Therefore, practitioners and scholars emphasise the impact of establishing customer-employee interaction (CEI) on contact consistency. Prior studies partially ignored the CEI role to examine the impact of CEB (Rather and Sharma, 2017).

Moreover, optimal distinctiveness (OD) has been also explained beyond the firm's expected services (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003). OD's core point is that divergence from a normative prototype decreases a proposed new undertaking since it inhibits customers from connecting the unknown with a familiar cognitive pattern of services (Tauscher et al., 2020). The fundamental question that may approach this study is: how can OD enhance CEB in the hotels? The OD emphasises the individual uniqueness in their deal (Prabhu et al., 2019). Thus, we consider customer engagement on the service experience and fill up their expected demand. Based on this concept of how individuals establish unique identities under intense regulatory pressure to comply, an extensive literature has emerged to discuss the nature and implications of OD at hotel level (Black et al., 2018; Hou and Fan, 2011; Leonardelli et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2017; Zuckerman, 2016a). Despite this importance, past studies were not discussed extensively or synthesised to enable a more progressive and consolidated knowledge domain to be developed (McKnight and Zietsma, 2018), especially concerning the implications for CEB.

In view of the importance of perceived fairness, the hotel industry recognises the incorporation and exploitation of consumer attraction strategies. Previous research considered fairness assessments, particularly in connection with physical products or services, with regard to past price changes and price increases (Yao et al., 2019). Therefore, the present study investigates the fairness against CEBs in the hotel industry of customers.

Finally, the aim of the study is to identify CEB relationships, with functional quality influencing factors (CEI, OD and perceived fairness). The research has several gaps and contributions, the key contributions are the mediating role of FQ among influencing variables and CEB, and the impact of OD on FQ. The current research is attempting to bridge the gaps.

## **2 Literature review**

### *2.1 CEI, FQ and CEB*

In the customer service, CEI was found by several researchers to involve the communication in the service area (Sudigdo and Khalifa, 2020; Thusyanthy and Senthilnathan, 2012) and a vital weapon for the success of a hotel's functions and structural development (Li and Hsu, 2016). Thus, it defines the good relationship between employee and customer for the purpose of excellent performance and profit (Lei et al., 2021).

An interaction relates to any situation where two effective parties, capable of exerting impact on one another, engage in the exchanging of values (Almatrooshi et al., 2021; Li and Hsu, 2017, 2016, 2018). Therefore, CEI between two or more persons who

communicate with each other to achieve a shared purpose through their reactions as the hotel departmental functions are the common meeting place (Dagnoush and Khalifa, 2021a, 2021b; Li and Hsu, 2016).

The research found that employee workplace is affected not only by cognitive abilities but also by social capital, pointing to the future advantages workers reap from relationships with one another (i.e., customer) (Alharthi and Khalifa, 2019; Mohamed et al., 2019, 2018).

Considering the inseparability of service offering, CEI is the key component of the hotel (Li and Hsu, 2018) as it enhances the customer service experience and further boosts customer satisfaction and FQ (Li and Hsu, 2016).

Therefore, CEI works on the hotel's FQ enhancement and meets customer expectations through competitive advantage (Chathoth et al., 2016). As a result of the above mentioned, the study proposed this hypothesis:

H1a CEI has a positive impact on FQ.

CEI is essential in hotels, but it is often characterised by temporary contact, and both parties exert influence on the interaction and share some obligations. CEI concerns customer engagement and has emphasised the essential interest exchange for the two parties' benefit. The effectiveness of CEI depends on accuracy, relevance and appropriateness. Thus, interactive level is reflected based on an earlier CEI duration:

Also, Bernardo et al. (2012) have postulated that CEB consists of a place to interact between hotel and customer needs. Thus, the commitment of employee-customer relationship to their better predictive performance and organisational conduct has been endorsed (Alharthi et al., 2019), which means that scholars and practitioners get more attention. It emphasises the relationships of employee and customer and customer engagement separately to increase hotel's success. Thus, we suggested the following hypothesis on the basis of the aforementioned urgings:

H1b CEI has a positive effect on CEB.

Because of its dynamic nature, CEB is beneficial to the formation of customer-based consequences, such as perceived quality, attachment and commitment; thus, it is helping to distinguish companies. Therefore, revenue, competitiveness, and profit margins are increased (Islam et al., 2019).

In all aspects, the service provider plays multidimensional functions based on service communication, and the common goal is to develop a relationship with the customer (Rather and Sharma, 2017). Accordingly, the customer expects the quality of functional service by interactive information, reputation, features and hotels (Hossain et al., 2019; Huang and Hsu, 2010). Therefore, exchanging information provides understanding in terms of essential survival and profit during customer encounter (Deng et al., 2010; Mende et al., 2013).

It takes critical attention in service operation that FQ is agreeably considered as the mediator between CEI and CEB. Therefore, significant consideration of the quality of functions is required in order to predict CEB (Saad Andaleeb and Conway, 2006; Wu et al., 2015). The study explores the FQ mediating effect on the CEI-CEB relationship, which remains nebulous and provides affirming signals that could boost SQ and efficiency. The FQ is an influential driver of customer-hotel connections that empirically examine the impact of CEI on FQ and its subsequent effect on CEB to re-patronise the hotel sector.

H1c FQ mediates between CEI and CEB.

## 2.2 *OD, FQ and CEB*

The social-psychological theory explained that OD differentiates the individual expectations within the different groups and conditions to achieve an optimum balance of presence and distinction (Zhao et al., 2017). Zuckerman (2016b) defined the stability of difference and conformity between individuals or organisational identity as an integrative framework to understand. Meanwhile, distinctiveness denotes the importance of how customers perceive their service as different from others (Gioia et al., 2013). It also penetrates both hotels and peer similarities because they intend to find out consistent identities or invent competing extremes (Foreman et al., 2012).

Consequently, hotel functions internally resolve the dilemma of sameness with different identity and also perceived legitimacy within the corporate environment (Navis and Glynn, 2010). Thus, inter-group communication leads to build up frequency and develop interaction across racial/ethnic boundaries (Pettigrew, 2008). The OD model suggests that humans are distinguished by two competing desires that control the relationship between self-concept and social group membership (Snihur, 2016). The first is the need for acculturation and integration, a desire to join that motivates social community immersion (Leonardelli et al., 2010). The second is the desire to be distinguished from others, which contrasts to the need for immersion. This research combined the two groups according to the customer's wish in respects of the hotel's expected service. Hotel FQ then helps the interaction between customer and hotel to boost optimum and distinctive actions of the customer.

H2a OD has a positive impact on FQ.

The hotel environment plays a role in reinforcing intolerance and lack of creativity to reach CEB (Porac et al., 2011). The O is obtaining positive outcomes and positive feelings towards achieving customer engagement against negative emotions in the future (Grant and Higgins, 2003; Rasmussen et al., 2006). This prioritises the impression of planned fulfilment in the hotel's customer engagement, which implies satisfying their demand. To the best of the authors' knowledge, in the past literature, minimal research investigated the impact of OD towards CEB. This hypothetical mechanism, therefore, places particular importance on a new contribution. Based on the above, we hypothesise as follows:

H2b OD has a positive effect on CEB.

In addition, if social cooperation, identification and inter-groups are mostly necessary for human survival, psychological processes should operate at the person level of motivations and preserve group distinction and identification (Hogg and Mullin, 1999). In particular, social identities are recommended to be selected to the extent that they lead to a balance between the conditions for inclusion and differentiation in a given organisational culture. A hotel's FQ mediating role manages the integration of motivation within a client's psychological mechanism through organisational process. OD, therefore, boosts CEB through FQ in such a way that increases higher optimism.

H2c FQ mediates between OD and CEB.

### 2.3 *Perceived fairness, FQ and CEB*

The SERVQUAL scale focuses mainly on the functional aspects of the service relationship between employees and customers, which represent the quality with which the service is delivered by contacting employees, such as reliability and responsiveness (Khalifa et al., 2021a). From this viewpoint, consumers are described as rational processors of information that are capable of evaluating the degree to which employees provide the intended service functionally. The FQ of service is defined as “the efficiency with which the core service is provided (e.g., when the service is provided quickly by employees).” Several research pieces on service fairness and SQ have been carried out in a service failure and recovery context. In this sense, perceived fairness is known as a primary effect on corporate reactions to a service deficiency in creating consumer evaluative decisions (Nikbin et al., 2016). High FQ standards are correlated with high levels of reliability and responsiveness.

In particular, higher levels of reliability and responsiveness are correlated with higher levels of consumer retention, which creates more positive functional performance. It is also crucial in the service sector to develop reliability and responsiveness while establishing healthy customer relationships (Elshaer, 2021). The improvement of the standard of service would be motivated by fair treatment. Confidence is crucial to exchange in service exchanges and is thought to affect interpersonal behaviour more than any other variable. Based on the theory of social exchange, organisational behaviour research suggests that employees tend to show a greater degree of commitment and feel motivated to exhibit engagement activities when their managers are viewed equally (Gharama et al., 2020; Khalifa, 2019). Along with this literature flow, research on service failure and recovery shows the effect of perceived justice on customer response in terms of post-service failure engagement behaviours (Roy et al., 2018). It reports that clients who consider service recovery as a fair experience are having positive emotions that create confidence among them in the service provider. According to Xerri (2014), customers’ interpretation of organisational justice is a precedent for the extra-role recommendations of consumer conduct, feedback, and customer support. Besides, Roy et al. (2018) show the positive effects of perceived fairness on consumers’ willingness to supply their business with suggestions; collaborate with service staff; and promote positive word-of-mouth. Hence, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H3a Perceived fairness has a significant impact on FQ.

H3b Perceived fairness has a positive effect on CEB.

H3c FQ mediates between perceived fairness and CEB.

### 2.4 *FQ and CEB*

SQ has been critical for business research progress since the mid-1980s (Abdulla et al., 2020). The Nordic school proposes the SQ measurements of technical quality (e.g., ‘service staff competence’) and FQ (‘to what degree the company fulfils the required function of the customer’) (Islam et al., 2019). Hotel businesses are concerned with adjusting their strategy to market changes to stay competitive in the global market (Ferreira et al., 2015). The competitive market has been changing for competitive advantage through the economic range to produce quality for needs and demands (Pineda



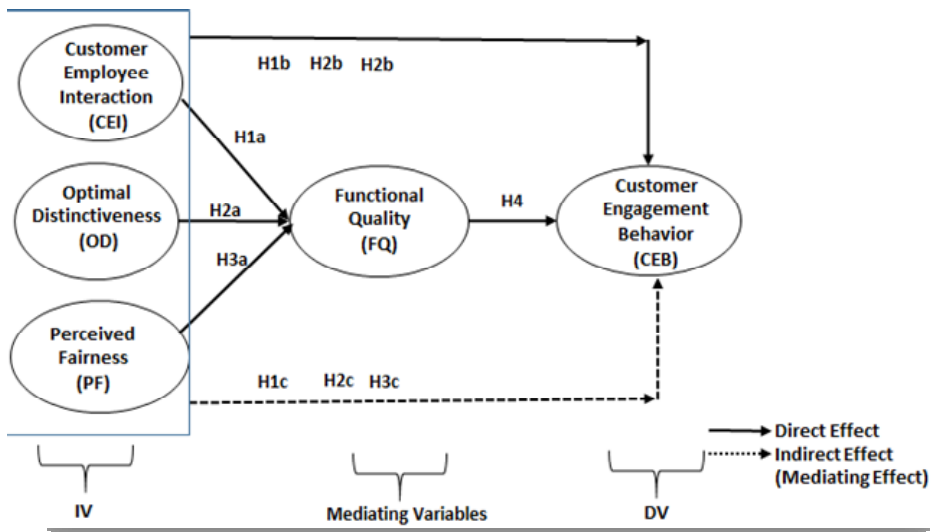
et al., 2010). The basic concept of FQ is to improve the production and service process faster while lowering the cost compared to the competitors (Elshaer, 2020). The quality has been sought to develop the existing system and products or services by identifying misalignments and errors of existing business to market demand (Alghfeli et al., 2021; El-Aidie et al., 2021).

Individuals perform comparative cost-benefit analyses based on social exchange theory to determine their expected value from an exchange (Sudigdo and Khalifa, 2020; Widjaja et al., 2020). The FQ is to improve the service and overall productive designation to engage customers in the hotel’s constructive suggestions (Marshall et al., 1997). The unique consideration in this relationship suggests that function operation with efficient manner managers can improve CEB. It is necessarily an area of need for a better long-run perspective in the competitive hotel market. Mostly, functions responsibilities are covered with productive efficiencies that are hotel environment, employee-guest exchanges, human characteristics and working system (Khalifa, 2019). Therefore, the customers are expected to reciprocate by returning value to the hotel through engagement. By delivering value to the guest, it is assumed that the hotel will be reciprocated by acquiring perceived value from the guest, thus preserving the connection and enhancing CEB. The study then hypothesises the following:

H4 FQ has a direct influence on CEB.

### 2.5 The research framework

**Figure 1** The conceptual framework (see online version for colours)



### 3 Methods

The paradigm of the research followed positivism that indicates the reality measure. This study established a quantitative design and a deductive approach. The quantitative design sets out methodological procedures for collecting data to use statistical analysis (Brannen, 2017). The methodology follows a survey-based technique with several benefits that are mainly important for this analysis. Mertler (2002) clarified that survey-based techniques provide advantages in simultaneously collecting a tremendous volume of data from an individual participant (Hair et al., 2017b). Therefore, this study followed a self-administered questionnaire in order for the employees to take responsibility for reading the questionnaire and answering the questions without intervention from the researcher. A common method bias (CMB) test was taken to reduce the survey response bias as it occurs if the assessments of the relations between two or more constructs are biased by the same technique (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986). We used Harman's single-factor test; thus, first factor was not greater than 50%.

This study used a questionnaire comprising mainly of two parts: demographic profiles (respondent's background) including (gender, age group, monthly income, nationality, categories of hotels, spoken language, etc.). This study constructs reflective measurements that were adapted from previous studies following the five-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree as (Hair et al., 2020) confirmed that partial least square-structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) can analyse the reflective and formative measurement.

Thus, the construct of CEI has been adapted with six items (Homburg et al., 2009), OD with six items (Sedikides and Brewer, 2015), perceived fairness with four items (Roy et al., 2018), FQ with six elements (Bernardo et al., 2012), and CEB with seven elements (van Doorn et al., 2010).

#### 3.1 *Sampling and procedures*

Vietnam has been expanding both domestically and internationally in the last decade with the World Travelling Awards 2018 as Asia's leading destination, and with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as the third fast-growing tourist destination in the world. Vietnam's hospitality sector is a blend of domestic and foreign brands and their hotel network. There is still a growing sector, and a large number of hotels/chain companies that are independent or home-grown. With about 19 hotels and more than 7,100 rooms, the domestic brand Vinpearl has the largest portfolio in the country, while the multinational brand Accor Hotels has 24 hotels with over 5,000 rooms. Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi Province are the famous tourist spots compared to other provinces, thus we have collected data from these provinces (Vu and Trung, 2021; Trung and Khalifa, 2019).

This study was conducted in the hotel industry to examine the CEB after getting the customers' experience. The hotels were explicitly chosen due to their proximity to the engaging populations and their rigorous method of selecting a representative sample. The sample that was drawn provides an appropriate representation of the target population with responses in Vietnam (Creswell, 2009). The survey was distributed across 30 four and five-star hotels. Vietnam's two most visited provinces have been selected: Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi City. The data was provided by 19 hotels in Ho Chi Minh and 11 hotels in Hanoi. A convenience sample was employed to collect data from respondents

during checkout time. Population aggregates the researcher's interest which generalises or encompasses a whole set of interest entities to the researcher (Hair et al., 2017a).

Flynn and Pearcy (2001) claimed that a reasonable sample size without a conclusive and straightforward rule is an appropriate sample size that is the subject of significant research debate. Study ratios for performing the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis of items to answer from 1:4–1:10 (Hinkin, 1995), as indicated by research requiring a sample size from 176 to 420. On the other side, the ratios of free parameters to response from 1:5–1:10 that are required for the sample size between 375 and 750 would be considered enough. Testing the study model utilising PLS-SEM requires a large sample, which is less reliable to estimate. Some researchers assume that partial least squares (PLS) can be used for sample sizes as small as 50 and as large as 5,000 (Hair et al., 2017b). A total of 500 surveys were circulated among hotel customers and 389 valid surveys were received. The various relationships were evaluated using a PLS approach to structural equation modelling (SEM).

## **4 Result interpretations**

### *4.1 Descriptive*

The respondents' data were presented using simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to summarise the data gathered. This indicates that there were more females than males (51.4%) (48.6%). The majority of visitors were between the ages of 40 and 49, which accounted for 52.2% of respondents and the age range of 30 to 39 years at 29% of overall respondents. Nearly 34.2% of the tourists are in business, and most of the remaining 32.9% are in private employment. Only 18.5% are holding a governmental job, and 14.3% are students. Hotel categories show that close to 37.8% of the tourists stay in five-star hotels, and most of the remaining 36.2% are staying on four-star hotels. As for nationality, 75.6% are foreigners, and 24.4% are Vietnamese. Table 1 displays key demographics.

### *4.2 Measurement model*

With regard to the reliability evaluation (Hair et al., 2017b), the research builds the calculated components Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and composite reliability (CR) requirements. Table 2 shows that the  $\alpha$  and CR values for all structures are higher than the suggested value 0.7, suggesting an acceptable reliability point. The value of the extracted average variance (AVE) above 0.5 indicated that both constructs had reasonable convergent validity values (see Table 2).

### *4.3 Discriminant validity*

Two methods: the Fornell-Larcker test and heterotrait/monotrait (HTMT) ratios were used to assess the discriminating validity of this analysis to distinguish structures in the context of the study (Henseler et al., 2015). The discriminant validity as the square root of AVE of each construct, evaluated with the Fornell-Larcker criterion, should be higher than the correspondence of all constructs described in Table 3 as italic. Besides, the HTMT should be lower than 0.90 (HTMT<sub>0.90</sub>) or 0.85 (HTMT<sub>0.85</sub>) for the constructs to

establish discriminant validity, according to Henseler et al. (2015). Table 3 shows that satisfactory (HTMT<sub>0.90</sub>) for all constructs that discriminant validity is fulfilled (Hair et al., 2017b).

**Table 1** Respondents profile

		<i>Freq.</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender	Male	189	48.6
	Female	200	51.4
Age	Less than 30	2	0.5
	30 to 39	113	29
	40 to 49	203	52.2
	50 to 59	53	13.6
	60 and above	18	4.6
Occupation	Business	133	34.2
	Government job	72	18.5
	Private job	128	32.9
	Student	56	14.3
Nationality	Foreigners	294	75.6
	Vietnamese	95	24.4
Total		389	

**Table 2** Results of the measurement model,  $\alpha$ , CR, AVE mean and standard deviation

<i>Constructs (items measurement)</i>	<i>Mean/SD</i>	<i>Skewness/kurtosis</i>	<i>Items loadings</i>	<i>Cronbach alpha (<math>\alpha</math>)</i>	<i>Composite reliability (CR)</i>	<i>Average variance explained (AVE)</i>
<i>Customer-employee interaction</i>						
CEI1	3.28/1.103	-0.341/-0.531-	0.824	0.868	0.901	0.606
CEI2	3.28/1.128	-0.324/-0.561-	0.825			
CEI3	3.49/1.146	-0.460/-0.411-	0.831			
CEI4	3.49/1.150	-0.456/-0.413-	0.837			
CEI5	3.49/1.125	-0.457/-0.336-	0.695			
CEI6	3.63/1.073	-0.497/-0.263-	0.635			
<i>Optimal distinctiveness</i>						
OD1	3.58/1.102	-0.461/-0.316-	0.836	0.859	0.895	0.592
OD2	3.57/1.057	-0.582/-0.017-	0.842			
OD3	3.56/1.089	-0.505/-0.204-	0.829			
OD4	3.55/1.099	-0.480/-0.327-	0.829			
OD5	3.76/1.128	-0.641/-0.305-	0.601			
OD6	3.77/1.100	-0.724/-0.069-	0.637			

**Table 2** Results of the measurement model,  $\alpha$ , CR, AVE mean and standard deviation (continued)

Constructs (items measurement)	Mean/SD	Skewness/kurtosis	Items loadings	Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance explained (AVE)
<i>Functional quality</i>						
FQ1	3.77/1.197	-0.602/-0.562-	0.872	0.925	0.941	0.728
FQ2	3.62/1.135	-0.518/-0.385-	0.877			
FQ3	3.78/1.139	-0.720/-0.165-	0.830			
FQ4	3.67/1.131	-0.497/-0.378-	0.866			
FQ5	3.69/1.157	-0.600/-0.291-	0.840			
FQ6	3.52/1.213	-0.572/-0.483-	0.831			
<i>Perceived fairness</i>						
PF1	3.47/1.087	-0.533/-0.100-	0.856	0.838	0.891	0.673
PF2	3.51/1.039	-0.654/-0.163	0.811			
PF3	3.47/1.097	-0.525/-0.193-	0.793			
PF4	3.56/1.094	-0.541/-0.186-	0.819			
<i>Customer engagement behaviour</i>						
CEB1	3.53/1.127	-0.584/-0.153-	0.882	0.927	0.941	0.697
CEB2	3.39/1.162	-0.463/-0.444-	0.858			
CEB3	3.51/1.296	-0.525/-0.767-	0.836			
CEB4	3.32/1.248	-0.414/-0.725-	0.768			
CEB5	3.39/1.297	-0.419/-0.844-	0.801			
CEB6	3.39/1.284	-0.419/-0.797-	0.827			
CEB7	3.36/1.294	-0.433/-0.830-	0.865			

**Table 3** Results of discriminant validity (see online version for colours)

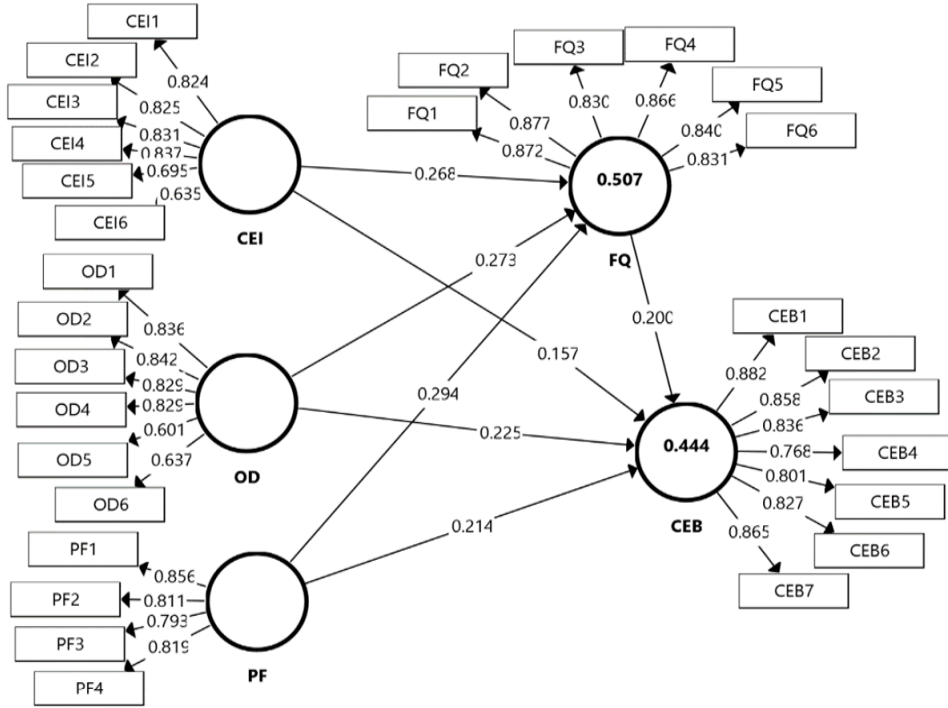
	Fornell-Larcker					HTMT				
	CEB	CEI	FQ	OD	PF	CEB	CEI	FQ	OD	PF
CEB	0.835									
CEI	0.497	0.834				0.537				
FQ	0.562	0.477	0.853			0.602	0.518			
OD	0.542	0.658	0.454	0.800		0.595	0.732	0.501		
PF	0.533	0.435	0.580	0.475	0.820	0.596	0.497	0.655	0.547	

4.4 Hypotheses testing

The structural model assessment shows that the findings supported all direct hypotheses significantly. The findings show that the CEI, OD and PF significantly impact FQ with the values of ( $\beta = 0.268, t = 5.705, p < 0.001$ ), ( $\beta = 0.273, t = 5.682, p < 0.001$ ) and ( $\beta = 0.294, t = 5.864, p < 0.001$ ). Hence, H1a, H2a and H3a are supported. Besides, the

analysis shows that CEI, OD and PF also significantly impact CEB as ( $\beta = 0.157$ ,  $t = 2.622$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), ( $\beta = 0.225$ ,  $t = 3.727$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $t = 4.440$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, H1b, H2b, and H3b are accepted. The direct hypothesis of FQ also significantly impacts CEB ( $\beta = 0.200$ ,  $t = 3.534$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); hence, H4 is supported.

**Figure 2** Structural model's results



The results of path coefficients explain the influence of both the inner and outer constructs. It shows that the OD has a stronger effect on CEB than other constructs, and the ( $f^2$ ) shows (0.283). The inner constructs predictive values fulfilled the suggested values greater than zero. The proposed model explained that 45.4% of the variance in CEB, while FQ variance was explained by 40.4% and the  $R^2$  values of the results are acceptable (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 4** Direct hypotheses' test results

Relationships	$\beta$	SE	T value	P values	$F^2$	$Q^2$	VIF
CEI -> CEB	0.157	0.060	2.622	0.009	0.043	0.284	1.906
CEI -> FQ	0.268	0.047	5.705	0.000	0.044	0.343	1.824
FQ -> CEB	0.200	0.056	3.534	0.000	0.283		1.679
OD -> CEB	0.225	0.060	3.727	0.000	0.055		1.927
OD -> FQ	0.273	0.048	5.682	0.000	0.069		1.909
PF -> CEB	0.214	0.048	4.440	0.000	0.048		1.656
PF -> FQ	0.294	0.050	5.864	0.000	0.118		1.337

To test the indirect relationships, the path coefficients approaches were applied to test the significance values H1c, H2c and H3c (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). H1c is supported, since FQ is significantly mediated between CEI and CEB, as ( $\beta = 0.053$ ,  $t = 2.936$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and 95% bias corrected confidence interval (Bc-CI): (LL = 0.028, UL = 0.098). H2c significantly associated between OD and CEB through FQ as ( $\beta = 0.054$ ,  $t = 2.842$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and 95% Bc-CI: (LL = 0.022, UL = 0.092). H3c significantly associated between PF and CEB through FQ as ( $\beta = 0.050$ ,  $t = 2.976$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and 95% Bc-CI: (LL = 0.025, UL = 0.104).

**Table 5** Indirect hypotheses’ test results

	$\beta$	SE	T value	P values	2.5%	97.5%
CEI -> FQ -> CEB	0.053	0.018	2.936	0.003	0.028	0.098
OD -> FQ -> CEB	0.054	0.019	2.842	0.005	0.022	0.092
PF -> FQ -> CEB	0.059	0.020	2.976	0.003	0.025	0.104

## 5 Discussion

CEBs include conducts that affect the productivity of the firm. Prior literature either examines these CEBs using different theories or uses the structure for customer engagement on a piecemeal basis. This prevents a unifying view on the phenomenon from emerging, which is needed for both theoretical development and adequate managerial insights (Romero, 2017). Our research contributes to the existing literature by researching CEB in the sense of tourism, in response to calls for context-specific interpretation of the concept (Islam et al., 2019; Kumar et al., 2019). Within the current research’s theoretical model, we advanced insight into the importance of CEI, PF and OD as FQ drivers and the influence of FQ on CEB. Although SQ is a frequently used parameter in extant studies, just a few research dealt with CEB-related FQ impact. Our social exchange insight, therefore, helps to broaden the theoretical understanding of the proposed conceptual associations. Thus, this work adds to the existing literature of engagement by exploring the mediating effect of the FQ. Furthermore, FQ was recognised to impose a possible impact on CEB. Our perception of the variables of research and its effects on CEBs tend to be limited. The results of this research also offer additional perspectives into this viewpoint by collectively analysing how CEBs simultaneously affect these behaviours. These behaviours provide a forecast to be linked to corporate profitability and return on marketing investment (van Doorn et al., 2010).

CEI is one of the main research constructs. The study findings showed substantial results as mentioned above which indicated that CEI significantly affects FQ. CEI is an essential part of service development and delivery and these interactions require much more than service transactions (Grandey et al., 2012). CEI may impact customer-related consequences including quality of service and engagement (Li and Hsu, 2016). The objective of achieving FQ and the interaction between employee and customer will affect the assessment of product/service delivery (Wieseke et al., 2012). The empirical test and the above results have shown that CEI provides a causal relationship for long-time service exchange (i.e., price, promotion), which is different from customer satisfaction or other facilitating dimensions. In this study, relevant components of CEI are reported in hotels. The high level of CEI in hotel services is characterised by the consideration of the

connection by both parties as important and the resolution of their potential conflicts by involving mutual commitment and the transfer of different types of data.

Customer and employee should practice their function as two main components in the cycle of service development (Liu and Chen, 2007). The findings have also shown that interaction between both parties can improve the prediction of CEBs in participating beneficiaries. The engagement literature focuses mostly on the contributions of customers, which is the centric beneficiary (Verhoef et al., 2010). The mediation impact of FQ indicates that interaction toward customer engagement may occur during functional activities. Kang and James (2004) clarified that FQ shows how something should be accomplished or how the operation should be performed to the customer. According to concepts of co-creation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) and co-production (Chathoth et al., 2013), both are having a relationship between CEB or the willingness to participate. In addition to influencing customer-related consequences such as level of service and perception, CEI will also boost CEB (Li and Hsu, 2016).

The authors review comprehensive data that show how OD-level behaviour from the hotel image and its impact on FQ and CEB. We demonstrate how the customer-hotel engagement forms the identity. The results demonstrate that OD significantly affects FQ. The conceptual changes promise to deepen our understanding of optimal distinctive features by highlighting how complexity in a hotel could help multiple customer's optimal points of distinction (Madsen and Walker, 2015). According to Zuckerman (2016a), OD suggests self-esteem and desire for change. Zhao et al. (2017) linked the functional activities management and strategies. The results also showed that consumer differentiation in service and products or high expectations increases their engagement. In addition, the above findings showed that OD has a positive effect on CEB. OD is involving an attention in meeting the needs for assimilation and differentiation within the same group (Jansen et al., 2014). This has been checked most commonly by using group size as proxy to establish the relational experience (Sorrentino et al., 2007). The engagement with functionalities seeks challenges that provide them with service opportunities (Fernandes and Remelhe, 2016). Our research ultimately contributes to the CEB literature. One important contribution is to disentangle how OD shapes the CEB dimension. This has helped hotels to implement FQ as an essential mechanism that mediates the OD-CEB relationships. Moreover, H2a indicates the effect of OD on FQ. This hypothesis relates to enhance the FQ by achieving OD in the service encounter. OD is necessary to address the customer high expectation related to the service of the hotel. Chan et al. (2012) claim that humans have two conflicting needs:

- a for social 'assimilation' or 'inclusion'
- b for 'uniqueness' or 'differentiation' from other persons.

The theory usually suggests that these criteria are optimally distributed in a small to moderate group with identical ones. Ultimately, the customer needs to be fulfilled in order to get satisfaction (Alkatheeri et al., 2020; Alshamsi et al., 2019; Khalifa, 2020b).

One of the contributions to the study is the examination of the direct and indirect effect of perceived fairness on CEB. Hence, perceived fairness, on the one hand, has a positive and significant effect on FQ and CEB. Furthermore, FQ significantly mediates the relationship between PF and CEB. These mechanisms are known to be competitive levers used by hotels to have meaningful customer response, such as customer retention, loyalty and word-of-mouth (Roy et al., 2018). Thus, it seems intuitive that all of these



variables serve as CEB's motivational drivers. The advent of a global economic system has allowed customers to connect with hotels through different networks, primarily through social media. We assume that these advances have increased customer service standards and; therefore, modified the way consumers perceive quality of service. In such a situation, clients feel entitled to receive outstanding quality of service and can perceive their hotel partnership as transactional in nature because of low switching costs. Offering outstanding SQ will also assist hotels in receiving conventional CEB.

Finally, the findings have shown that FQ significantly affects CEB. The consumer assesses how far goods are reaching, even exceeding the quality requirements (Alghfeli et al., 2021; Boshoff et al., 2012). If consumers favourably consider FQ, they will have higher confidence in the determinants and outcomes of service providers. This FQ aspect is sometimes referred to as technical or 'hard' quality, and is similar to a measuring instrument called 'service reliability'. The customer desires the expected service by the hotel operation. In addition, CEB denotes customer participation and functions in the hotel services. CEB, where customers make voluntary contributions to resources that concentrate on the hotel and expand beyond the fundamental issues involved in transactions, engage with the focal point or other players as a result of motivational drivers.

## **6 Theoretical and practical implications**

With the ever-increasing competition and growth in tourism and hospitality industry (Khalifa, 2018, 2020b), managers have become imperative to recognise how to create and sustain CEB with their offerings. Actually pleasing consumers is not having the same impact as making them engaged (Islam et al., 2019). Although academics and marketing researchers have recognised the positive effect of CEB, acceleration is required to offer maximum efficiency (Roy et al., 2018).

We add to the growing management literature on customer engagement by studying its commitment in the hospitality literature (van Doorn et al., 2010). The findings suggest that CEB is a higher-order design which offers a deeper view of the efficiency of hotels. According to Jaakkola and Alexander (2014), it seems that consumers engaged with their providers contribute to a wide variety of services. This work has strengthened our understanding of CEBs and how hotels should handle them efficiently and effectively. We have also addressed the need for further work by defining certain CEB psychological contexts at the consumer level.

We show the significance of boosting hotel-based CEB, as its advancement is estimated to increase customer brand experience as well as profitability. Therefore, it is recommended that hotel marketers establish CEB as part of an experience-based marketing strategy (Hossain et al., 2020b). Since other CEBs also affect the target client, hoteliers need to look beyond management and strive to improve consumer-to-employee experiences and connections to promote and sustain value. Our results show that more than 51.3% of the CEB variance included in the study is explained by three antecedents; CEI, OD and FQ.

Relational CEI within services providers should be valued and encouraged. Harmonisation of interaction among customer-employee is a key factor in promoting CEB. Hotels and service firms should, therefore, stress the importance of interactions

between customers and employees, establish a favourable atmosphere of shared trusted associations and allow additional flexibility in dealing.

In addition, the study results demonstrated that a high degree of CEI solidarity could directly and indirectly lead to more CEB by developing a social psychological atmosphere. Employee practices in a hotel bind the business with customers and are essential to the creation of productive working relationships (Khalifa, 2019).

Identifying CEI towards FQ indicates putting sincere concern during the operation of the service. The development and sharing of customer and service-quality related experiences via online/offline platforms is therefore another influential program for improving consumer engagement.

Furthermore, the OD theory indicates that people have two main and competing human needs: the need for integration and the need for distinction. The results indicated that OD can have a significant impact on FQ. It addresses the high expectations of customers in relation to hotel service (Leonardelli et al., 2010) and is considered as a key aspect of organisational life. The dual incentive to be genuine and distinctive is important and enduring, influencing a range of organisational outcomes.

Nonetheless, in order to advance in recognising the causes and implications of OD and how hotels should properly differentiate themselves strategically for better CEBs, researchers need a more cohesive and consistent scholarly and research agenda. OD is concerned with the needs of assimilation and differentiation within the same community (Jansen et al., 2014). In addition, FQ of the hotel determines all departmental tasks which meet customer expectations. Bitner (1992) recognised that consumers engage in their distinctive services, but typically only on the basis of user interaction, which leads to the customer experience of themselves or other customer involvement following the FQ of a hotel. Hence, hotel managers must provide clients with certain incentives for staff to receive customer support and engagement tools. For instance, in hotel restaurants, newly developed menu items can be offered to customers in addition to soliciting their views and offering employees the opportunity for engaging with clients.

Hotels may also create customer engagement services, such as creativity-related games and competitions, to encourage customers' openness to fresh ideas. The findings indicate that FQ influencing factors play a key role in enhancing CEB at service encounter. The CEI and OD guidance, in particular, will create encouraging ways to establish workgroup decisions and also require exceptions in extreme circumstances to assist workers in their duties. There is a greater prevalence of CEB as evident from the results, regardless of the perception of justice, for high levels of perceived service fairness. It is therefore possible to believe that, if not appropriately placed, service fairness will make consumers inactive service recipients and they will not extend gratitude to their service providers. Service fairness is a dynamic phenomenon for hotels in such situations, as it drives CEB and amplifies the impact of FQ on CEB.

Finally, this result underlines the importance of the influencing factors of FQ. Previous work presented that positive service factors can be trained (Braun et al., 2013). The current study recommends that organisations should measure FQ through questionnaire methods. When the organisation finds some planners to have less supportive behaviours, they should introduce business approaches in order to provide necessary knowledge and skills. Therefore, FQ theorised the perspective to increase CEB in order to be implemented into the Vietnam hotel industry. It is important for hotel managers to focus on FQ when they're less focused on CEB. In the beginning, the hotel

should pay attention to build FQ in the relationship within organisational contract with consultant (Rihova et al., 2018).

Furthermore, it is vital to know that FQ positively impact CEB. Particularly, hotels oversee boosting a helping and supportive environment, an open climate for discussion, feedback and exchange (Li and Hsu, 2016). For instance, through continuous individual reflection, organisation should also be aware of the drawbacks of their influence since perceptions of breach can have detrimental effects on their progress in their workplace (Al-Shibami et al., 2019). Importantly, FQ directly influences CEB, which is supported according to the above results, and this can suggest implementing it to the reorganisation in future. Consequently, influencing factors are having an indirect influence on CEB that suggests utilising the complimentary for the future implication and it would be helpful for the achieving common goal.

## **7 Limitations and future research**

This research is not excluded from restrictions and may serve as a guide for further research. First, we focused our attention on the CEB's customer-based experience and ignored company-and context-based perspectives. Including them would have offered a more detailed view of how the context of CEB exerts its impact in the hospitality sector, which would have greatly enhanced our studies. Second, we only integrated the direct/indirect effects of the FQ, CEI and OD relationships, while they may interact to improve CEBs. The limitations identified are several but few of them are essential: single industry, limited geographical area, and only one country. The future studies should indicate the other influencing factors that can be determined to predict CEB (i.e., customer perception, regulatory services).

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