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**Service Quality and Brand Loyalty: The Mediation Effect of
Brand Passion, Brand Affection and Self-Brand Connection**

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3 **Service Quality and Brand Loyalty: The Mediation Effect of Brand Passion, Brand**
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6 **Affection and Self-Brand Connection**

7
8 **Abstract**

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10 **Purpose:** The aim of this study is threefold: first, to examine the extent to which service quality
11 (SQ) affects the three components of emotional brand attachment (EBA) (brand passion, brand
12 affection and self-brand connection); second, to investigate the extent to which these three
13 components influence brand loyalty; and third, to test the mediation effect of the components of
14 EBA on the SQ-loyalty relationship.
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22 **Design/Methodology/Approach:** Survey data were collected from 355 respondents using an
23 online panel in the UK. Smart PLS2.0 was employed to analyze the data.
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27 **Findings:** Three key findings emerge: first, compared to staff behavior, physical environment
28 tends to have a stronger and more significant effect on the three elements of EBA. Second, brand
29 passion and self-brand connection fully mediate the SQ-loyalty relationship, whereas brand
30 affection partially mediates the same relationship. Finally, the SQ-EBA-loyalty relationship is
31 significantly stronger for repeat visitors compared to first-time visitors.
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39 **Originality:** The findings offer new insights through examining the symbolic consumption and
40 emotional aspects of a guest's hotel experience as mediators to the SQ-loyalty relationship. The
41 findings also add to the growing body of knowledge of the antecedents of EBA through
42 identifying physical environment and staff behavior as key determinants of EBA.
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48 **Practical Implications:** Hotel brands need to design their facilities and décor, and develop guest
49 experiences based on symbolic values and deep emotional aspects. Offering employees
50 customer care training and adopting a consumer-centric, relational, and storytelling approach are
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3 particularly important in order to inspire and captivate hotels' customers, and to build and shape
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5 profound and enduring affective ties between the hotel brand and its customers.
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10 Keywords: Brand Loyalty; Emotional Brand Attachment; Hotels
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For Review Only

Introduction

In the hotel industry, two central constructs, namely service quality (SQ) and brand loyalty, have received significant attention in previous research. The importance of SQ stems from its effect on brand loyalty (Gursoy et al. 2014; Prentice, 2013), improving revisit intentions (Peng et al. 2015; Dortyol et al. 2014), spreading positive word of mouth (Bujisic et al., 2014), increasing willingness to pay premium prices (Zemke et al. 2015), lowering the probability of hotel failure (Gemar et al., 2016), improving customer satisfaction and value (Ren et al., 2016; Dortyol et al. 2014; Ryu et al. 2012), enhancing customer-company identification (Su et al., 2016), decreasing operating costs (Molina-Azorín et al., 2015), and enhancing overall business image (Durna et al. 2015). Therefore, pursuing SQ has become a crucial factor for hotels aiming to survive and remain competitive (Lee et al., 2014). Similarly, in recent research studies, particular attention has been paid to the concept of brand loyalty in the hotel industry (Bowen and McCain, 2015), because it triggers the profits of organizations (Kandampully et al., 2015), and because it represents a key determinant of consumer-based brand equity (Seri'c et al., 2014; Xu and Chan, 2010).

Despite the impressive number of studies examining the SQ-loyalty relationship, little attention has been paid to the role of emotions in this relationship (Han and Jeong, 2013). As Lo et al. (2015) and others (Brunner-Sperdin et al., 2012; Tsai, 2014; Su et al., 2015) note, the role of customers' emotions during service experiences has received little research attention in the hotel industry, despite its undoubted importance. To address this gap, some attempts have been made recently to incorporate emotional elements in the SQ-loyalty relationship (i.e. SQ-emotion-loyalty) in order to deepen understanding of the concept (Jani and Han, 2015; Su et al., 2015;

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3 Han and Jeong, 2013; Lin and Liang, 2011; Namkung and Jang, 2010). These studies focus
4 specifically on examining the role of SQ in influencing customer emotional states
5 (positive/negative) associated with consumption within the service delivery context.
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12 However, although these studies have advanced understanding of the role of emotions in service
13 experiences, they have not examined specific, different and deeper forms of customer emotions,
14 nor have they examined the extent to which SQ contributes to developing emotions toward the
15 service brand. In this particular aspect, a new construct has emerged in the marketing literature
16 called emotional brand attachment (EBA), which taps deeply into the affective realm and focuses
17 on specific and different forms of emotions as a root of the development of brand loyalty. EBA,
18 which captures the strength and the deep emotional bonds between the brand and the customer
19 (Thomson et al., 2005), manifests itself via three variables: passion, affection and self-brand
20 connection (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010; Proksch et al., 2015). These three
21 components contribute significantly toward building brand loyalty (Lastovicka and Sirianni,
22 2011); enhancing brand defense (Park et al., 2010); attenuating judgments of unethical behavior
23 (Schmalz and Orth; 2012); and predicting customers' resource allocation, actual purchase
24 behavior and brand purchase share (Park et al., 2010).
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46 Existing evidence indicates that SQ has the potential to affect customer emotions associated with
47 consumption; therefore, it is reasonable to investigate the nature of the relationship between SQ
48 and EBA, and the extent to which EBA mediates the SQ-loyalty relationship, in order to gain a
49 more comprehensive understanding of the role of SQ in influencing customer emotions. In this
50 respect, Wilkins et al. (2007) point out that, in the hotel industry, there is a continuing need for
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3 refining the theories and methodologies suitable to hospitality consumption situations, and one
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5 way to do so is through considering new constructs, within the established framework, that are
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7 potentially powerful in predicting consumer behavior.
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12 There are also a number of other reasons for investigating the SQ-emotions-loyalty relationship
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14 in a hotel setting. First, the hotel industry is characterized by high cost products, seasonality,
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16 ease of entry/exit (Evan, 2016), low salaries and job security, long working hours, and limited
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18 opportunities for personal development (Zhao and Ghiselli, 2016; Dawson et al., 2011). Second,
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20 the hotel industry is greatly influenced by intellectual capital manifested via human capital,
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22 internal capital (i.e. efficient processes), and external capital (i.e. branding) (Patrick et al., 2013).
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24 It is characterized by a very high level of intangibility (Shaw et al., 2011), or as Connolly (2000)
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26 notes, it is a people industry, that is, individuals serving individuals on a personalized level with
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28 tailored services. Third, the outcome of hotels' service consumption is mainly psychological in
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30 nature and involves the provision of numerous and diverse experiences that few other sectors can
31
32 offer (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Such characteristics, which distinguish hotels as experience-
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34 dominant service contexts, place the industry among experience-intensive services (Cetin and
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36 Walls, 2015). Fourth, unlike most service settings, in the hotel industry, the manner in which
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38 hotel personnel deliver the service, as opposed to the service itself, is a key factor that
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40 contributes to the guest's overall enjoyment of the experience (Dawson et al., 2011). Fifth,
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42 although the hotel industry has a central role in the context of tourism systems, it has a history of
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44 business failure including bankruptcy, poor financial performance and low returns on investment
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46 (Solnet et al., 2010). Finally, the number of operators in the global hotel sector is expected to
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48 grow significantly over the next two decades (Roth and Fishbin, 2014), which will make it very
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3 difficult for hotels to achieve reasonable returns for their shareholders. When taken together, and
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5 as hotels search for ways to encourage their customers to develop long-term relationships with
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7 their brands, (Mohsin and Lockyer, 2010) examining the SQ-EBA-loyalty relationship is of
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9 significant importance. Investigating such relationships is expected to provide hotel managers
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11 with deeper insights into how to sustain their operations and remain competitive in this highly
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13 competitive and volatile industry. Research in this field will also help them to develop more
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15 appropriate and competitive marketing strategies to attract new guests while ensuring repeat
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17 business from existing ones.
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24 Accordingly, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the nature of the relationship
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26 between SQ and the three components of EBA in the hotel industry. A secondary purpose is to
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28 investigate the effect of the components of EBA on brand loyalty and, thirdly, to examine the
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30 mediation effect of the components of EBA on the SQ-brand loyalty relationship. A final
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32 purpose is to test the moderating effect of first time visitors vs. repeat visitors on the quality-
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34 EBA-loyalty relationship. The investigation will draw on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-
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36 O-R) Model, which originates in environmental psychology research by Mehrabian and Russell
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38 (1974). The key assumptions of this model are that the environment (stimulus) influences the
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40 emotional states of customers on three dimensions: pleasure, arousal or dominance (organism).
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42 The three dimensions act as mediators of the response, which is a behavior characterized by
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44 avoiding or approaching. Following the assumptions of this model, physical quality and staff
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46 behavior variables which capture the concept of SQ in a hotel setting (Nam et al., 2011) are
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48 hypothesized as stimuli that influence EBA (i.e. organism), captured by passion, affection and
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3 self-brand connection (Thomson et al., 2005), which in turn influence brand loyalty (i.e.
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5 approach).

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8 The paper is structured as follows – the next section consists of two parts: the first part defines
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10 the key constructs of the current research, and the second provides the theoretical background on
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12 the S-O-R Model. The third section proposes the framework of the study, and the research
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14 hypotheses are formulated. Analysis and testing of the research hypotheses follows. The last
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16 section summarizes the findings and provides a conclusion. Managerial implications and
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18 directions for future research are also presented.
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24 **Literature Review:**

25 *Definition of the Study's Constructs*

26 *Service Quality*

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29 SQ refers to customer evaluation of the overall excellence of the service (Zeithaml, 1988), or
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31 overall perceived judgment (Grönroos, 1984). There are two perspectives on conceptualizing and
32
33 measuring the concept of SQ: the American perspective and the Nordic perspective. The first
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35 perspective proposes the model widely known as SERVQUAL, which includes five dimensions
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37 namely; reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurances, and tangibles (Parasuraman et al.,
38
39 1988). It is worth noting that prior researchers extended, adapted and proposed different versions
40
41 of the SERVQUAL model in order to take into account the specificity associated with various
42
43 service sectors (for a comprehensive review, see Pizam et al. 2016). However, although the
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45 SERVQUAL model is widely used in the literature, two criticisms have been made against it: the
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47 validity of the model and the exact number of its dimensions (Nam et al., 2011).
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3 The second perspective defines the dimensions of SQ in global terms and comprises two
4 components: functional quality (i.e. how the service is delivered) and technical quality (i.e. what
5 the customer receives in the service encounter) (Grönroos, 1984). There is support for the view
6 that this perspective is valid compared to the US approach when applied to multiple service
7 industries in general (Loureiro et al., 2014), and to hospitality services in particular (Ekinici et al.,
8 2008; Nam et al., 2011). By drawing on the Nordic school of thought, Nam et al. (2011)
9 proposed two dimensions (i.e., staff behavior and physical quality) to measure the concept of SQ
10 in the hospitality industry. Physical quality refers to "the image projected by the design,
11 equipment, facilities, and materials of the hotel", whereas staff behavior refers to "the image
12 projected by competence, helpfulness, friendliness, and responsiveness of the hotel or restaurant
13 employees" (Nam et al., 2011: 1013). Following Nam et al. (2011) and Ekinici et al. (2008), the
14 authors have adopted these two dimensions to measure SQ in the hotel industry in this research.
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34 *Brand Loyalty*

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36 It is widely acknowledged in the literature that the concept of brand loyalty is a two-dimensional
37 construct containing attitudinal and behavioral aspects (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012).
38 According to the attitudinal perspective, brand loyalty is defined as "a deeply held commitment
39 to rebuy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing
40 repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing
41 efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1999: 34). On the other hand,
42 behavioral loyalty is usually understood as forms of customer behavior such as retention of the
43 brand, repeat purchase, share of category expenditure and portfolio size, which are directed
44 toward a particular brand over time (Reinartz and Kumar, 2000). For the purpose of the current
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3 research, and in line with previous research (e.g. Hwang and Kandampully, 2012), brand loyalty
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5 will be measured by including attitudinal and behavioral aspects.
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8 9 10 *Emotional Brand Attachment*

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12 The concept of EBA draws on attachment theory, which indicates that the level of emotional
13 attachment to an object determines the nature of a person's interaction with that object, and
14 his/her level of commitment, investment and acceptance of sacrifices to that object (Hazan and
15 Shaver, 1994). Attachment is multi-faceted, emotionally complex, evolves over time and
16 requires a personal history between the object and the person (Kleine and Baker, 2004). It is
17 developed through consistent affective, cognitive and behavioral experiences with the object
18 (Feeney and Noller, 1996). In consumer behavior and branding studies, EBA refers to the
19 closeness of the self to a brand in terms of a strong cognitive and affective perception existing in
20 consumers' mindsets (Park et al., 2006), and the extent to which elements of the brand are self-
21 referential and self-defining for consumers (Schmalz and Orth, 2012: 872).
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39 Three critical factors capture the conceptual properties of EBA: passion, affection and brand-self
40 connection (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010; Tsai, 2014). Passion refers to “the zeal and
41 enthusiasm features of consumer–brand relationships” (Keh et al., 2007: 84), and reflects intense
42 and aroused positive feelings toward a brand, i.e. consumers' feelings of craving and longing to
43 use a brand, desiring it and wanting it (Batra et al., 2012). Affection describes the positive
44 evaluation of and the warm feelings a consumer has toward a brand (Thomson et al., 2005), and
45 reveals the ability of a brand to elicit consumers' positive emotional responses from using it
46 (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Brand-self connection refers to consumers' feelings of being
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3 joined with the brand (Thomson et al., 2005), and the extent to which consumers have integrated
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5 the brand into their self-concept (Park et al., 2010).
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10 The three key constructs that were discussed in the previous subsections will be linked together
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12 from a theoretical perspective using the S-O-R Model, which is presented in the following
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14 section.
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17 18 19 20 *Theoretical Background to the S-O-R Model*

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22 Donovan and Rossiter (1982) introduced the concept of environmental psychology to marketing
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24 literature through adapting the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, which was
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26 originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The key assumptions of this model are
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28 that the environment (stimulus) influences the emotional states of customers along three
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30 dimensions: pleasure, arousal or dominance (organism). The three dimensions then act as
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32 mediators of the response, which is a behavior characterized by avoiding or approaching
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34 (Mehrabian and Russell 1974). In consumer behavior and service marketing literature, the
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36 stimuli consist of both marketing mix variables and other environmental inputs (e.g. ambient,
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38 design, social factors) that influence the emotional responses of the consumer (Bagozzi, 1986).
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40 Organism refers to a customer's positive emotional responses toward the stimulus (e.g.
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42 environmental characteristics of the service setting) (Bagozzi, 1986). Response reflects the final
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44 outcomes and the final decisions of customers, which could be approach (e.g. staying longer,
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46 browsing, making purchases) or avoidance behaviors (e.g. buying less, leaving earlier) (Bagozzi,
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48 1986). The following section will use the key assumptions of the S-O-R Model to hypothesize
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3 the effect of physical quality and staff behavior (stimuli) on EBA (i.e. organism), and the effect
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5 of the latter on brand loyalty (i.e. approach).
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10 **Hypotheses Development and Suggested Model**

11 *Physical Quality and Emotional Brand Attachment*

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13 Using the S-O-R Model, researchers have pointed out that a well-designed and pleasant physical
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15 environment decreases pressure and stimulates positive emotions (e.g. the customer feeling
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17 pleased/excited), whereas a poorly designed and unpleasant environment makes consumers
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19 experience negative feelings (e.g. ignored, angry) leading to a deterioration in the customer's
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21 positive emotion (Jani and Han, 2015; Jang and Namkung, 2009). Creative use of physical
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23 design is a key factor in evaluating service experiences positively (Han and Ryu, 2009). Chang et
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25 al. (2014) found that the overall architectural design and decor of a facility are the key
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27 environmental elements in generating utilitarian and hedonic values among customers. In a retail
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29 setting, store atmospheric cues were positively associated with customer pleasure and arousal
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31 (Nisco and Warnaby, 2014). In other service industries such as airlines, Han and Hwang (2015)
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33 identified a positive link between quality of in-flight physical surroundings and perceived level
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35 of the airfare, trust in the airline and intention to re-patronize. In the hotel industry, the physical
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37 environment of a hotel's interior and exterior design is a key factor influencing hotel choice
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39 (Kim and Perdue, 2013). Compared to service product and service delivery, Rauch et al. (2015)
40
41 found that service environment is the strongest predictor of a hotel's ability to meet guests'
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43 expectations and to provide them with value within this context. Researchers conclude that
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45 ambience influences guests' consumption emotions, which in turn affects loyalty (Jani and Han,
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47 2015).
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3 In a hotel context, physical quality includes modern-looking equipment; visually appealing
4 facilities, furniture, menus and rooms; comfortable, beautiful and attractive decorations; high
5 quality electronic equipment; well-designed public spaces, lobby and swimming pool/spa;
6 interesting audio/video machines; clean walkways and exits. Thus, by drawing on the S-O-R
7 model, it is reasonable to assume that a true and deep understanding of customers' needs and the
8 successful translation of those needs into innovative, aesthetic, and functional designs would
9 create a truly distinctive and unique experience. Having such an experience would surely
10 strengthen guests' emotional bonds with the hotel and would also increase the possibility of
11 identifying with that hotel. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:
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24 *H1: physical quality is positively associated with (a) passion, (b) affection and (c) self-brand*
25 *connection*
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31 *Staff Behavior and Emotional Brand Attachment*

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34 By drawing on the S-O-R Model, prior researchers conclude that employee attitude and social
35 interaction between employees and customers contribute toward customers' positive emotional
36 responses (Su et al., 2015; Chang et al., 2014; Lin and Liang, 2011). Perceived employee
37 friendliness was also related to impulse buying behavior (Chang et al. 2011). The reliability and
38 responsiveness of the service staff, the assurance provided by the service staff, and the empathy
39 shown by them has a positive effect on positive customer emotion and a negative effect on
40 negative customer emotion (Lo et al., 2015; Lin and Mattila, 2010). In five different service
41 sectors (i.e. hotels, retailers, hospitals, banks and vehicle repair workshops), Lemmink and
42 Mattsson (2002) found that customer emotions were strongly affected by the facial expressions,
43 behavior, words and tone of staff.
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3 Findings from other studies, which drew on different research paradigms, also provide support
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5 for the proposed relationship between staff behavior and emotional brand attachment in the hotel
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7 industry. For example, employees' brand-related behaviors is a key factor affecting consumers'
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9 relation with the brand (Erkmen and Hancer, 2015). Additionally, friendly, courteous and helpful
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11 employees are the main predictors of guests' willingness to recommend a hotel (Dortyol et al.
12
13 2014). Similarly, communicative staging of servicescape, which refers to the helpfulness,
14
15 politeness, friendliness, caring, passionate and attractiveness of employees, was strongly
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17 associated with overall business image (Durna et al. 2015). Following the logic of the above
18
19 argument, then it is reasonable to predict the following in the hotel industry:
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25 *H2: staff behavior is positively associated with (a) passion, (b) affection and (c) self-brand*
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27 *connection*
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32 *Emotional Brand Attachment and Brand Loyalty*

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34 Emotional responses stimulated by the physical environment and/or staff behavior influence a
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36 range of consumer outcomes including shoppers' willingness to spend money and time (Nisco
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38 and Warnaby, 2014), revisit intentions (Jani and Han, 2015), buying more in the future,
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40 recommending the store to others (Jang and Namkung, 2009), unplanned spending (Nisco and
41
42 Warnaby, 2014), consumers' perceived shopping value (Chang et al., 2014) and loyalty (Jani and
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44 Han, 2015). Consumers who feel passionate and affectionate toward a brand have higher levels
45
46 of trust, engage in positive word of mouth (Albert et al., 2009) and are more willing to accept
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48 higher prices (Bauer et al., 2007). Aspects of EBA help in improving brand profitability and
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50 customer lifetime value (Thomson et al., 2005).
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Gursoy et al. (2014) examined the antecedents of tourist destination loyalty and conclude that previous experiences, place attachment and involvement are the most influential factors of destination loyalty formation. In the restaurant sector, brand attachment is positively associated with relationship continuity and willingness to pay premium prices (Bahri-Ammari et al., 2016). In the hotel industry, Tsai (2014) found that brand love had a greater effect on switching resistance loyalty compared with overall customer satisfaction. Accordingly, guests who idealize and feel excitement about or infatuation with a hotel brand, use a hotel brand to express a significant aspect of their individual selves, and develop a sense of oneness with the hotel brand through forming cognitive links that connect the brand with the self, are more likely to maintain a relationship with that hotel. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: (a) passion, (b) affection and (c) self-brand connection are positively associated with brand loyalty

The Mediation Effect of Emotional Brand Attachment

According to the S-O-R Model, the stimulus influences customers' emotions which in turn influence their behavior. In this vein, customer emotions mediate the positive effect of store color on patronage intentions and purchase intentions (Nisco and Warnaby, 2014); light, music, scent and pleasing ambient scent on behavioral intentions (Liu and Jang, 2009); and product quality, atmospherics and staff behavior on behavioral intentions (Jang and Namkung, 2009). In fashion apparel retailing, the social environment and physical environment affect customers' positive emotions, which in turn affect behavioral intentions (Sheng et al., 2011). Similarly, customer emotions mediate the effect of friendliness of staff on willingness to buy and word of mouth (Su et al., 2015). By drawing on these findings, it is reasonable to expect that the three

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3 components of EBA partially mediate the relationship between physical quality and brand
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5 loyalty, and between staff behavior and brand loyalty. In other words, physical quality and staff
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7 behavior are expected to influence passion, affection and self-brand connection, which in turn
8
9 influence brand loyalty. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

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12 *H4: brand passion partially mediates the effect of (a) physical quality and (b) staff behavior on*
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14 *brand loyalty*

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17 *H5: brand affection partially mediates the effect of (a) physical quality and (b) staff behavior on*
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19 *brand loyalty*

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22 *H6: self-brand connection partially mediates the effect of (a) physical quality and (b) on brand*
23
24 *loyalty*

25 26 27 28 29 **The Moderating Effect of First-Time Visitors vs. Repeat Visitors on the Quality-EBA-** 30 31 **Loyalty Relationship**

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34 'First-time visitors' refers to those who are visiting/staying in a specific hotel for the first time,
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36 whereas 'repeat visitors' represent those who are familiar with the hotel and satisfied with the
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38 service experiences offered (Lau and McKercher, 2004: 279). Different studies in the hospitality
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40 industry have found that, compared to first time visitors, repeat visitors are more likely to be
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42 satisfied with their travel experiences (Li et al., 2008); have stronger intentions to return to their
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44 previously visited destination (Hong et al., 2009); be loyal to the destination (Gyte and Phelps,
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46 1989); spread positive word-of-mouth (Oppermann, 2000); and have a stronger value-loyalty
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48 relationship (Lee et al., 2009). Additionally, familiarity and exposure to a particular tourist place
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50 (Pearce and Kang, 2009), and the number of previous visits (Kozak, 2001) are powerful
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52 influences on behavioral intentions and destination loyalty. This is because visitors with past
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3 travel experiences may become more confident as a result of their experiences and therefore be
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5 more likely to select the same destination.
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10 By drawing on the above findings it is expected that, in the hotel industry, the quality-EBA-
11 loyalty relationship would be stronger for repeat visitors compared to first-time visitors. Repeat
12 visitors are more familiar with the physical environment of the hotel and have already
13 experienced the hotel's facilities which encourages favorable impressions about the quality of
14 interaction with the hotel's physical environment. This in turn results in developing favorable
15 emotions toward the service brand and making guests return to the same hotel. Additionally,
16 repeat visitors have already interacted with the hotel staff. Such interactions would offer the
17 hotel staff the opportunity to confirm the brand promise. This confirmation would enhance the
18 brand associations in consumers' minds, improve the evaluative attitudes toward the brand, and
19 strengthen consumer-brand connections, thus driving repeat visits. As first-time visitors do not
20 have such experiences and have not yet interacted with the hotel staff, then it is expected that the
21 strength of quality-EBA-loyalty relationship will be weaker for them, and therefore, the
22 following hypotheses are formulated:
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41 *H7a: The physical quality-passion-loyalty relationship will be stronger for repeat visitors*
42 *compared to first-time visitors*
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46 *H7b: The physical quality-affection-loyalty relationship will be stronger for repeat visitors*
47 *compared to first-time visitors*
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51 *H7c: The physical quality-connection-loyalty relationship will be stronger for repeat visitors*
52 *compared to first-time visitors*
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3 *H7d: The staff behavior-passion-loyalty relationship will be stronger for repeat visitors*
4 *compared to first-time visitors*
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8 *H7e: The staff behavior-affection-loyalty relationship will be stronger for repeat visitors*
9 *compared to first-time visitors*
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12 *H7f: The staff behavior-connection-loyalty relationship will be stronger for repeat visitors*
13 *compared to first-time visitors*
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17 18 19 20 **Methodology**

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22 The current research adopted a quantitative method to test the proposed framework (see Figure
23 1). Among the different quantitative data collection techniques, a cross-sectional survey was
24 employed to measure guests' perceptions of SQ, EBA and brand loyalty in the hotel industry.
25 This is in line with prior research on SQ and branding in the hotel industry (e.g. Tsai, 2014; So et
26 al., 2013; Nam et al., 2011). Additionally, a cross-sectional survey has the ability to measure
27 latent constructs that cannot be directly observed or quantified (e.g. passion, affection, self-brand
28 connection) (Burton and Mazerolle, 2011).
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41 *Item generation and purification of scale items:*

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43 The current study uses measurement items validated in previous research and demonstrates high
44 Cronbach's alpha values (please see APPENDIX). Accordingly, physical environment and staff
45 behavior are measured with four and five items, respectively. These nine items are selected from
46 Ekinci et al. (2008) and Nam et al. (2011). Brand affection (five items) and self-brand connection
47 (five items) are measured using scales developed and validated by Tsai (2014) in a hotel context.
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3 Finally, six items were adapted from Harris and Goode (2004) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook
4 (2001) to examine brand loyalty. Some items were reworded/modified to measure the constructs
5 more accurately. The survey instrument containing 29 items was subject to a pilot study by
6 inviting 100 people to complete and comment on the questionnaire. Complex items were
7 modified to reduce ambiguity. In the final questionnaire, respondents were asked to express their
8 level of agreement regarding the statements based on a five-point Likert scale ('strongly
9 disagree' to 'strongly agree').
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20 21 22 *Data Collection*

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24 The survey data were collected using an online panel based in the UK. The panel was accessed
25 via a specialized market research company (CINT UK). The survey started with a filter question
26 (if respondents answered 'No', they moved directly to the exit page). The respondents were asked
27 to name a hotel brand they had used, and they cited a range of different hotel brands. Originally,
28 388 questionnaires were collected and 33 were excluded due to partial completeness or early
29 exit, resulting in 355 usable questionnaires for the final analysis. The sample characteristics in
30 terms of gender, age, level of education, career type, income level, number of hotel visits and
31 purpose of visiting, are presented in Table 1.
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43 44 **Insert Table 1**

45 46 *Scale Assessment*

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48 Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), average variance
49 extracted (AVE) and multicollinearity were used to assess the reliability, validity and propriety
50 of the six scales (see Table 2). The table shows that Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability
51 of the scales are much higher than the threshold (0.70) (Churchill, 1979), ranging from (0.853) to
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3 (0.953). EFA results indicate that the items of each factor loaded significantly ≥ 0.50 on their
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(0.953). EFA results indicate that the items of each factor loaded significantly ≥ 0.50 on their respective factor, ranging from (0.770) to (0.924). Convergent validity was evaluated through observing the AVE index using SmartPLS2.0 (Wetzels et al., 2009). The AVE for all the six scales exceeded the minimum threshold value of 0.50, ranging from (0.695) to (0.780). Discriminant validity was assessed through evaluating the multicollinearity among the six scales. Multicollinearity can be detected by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF). Table 2 indicates that the highest value of VIF was 3.050 for brand passion, which is below the common cut-off point threshold of 5 (Henseler et al., 2009).

Insert Table 2

Hypotheses Testing

Structural equation modelling - Partial Least Squares (PLS)

PLS was employed to test the proposed framework. The key advantage of PLS is that it simultaneously assesses all path coefficients and individual item loadings in a specified model, which allows researchers to avoid biased and inconsistent parameter estimates (Chin, 1998).

The Direct Effect of SQ on EBA

The current study predicts in H1a-c, that quality of physical environment is positively associated with brand passion, brand affection and self-brand connection. The findings support the three hypotheses: H1a ($\beta = 0.549$, $R^2 = 0.573$, $p < 0.001$); H1b ($\beta = 0.481$, $R^2 = 0.447$, $p < 0.001$); and H1c ($\beta = 0.377$, $R^2 = 0.493$, $p < 0.001$). The results of the model testing also provide support for H2a ($\beta = 0.333$, $R^2 = 0.574$, $p < 0.001$); H2b ($\beta = 0.184$, $R^2 = 0.447$, $p < 0.05$); and H2c ($\beta = 0.240$, $R^2 = 0.493$, $p < 0.01$), and therefore confirm that staff behavior is positively associated with brand passion,

brand affection and self-brand connection. The results of these hypotheses are reported in Table 3.

The Direct Effect of Emotional Brand Attachment on Brand Loyalty

H3a-c posit that brand passion, brand affection and self-brand connection are positively associated with brand loyalty. The analysis supports these hypotheses: H3a ($\beta=0.380$, $R^2=0.563$, $p<0.001$); H3b ($\beta=0.139$, $R^2=0.563$, $p<0.05$); and H3c ($\beta=0.229$, $R^2=0.563$, $p<0.001$). The results of these hypotheses are reported in Table 3.

Insert Table 3

The Mediation Effect of Emotional Brand Attachment on the Service Quality-Loyalty Relationship

With regard to H4a-b, H5a-b and H6a-b, which predict the mediation effect of brand passion, affection and self-connection on the SQ-loyalty relationship, the analysis of the six hypotheses provided mixed results (see Table 4). That is, statistical support is only found for **H5a** (*brand affection partially mediates the effect of physical environment on brand loyalty*); and **H5b** (*brand affection partially mediates the effect of staff behavior on brand loyalty*). The mediation is considered partial because the path coefficient between physical environment and loyalty dropped from (0.367) to (0.197), but remained significant. Also, the path coefficient between staff behavior and loyalty dropped from (0.183) to (0.127), but remained significant. However, the results do not confirm **H4a** (*brand passionate partially mediates the effect of physical environment on brand loyalty*); **H4b** (*brand passionate partially mediates the effect of staff behavior on brand loyalty*); **H6a** (*self-brand connection partially mediates the effect of physical environment on brand loyalty*); and **H6b** (*self-brand connection partially mediates the effect of*

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3 *staff behavior on brand loyalty*). These variables fully, rather than partially, mediate the SQ-
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loyalty relationship (see Table 4). In other words, when either of these two variables is introduced in the direct relationship between physical environment and brand loyalty, or between staff behavior and brand loyalty, these direct relationships become insignificant.

Insert Table 4

Testing the Moderating Effect of First-Time Visitors vs. Repeat Visitors on the SQ-Loyalty Relationship

To test whether the quality-EBA-loyalty relationship is stronger for repeat visitors compared to first-time visitors, the authors followed the PLS-MGA approach, which is proposed by Henseler et al. (2009). This approach suggests that the original sample should be split according to the number of groups and each subsample should be exposed to separate bootstrap analyses, and the outcomes of the bootstrapping are the basis for tests of group differences. Following this approach, the sample was split into two groups (i.e. first-time visitors and repeat visitors) and each group was tested as a separate model using SmartPLS. After conducting the bootstrapping analysis for all the relationships included in each model, the bootstrapping outcomes were imported into a spreadsheet using software developed by Henseler et al. (2009) to compare the relationships across two subsample populations and to see whether such relationships are significantly different from one another. The results reported in Table 5 provide support for all the hypotheses in this regard (i.e. H7a-f). For example, the bootstrap parameter means for repeat visitors regarding Physical Quality→Brand Passion (0.6614), Physical Quality→Brand Affection (0.6253) and Physical Quality→Self-Brand Connection (0.5944), were significantly higher compared to Physical Quality→Brand Passion (0.489), Physical Quality→Brand Affection (0.4524) and Physical Quality→Self-Brand Connection (0.4642), for first-time visitors.

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3 Similarly, the relationships between Staff Behavior→Brand Passion (0.253), Staff
4 Behavior→Brand Affection (0.298) and Staff Behavior→Self-Brand Connection (0.352), were
5 significantly higher for repeated visitors compared to first-time visitors: Staff Behavior→Brand
6 Passion (0.087), Staff Behavior→Brand Affection (-0.017) and Staff Behavior→Self-Brand
7 Connection (0.005). Finally, the bootstrap parameter means for repeat visitors with respect to
8 Brand Passion→Loyalty (0.5586), Brand Affection→Loyalty (0.1902) and Self-Brand
9 Connection→Loyalty (0.3003), were significantly higher compared to Brand Passion→Loyalty
10 (0.4327), Brand Affection→Loyalty (0.0744) and Self-Brand Connection→Loyalty (0.2076), for
11 first-time visitors.
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25 **Insert Table 5**

26 **Conclusions**

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28 Drawing upon the previous analyses, four key conclusions can be reached. First, the results
29 suggest that physical quality has a stronger and more significant effect on the three components
30 of EBA compared with staff behavior. For example, the effect of physical quality on brand
31 passion (0.549, $p < 0.001$) was stronger compared with staff behavior (0.333, $P < 0.001$).
32 Additionally, the effect of physical quality on brand affection was not only stronger (0.481), but
33 also more significant ($P < 0.001$), when compared with staff behavior (0.139, $P < 0.05$). Similarly,
34 the effect of physical quality on self-brand connection was stronger and significantly higher
35 (0.377, $P < 0.001$), compared with staff behavior (0.183, $P < 0.01$). There could be two reasons
36 behind the higher effect of physical quality on EBA compared with staff behavior. First, favorite
37 places often offer people the opportunity to escape from social stresses, release their emotions,
38 feel calmer and more relaxed, clear their minds and refresh and restore their experiences
39 (Korpela, 1992). Accordingly, it could be that hotels which have modern-looking equipment and
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3 visually appealing facilities, furniture, menus and rooms, will offer their guests the opportunity
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5 to escape from social stresses, release their emotions, and feel calmer and more relaxed.
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7 Additionally, when the quality of interaction with the physical environment of the hotel is very
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9 high, it may provide the hotel's guests with pleasant experiences and unforgettable memories.
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11 Such benefits, when taken together, might be perceived and valued highly by hotel guests
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13 compared to the benefits obtained from 'interacting with hotel employees'. The second reason
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15 could be ascribed to the length of time a hotel's guests spend on interacting with the hotel's
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17 facilities compared with time they spend on interacting with the hotel staff. As the length of time
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19 guests spend on interacting with the physical environment is high, then it could be assumed that
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21 favorable impressions formed from such interactions would last longer. This in turn would have
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23 a stronger effect on guests' emotions toward the service compared with those emotions
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25 developed from interacting with the hotel staff.
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34 Second, the analysis of H3a-c reveals that the three components of EBA have different effects on
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36 brand loyalty in the hotel industry. Among the three components, brand passion has the highest
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38 significant effect on brand loyalty (0.380; $p < 0.001$), followed by self-brand connection (0.228;
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40 $p < 0.01$) and brand affection (0.139; $p < 0.05$). It is worth noting that brand passion and self-brand
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42 connection represent a higher state of emotional arousal, while brand affection reflects a lower
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44 state of emotional arousal (Batra et al., 2012). Such a distinction, which suggests that emotion-
45
46 based loyalty towards the hotel service brand is strongly driven by a state of higher emotional
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48 arousal, indicates the positive evaluation of and the warm feelings a guest has toward the hotel
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50 brand. This finding, however, although it points toward the concept of 'brand affection', might
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52 not be enough for customers to develop a strong emotion-based loyalty.
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Third, the results show that both brand passion and self-brand connection fully mediate the SQ-brand loyalty relationship, whereas brand affection partially mediates the same relationship. This suggests that higher levels of guest loyalty can be attained when hotels position themselves, design their facilities and decorations and develop guest experience based on symbolic values and deep emotional aspects, rather than on customer satisfaction *per se*. Finally, the significant differences in the path coefficients identified between first-time visitors and repeat visitors confirm the findings of previous studies in other sectors, which conclude that attachment is developed and grown when consumers are frequently exposed to the brand, and when the level of interaction with the brand is intense (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011; Park et al., 2010). Such findings, however, reveal the distinctiveness of the first-time visitors and repeat visitors, and that each group may have different demands and requirements regarding the products and services offered by a hotel. Accordingly, marketing efforts targeted primarily at first-time visitors may be entirely inappropriate for encouraging previous guests to return.

Theoretical Implications

The current study makes four theoretical contributions. First, prior research used the S-O-R Model to examine the extent to which physical environment stimulates customer emotions (positive/negative) associated with consumption within the service context, and the extent to which those emotions influence customer responses. However, this research extends those studies through examining how physical quality and staff behavior influence specific, deeper and different forms of emotions that hotel guests develop toward the service brand, rather than the emotional states associated with the consumption of the service, and how these heavy emotions affect brand loyalty. Thus, the key contribution of this research is linking SQ with EBA, from a

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3 theoretical and an empirical perspective, and showing that SQ does not only influence consumer
4 emotions during service consumption but can also influence consumer emotions toward the
5 service brand. This is novel since such issues have never been examined in prior research.
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12 Second, prior research devoted a significant amount of effort to identifying the key determinants
13 of EBA, and found that brand self-expression (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), brand self-congruity
14 and reputation (Japutra et al., 2014), brand trust (Albert et al., 2013), and brand uniqueness,
15 brand prestige and hedonic brand (Bauer et al., 2007), are among those determinants. This
16 research, therefore, adds to this body of knowledge through identifying physical environment
17 and staff behavior as key determinants of EBA. Third, the current research uses the concept of
18 EBA beyond the conventional context of personal relationships and provides empirical support
19 for the existence of the three components of EBA (i.e. passion, affection and self-brand
20 connection) in the hotel industry. Each component is unique and distinct and thus makes a
21 significant and different contribution toward EBA in the hotel industry. Finally, the current study
22 provides empirical support for the mediation effect of EBA on the SQ-brand loyalty relationship,
23 an issue that has never been examined in the extant literature. The mediating effects explain how
24 guests' perceptions of physical quality and staff behavior can influence their loyalty via the
25 creation of different, specific and deep emotions. The mediation effects also show that service
26 brand emotions developed via physical quality and staff behavior have a stronger positive
27 indirect effect on brand loyalty, than the direct effect from physical quality and staff behavior.
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Practical Implications

The study provides some key insights for managers aiming to strengthen their service brand and seeking to build greater loyalty among guests. First, service brand experiences need to be customized and personalized to support the individuality, uniqueness and distinctiveness of customers. For example, Wyndham Hotels encourage their customers to display their personal items and belongings in their rooms to express the individuality and distinctiveness of their personalities (Nam et al., 2011). Second, guest loyalty can be attained when hotels position themselves, design their facilities and decorations and develop guest experiences based on symbolic values and deep emotional aspects, rather than on customer satisfaction *per se*. Thus, managers could develop new hotel services to reflect the different lifestyles of their customer base and integrate living elements and modern themes into functional design to offer customers unique opportunities to explore their preferred experiences. Third, due to the strong effect of the physical environment on EBA, hotel brands need to continuously renew their facility elements, renovate based on recent trends, seek and incorporate new technology in their facilities, minimize noise, control ambient temperature and humidity inside their hotels in accordance with the prevailing season, offer soft and relaxing amenities and adjust background music depending on the occasion. Nonetheless, managers need to consider whether the financial investment in some of the activities above is justified and worthwhile. This shows the importance of an enhanced customer database to track customer preferences to see whether they value a luxurious physical environment or whether they value a functional environment over turndown services. Fourth, hotel brands needs to equip their employees with tools, a working environment, and time to provide special care when dealing with customers, given that personal recognition and being remembered are critical factors of service experiences. Offering employees customer-care

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3 training is particularly important since it ensures that employees follow appropriate ways to
4 handle and shape customers' behavior to promote desired behaviors, and thus, enhancing EBA.
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6 Adopting a consumer-centric, relational, and storytelling approach is also key since this approach
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8 can inspire and captivate hotel customers, and contribute to building and shaping profound and
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10 enduring affective ties between the hotel brand and its customers (Roberts, 2004). This approach
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12 also involves the engagement of customers in a deep, enduring, passionate emotional connection
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14 with the brand, which goes beyond the benefits obtained from the delivery of the core service.
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16 Finally, the results identify clear differences between first-time and return guests which has an
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18 impact on the best approaches to promoting the hotel to these different segments. For example,
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20 focusing on images of the physical surroundings and facilities stimulates memories and emotions
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22 related to previous visits to the hotel for return visitors, but can be viewed as mere factual
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24 information for new customers. Nonetheless, appealing to the emotions of potential hotel guests
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26 in promotional material is a powerful tool, and contributes to developing a deeper relationship
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28 with the brand beyond brand knowledge and brand recognition, to incorporate brand connection,
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30 brand affection and brand passion.
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41 **Limitations and Direction for Future Research**

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43 There are a number of limitations to this study which the authors acknowledge. The first
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45 limitation is that the proposed framework, including all the relationships, was tested in one
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47 country (the UK) even though the hotels cited by the guests were both UK-based and
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49 international; therefore, future research could enhance the generalizability of the findings
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51 through examining the hypothesized relationships using a sample based in other countries.
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55 Second, the current research is restricted to examining the role of emotional components in
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3 developing brand loyalty and their effects on the SQ-loyalty relationship. Therefore, future
4 research could integrate cognitive components (e.g. satisfaction, perceived value and brand trust)
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6 along with the emotional ones in order to provide a more complete understanding of the role of
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8 emotional and cognitive aspects in cultivating brand loyalty and how both aspects mediate the
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10 SQ-loyalty relationship. Finally, researchers might study other determinants of EBA in the hotel
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12 industry and discover the extent to which those determinants help to develop and improve the
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14 level of EBA.
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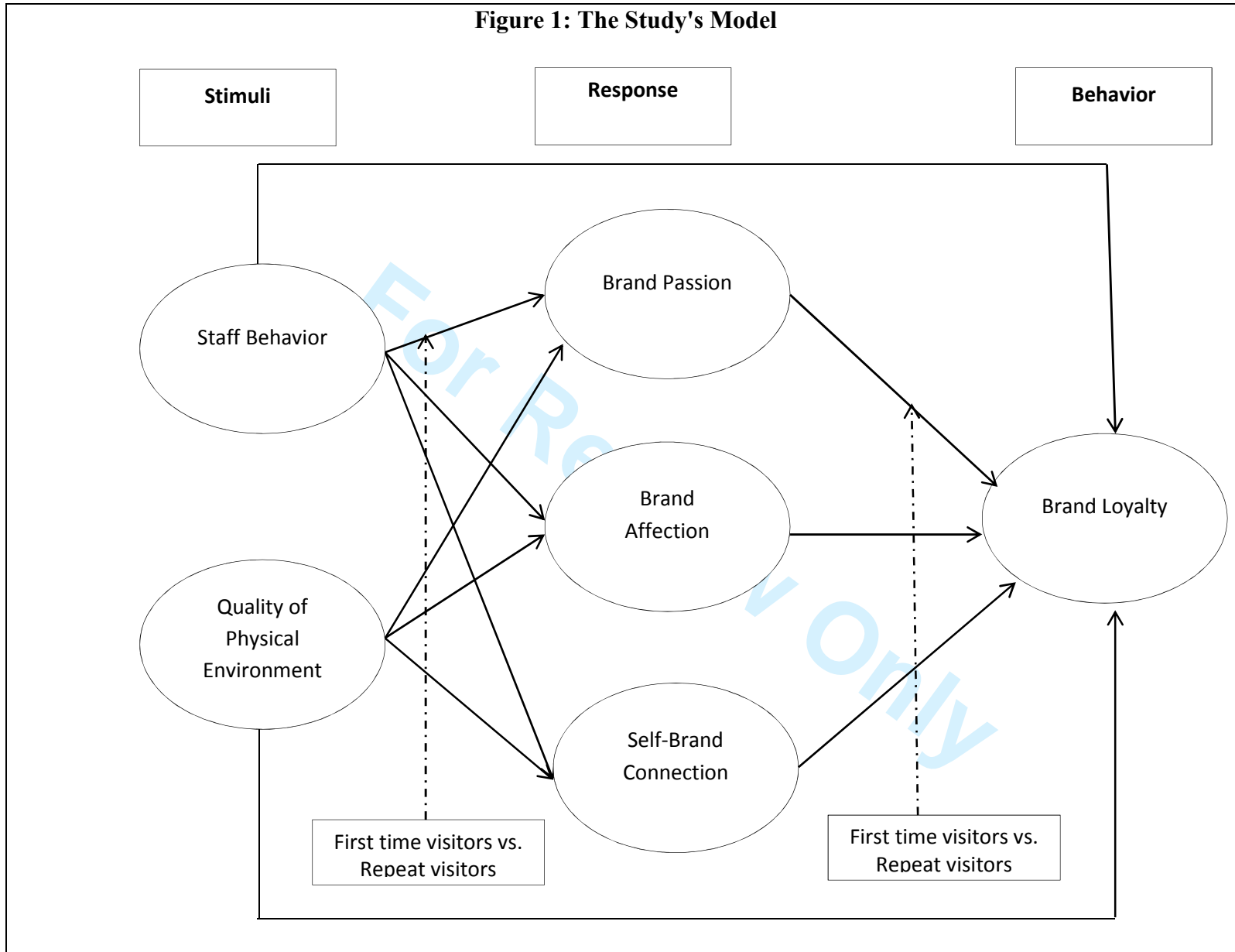
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Figure 1: The Study's Model



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Table1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Demographic Variables		No.	Percent	Demographic Variables		No.	Percent
Gender	Male	174	49.0	Income	<£25000	150	42.3
	Female	181	51.0		£25000-£35.000	78	22.0
Age	26-35	80	22.5		£35.001-£45.000	46	12.9
	36-45	102	28.7		£45.001-£55.000	34	9.6
	46-55	92	25.9		≥£55.001	47	13.2
	55+	81	22.8				
Career Field	Retailing	28	7.9	No. of Visits	Once	108	30.4
	Engineering	31	8.7		2-4 times	143	40.3
	Public Service	39	11.0		> 4 times	104	29.3
	Hospitality and Tourism	13	3.7	Purpose of Stay	Business	30	8.2
	Education	40	11.3		Leisure	265	74.6
	IT Computing	40	11.3		Business and Leisure	60	16.9
	Finance and Banking	22	6.2	Level of Education	High School	74	20.8
	Media or the Arts	12	3.4		College	191	53.8
	Health and Social Care	32	9.0		Master's	72	20.3
Other	97	27.3	Doctorate		15	4.2	

Table 2: Factor Loadings, Cronbach Alpha, CR, AVE, Mean Scores and Std. Deviation

Variable	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Mean Scores	Std. Deviation	Multicollinearity
Physical Environment	0.770-886	0.853	0.901	0.695	3.84	0.7982	2.730
Staff Behavior	0.852-0.915	0.920	0.940	0.757	4.00	0.7725	2.251
Passion	0.838-0.908	0.928	0.945	0.776	3.56	0.8673	3.050
Affection	0.825-0.873	0.868	0.909	0.715	3.27	0.9016	2.560
Brand Self-Connection	0.816-0.896	0.879	0.917	0.734	3.85	0.8402	2.637
Loyalty	0.845-0.924	0.953	0.961	0.780	3.46	0.9878	2.253

Table 3: Hypotheses Testing of the Study's Model (Direct Effect)

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	Significance Level	R ²
H1a:Physical Environment→Passion	0.549	0.001	0.573
H1b:Physical Environment →Affection	0.481	0.001	0.447
H1c:Physical Environment → Self-Connection	0.377	0.001	0.493
H2a:Staff Behavior →Passion	0.333	0.001	0.573
H2b:Staff Behavior →Affection	0.184	0.05	0.447
H2c:Staff Behavior→Self-Connection	0.240	0.01	0.493
H3a:Passion→ Brand Loyalty	0.380	0.001	0.563
H3b:Affection →Brand Loyalty	0.139	0.5	
H3c:Self-connection→Brand Loyalty	0.228	0.01	

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing of the Study's Model (Mediation Effect)

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	Significance Level	Partial/Full Mediation	R ²
H4a:Physical quality→Passion	0.717	0.001	Full Mediation.	0.515
Passion→Brand Loyalty	0.660	0.001		0.545
Physical quality→Brand Loyalty	0.005	Insignificant (p>0.05)		
H4b:Staff Behavior →Passion	0.546	0.001	Full Mediation	0.536
Passion→Brand Loyalty	0.694	0.001		0.513
Staff Behavior →Brand Loyalty	-0.028	Insignificant (p>0.05)		
H5a:Physical quality→Affection	0.637	0.001	Partial Mediation	0.413
Affection→Brand Loyalty	0.453	0.001		0.392
Physical quality→Brand Loyalty	0.197	0.05		
H5b:Staff Behavior →Affection	0.565	0.05	Partial Mediation.	0.413
Affection→Brand Loyalty	0.508	0.001		0.392
Staff Behavior →Brand Loyalty	0.127	(0.05)		
H6a:Physical quality→ Self-Connection	0.655	0.001	Full Mediation.	0.449
Self-Connection →Brand Loyalty	0.561	0.001		0.516
Physical quality→Brand Loyalty	0.081	Insignificant (p>0.05)		
H6b:Staff Behavior → Self-Connection	0.487	0.001	Full Mediation.	0.449
Self-Connection →Brand Loyalty	0.660	0.001		0.516
Staff Behavior →Brand Loyalty	0.054	Insignificant (p>0.05)		

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Table 5: Testing for Group Differences

	Path Coefficients	Bootstrap parameter mean	Significance Level
Physical Quality→Brand Passion (First-time visitors)	0.489	0.4783	0.001
Physical Quality→Brand Passion (Repeat visitors)	0.663	0.6614	
Physical Quality→Brand Affection (First-time visitors)	0.449	0.4524	0.01
Physical Quality→Brand Affection (Repeat visitors)	0.623	0.6253	
Physical Quality→Self-Brand Connection (First-time visitors)	0.470	0.4642	0.01
Physical Quality→Self-Brand Connection (Repeat visitors)	0.593	0.5944	
Staff Behavior→Brand Passion (First-time visitors)	0.087	0.092109	0.001
Staff Behavior→Brand Passion (Repeat visitors)	0.352	0.364021	
Staff Behavior→Brand Affection (First-time visitors)	-0.017	-0.020451	0.05
Staff Behavior→Brand Affection (Repeat visitors)	0.298	0.309786	
Staff Behavior→Self-Brand Connection (First-time visitors)	-0.005	-0.001403	0.01
Staff Behavior→Self-Brand Connection (Repeat visitors)	0.253	0.258007	
Brand Passion→Loyalty (First-time visitors)	0.439	0.432712	0.05
Brand Passion→Loyalty (Repeat visitors)	0.573	0.558624	
Brand Affection→Loyalty (First-time visitors)	0.086	0.074425	0.05
Brand Affection→Loyalty (Repeat visitors)	0.288	0.190265	
Self-Brand Connection→Loyalty (First-time visitors)	0.070	0.207662	0.05
Self-Brand Connection→Loyalty (Repeat-visitors)	0.195	0.300387	

APPENDIX	
	Physical Environment
	This brand has modern-looking equipment.
	This brand's facilities are visually appealing.
	This brand gives you a visually attractive room
	This hotel is beautifully coordinated with great attention to details
	Staff Behaviour
	Employees of this brand listen to me
	Employees of this brand are helpful
	Employees of this brand are friendly
	Employees of this hotel brand always understand my needs
	Employees always have my best interests in mind
	Brand Passion
	I am passionate about this hotel brand
	I have real trust in this hotel brand
	I feel really close this hotel brand
	This hotel brand is really appealing to me
	This hotel brand makes me feel great delight
	Self-Brand Connection
	I can really identify with this hotel brand
	This hotel brand fits with how I see myself in the future
	This hotel brand always a pleasant travel experience
	This hotel brand fits with my ideal lifestyle
	This hotel brand contributes to enriching my life
	Brand Affection:
	Affection
	Love
	Peaceful
	Friendly
	Brand Loyalty
	I will continue to choose this hotel brand before other brands
	I would continue to favour the offerings of this hotel brand before others
	I am willing 'to go the extra mile' to choose this hotel brand

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I would rather stay with the this hotel than try a different hotel I am unsure of
Next time I am looking for somewhere to say, I will stay with hotel brand
I will recommend this hotel brand to someone who seeks my advice
I am very committed to this hotel brand

For Review Only

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When revising your paper, please prepare this report explaining how you have responded to each reviewer's comments and suggestions specifically.

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